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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

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House of Commons

Monday 29 July 2024

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[Mr Speaker *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

English Channel: Illegal Small Boat Crossings

1. **Lee Anderson** (Ashfield) (Reform): What steps she is taking to tackle illegal crossings of the channel in small boats. [900100]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Yvette Cooper): Before I respond to the first question, I simply want to say that I know the whole House will be concerned about the extremely serious incident that has taken place in Southport. All our thoughts will be with the families and loved ones of those affected. I have been in contact with the Merseyside police and crime commissioner and the Merseyside mayor to convey my support to the police, and our thanks to them and emergency services for their swift and courageous response. The response to this awful incident is currently unfolding, and the House and the public will be updated in due course.

Small boat crossings undermine our security and put lives at risk. Criminal gangs are profiting from this trade in human lives. That is why we are establishing a new border security command with additional cross-border police, and new counter-terror powers.

Lee Anderson: Six boats came over the channel on Saturday, and there have been reports of another four today. That is more than 500 illegal migrants being escorted into our waters by the French authorities. Does the Home Secretary agree that it is time to stop paying the French any more money until they stop being complicit in this evil trade?

Yvette Cooper: The hon. Member will know that these boat crossings are extremely dangerous. Another woman died in the channel yesterday, and criminal gangs are deliberately cramming boats to maximise their profits. They have been getting away with it for far too long. That is why we need the new border security command. It is also why we need to work not simply with the French police, but with police forces and organisations right across Europe and beyond, to pursue the gangs and prevent the boats from leaving the French coast in the first place.

Chris Murray (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): The thing about borders is that they have two sides. The best way to secure a border is to have a constructive relationship with the country that it is shared with. What steps will the Home Secretary take to reach out to France and Belgium, in order to secure the border?

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend is right that we need to strengthen work to prevent the gangs who are pursuing this vile trade in people. That is why we have immediately strengthened the UK presence in Europol and in the operational taskforces that go after the gangs. We are already in touch with leaders in France and Italy and right across Europe, so that we can strengthen co-operation, because the gangs are getting away with it and lives are being put at risk as a result.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge) (Con): May I start by extending my support to the Home Secretary for whatever incident is going on in Southport, and to Merseyside police, given the incidents we are sadly seeing in Merseyside today?

Earlier this month, the right hon. Lady refused to rule out the UK accepting migrants from European countries in exchange for a returns deal with Europe. Does she accept that under any deal she does, some of those sent to the United Kingdom from the European Union could harbour extremist ideologies or pose a security threat? Will she commit to ensuring strong safeguards, including a right of refusal on a case-by-case basis, to stop anyone who could put Britain's security at risk from entering this country?

Yvette Cooper: There will always need to be proper safeguards on security, and proper security checks on those who come to this country, but the problem with the boat crossings is that they undermine that border security. There are no checks on dangerous boat crossings, which put lives at risk, and on who criminal gangs choose to put into boats. We are clear that we need stronger border security. That is why we are setting up a new border security command, and counter-terror powers in new legislation. We recognise that returns—for example, of failed asylum seekers—have dropped substantially since the last Labour Government were in place. We have to turn that around; we want to increase returns.

Violence against Women and Girls

2. **Josh Fenton-Glynn** (Calder Valley) (Lab): What assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of the police response to violence against women and girls. [900101]

3. **Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): What steps her Department plans to take to tackle violence against women and girls. [900102]

5. **Alison Hume** (Scarborough and Whitby) (Lab): What steps her Department plans to take to tackle violence against women and girls. [900104]

12. **Mrs Elsie Blundell** (Heywood and Middleton North) (Lab): What steps her Department plans to take to tackle violence against women and girls. [900111]

19. **Jess Asato** (Lowestoft) (Lab): What steps her Department plans to take to tackle violence against women and girls. [900118]

22. **Catherine Atkinson** (Derby North) (Lab): What steps her Department plans to take to tackle violence against women and girls. [900121]

23. **Tracy Gilbert** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): What steps her Department plans to take to tackle violence against women and girls. [900122]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Yvette Cooper): For far too long, violence against women and girls has been treated as an inevitability, rather than the national emergency that it is. Our mission is for the whole country to halve violence against women and girls within a decade. That has to start with drastically improving the policing and criminal justice response.

Josh Fenton-Glynn: I am proud to support the Government's mission to halve violence against women and girls. I know from my time as a councillor that the experience of victims is much better if the police empathise with them. Will my right hon. Friend agree to look at work done by Alison Lowe, the Deputy Mayor of West Yorkshire, on connecting survivors with police, to ensure that the police are more empathetic when dealing with these awful crimes?

Yvette Cooper: As a West Yorkshire MP, I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to the work done by not just the Deputy Mayor of West Yorkshire, but the mayor and the chief constable. They have been looking at ways to improve women's safety on the streets and speed up charging for domestic abuse. Charge rates for domestic abuse have dropped by about 40% across the country over the last eight years. That has to be turned around, because we need justice on those terrible crimes.

Christine Jardine: I welcome the Home Secretary's comments, particularly in the light of a National Police Chiefs' Council report that states that one in 12 women will be victim of a violent crime by a man. While police action is necessary, does she agree that this is a whole-Government and whole-society problem? We have to look at societal change and education, including health education, and we have to look at misogyny in the round, because it is about more than just violence; it happens to women every day, in the most everyday of circumstances.

Yvette Cooper: I agree with the hon. Member that this has to be a broad mission; that is why the Prime Minister has talked about it being not just for Government or any individual Department. We will work on it across Government, but it must be about society as a whole. The Education Secretary has talked about tackling toxic misogyny in schools as well.

Alison Hume: I welcome the steps that my right hon. Friend is taking to reduce violence against women and girls. Women's refuges and other dispersed accommodation play a vital part in helping women and their children to escape domestic abuse. Scarborough has the highest domestic abuse rate in North Yorkshire, but we do not have a single refuge in the constituency of Scarborough and Whitby. Planning permission for a women's refuge at Danes Dyke was granted in 2022, but progress has stalled due to rising business costs. Will the Home Secretary please advise on how the shortfall in funds referenced by North Yorkshire council, Beyond Housing and Homes England can be dealt with, so that this vital service can be built?

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend is right to point out the important work done by refuges, as well as all kinds of voluntary sector groups who do immensely important work supporting victims and providing specialist advice. We have to recognise that funding for local council services has been hit; that is one of the issues that will be covered by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in her statement in due course. We want to see work done in every community across the country as part of this mission, so that we get the best impact from every pound there is for supporting women and girls who face violence and abuse.

Mrs Blundell: My constituency carries painful scars from a time when vulnerable girls were subjected to abuse and exploitation, but across the country it is not just so-called grooming gangs that present a danger to girls; abuse happens online, in institutions and in the home. What measures will the new Government put in place to target perpetrators and address the root causes of abuse and violence, to ensure that what happened to vulnerable girls in my constituency can never happen again?

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend makes an immensely important point. She is a strong voice for victims of the most terrible abuse and violence. We need to ensure that victims get support, and that action is taken against perpetrators. Too often, the focus is on the too-weak support for victims, and there is not enough proper, strong action to go after perpetrators and ensure that they face justice for their terrible crimes. We will set out a new perpetrators programme to properly ensure that the police pursue the most dangerous offenders when it comes to violence against women and girls. That is the best way to ensure that everyone can stay safe.

Jess Asato: The situation facing specialist charities is acutely difficult. Many local services have had to close their doors due to a lack of funding, including, sadly, Suffolk Rape Crisis. Long-term sustainable funding is crucial if women are to be supported after abuse and kept safe from future harm. Could my right hon. Friend confirm that Labour's mission will include a review of funding for these life-saving services?

Yvette Cooper: Our mission needs to be comprehensive, and to involve every area and local community; it is not just about the work of Government. We want strong partnerships in every area across the country, focusing on how to prevent violence against women and girls, ensuring that victims get support and pursuing perpetrators. We are keen to work closely with voluntary and third-sector organisations and refuges to make sure that we do that.

Catherine Atkinson: There were nearly 400 offences of violence against women and girls in Derby in 2022-23—shamefully, a fifth of all crimes in the city. I welcome the £83,000 for closed circuit television that will be put

into operation by our new Derbyshire police and crime commissioner, but what further support can this Government provide so that women feel safe, and are safe, in our city centres?

Yvette Cooper: I agree on the importance of that. As well as doing work specifically to target violence against women and girls, this Government are determined to increase neighbourhood policing, to get police back on the streets to make sure that people feel safe. We have lost around 10,000 neighbourhood police officers and police community support officers in the past eight years. We need to turn that around so that everyone can feel safe on our streets.

Tracy Gilbert: How will my right hon. Friend work with the devolved nations to ensure that we meet those targets?

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend raises an important point. The mission needs be right across the UK. We must address this issue in all corners of our country, work in partnership, and learn from what has and has not worked in keeping women safe. We will continue to do that.

Rebecca Smith (South West Devon) (Con): The right hon. Lady may be aware of Plymouth's "Male Violence against Women and Girls Report" and its recommendations. It was commissioned to help the city, including part of my constituency, rebuild following two violent tragedies in 2021. Our belief has always been that our recommendations could form a blueprint for how towns and cities across the country address violence against women and girls. Will the right hon. Lady meet me to discuss how we might work together on this issue?

Yvette Cooper: The hon. Member raises an important point. I have talked to Plymouth MPs over many years about the terrible incidents that Plymouth has had to endure, the impact on the community, and the importance of learning lessons to prevent future violence. We will continue to work with Plymouth, and I am sure that the safeguarding Minister will be happy to talk to her further about this. We need to ensure both prevention and a strong and robust response from law enforcement.

Caroline Voaden (South Devon) (LD): I applaud the new Government's mission to halve violence against women and girls. In my previous role as the chief executive of Devon Rape Crisis, I learned how insidious widespread access to pornography among our children and young people is, and how damaging it is to both boys and girls. Could the Secretary of State assure me that the Department for Education will be involved in this mission, with a widespread education programme in all schools across the country about how dangerous pornography is? Will she commit to working with internet companies to further tighten up safeguards, in order to create a fail-safe mechanism, so that our young people cannot access this vile pornography?

Yvette Cooper: The hon. Member may know that a review on pornography was established under the Conservative Government. That is due to report in the autumn, and we look forward to its conclusions. Let me take the opportunity to say that we will work with anyone on tackling violence against women and girls. Far too little has been done for too long, and we have inherited a legacy of far too much damage, but we want to pull everyone together to tackle this terrible crime.

Richard Tice (Boston and Skegness) (Reform): Does the Home Secretary agree that it is shocking when there is violence against female emergency workers? How committed is she to ensuring that perpetrators face the full weight of the law?

Yvette Cooper: Women must have the protection of the law wherever they face violence. That includes women emergency service workers, women police officers, and women shop workers who face violence in their job. That is one of the reasons why we are strengthening the law on assaults against shop workers, which particularly affect women at work, and why we need stronger action in policing. Too often, violence against women and girls has been seen as an inevitability, rather than a national emergency on which we need much stronger action.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): Next month, the community in Twickenham will once again remember Amelie Delagrange, the French student who, many Members will remember, was brutally murdered on Twickenham Green some 20 years ago. Sadly, so little has changed since then. In a local survey by Richmond and Kingston youth council, 69% of boys said that they would not intervene, or would be unsure about intervening, if they witnessed friends sexually harassing someone. May I reiterate calls from both sides of the House for work with the Department for Education to make sure that boys, as well as girls, learn what is and is not acceptable?

Yvette Cooper: The hon. Member is right that this needs to start early and start young. There is a strong personal commitment from the Education Secretary to starting this in schools, and continuing it throughout life, so that young men grow up understanding the importance of challenging misogyny and standing firm against violence of all sorts against women and girls. The hon. Member refers to awful cases from the past. She is right that for too long we have seen these cases and nothing has changed. We cannot let that go on. This has to be a moment for change. It is an opportunity for all of us to come together to make sure that happens.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Home Secretary very much for her positive answers to all the questions put forward. University of Ulster research from 2023 shows that an eye-watering 98% of women in Northern Ireland experience at least one form of abuse in their lifetime. Between 2017 and 2021, 35 women and girls were murdered there, a level of violence unprecedented across this United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. What discussions will the Home Secretary have with the Justice Minister back home about strategies for Northern Ireland for tackling abuse?

Yvette Cooper: The hon. Member is right to raise this issue; it affects us in all corners of the United Kingdom. We are keen to work in partnership everywhere and anywhere to tackle these appalling crimes. The truly awful thing is that sometimes, when a terrible murder is looked into, authorities come to the conclusion that things could have been done to prevent the abuse, or the

terrible murder or crime. We have to make sure that lessons are learned, and that it is not groundhog day, with us making the same mistakes again and again.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Home Secretary.

Mr James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): Once again, I welcome the right hon. Lady to her place. I welcome her Government's commitment to halving violence against women and girls. It is an incredibly important agenda, and it builds on the work that the previous Government —my Government—did in this area. This issue remains a long-standing priority for me. I am very proud that, as Foreign Secretary, I led the international women and girls strategy, which meant that this issue was addressed internationally, not just domestically. Her desire to halve incidents of violence against women and girls fits neatly with my aspiration at the time to make the United Kingdom the safest place in the world to be a woman or girl.

We have seen an increase in arrest rates for violence against women and girls—they went up by 25% between 2019-20 and 2022-23—and a 38% increase in charge rates for rape over a year, but we recognise that there is significant and regular under-reporting of violence against women and girls. I want to make sure the right hon. Lady's agenda does not inadvertently dissuade women from coming forward, so what specifically will be the metric by which we measure the halving of violence against women and girls?

Yvette Cooper: The shadow Home Secretary has made the important point that we need to be addressing the prevalence of violence against women and girls, not simply the reporting. We know that there are many areas in which reporting needs to increase because there is often under-reporting, and we have work under way at the moment in order to ensure that that can be measured.

The right hon. Gentleman talked about the increase in charge rates. If a very small number increases by just a little bit, it is still a very small number. The charge rate is still far too low, and the number of prosecutions and convictions for domestic abuse is more than 40% lower than it was eight years ago. This requires a major overhaul of the system, and I look forward to working with the right hon. Gentleman's party and with all parties in order to do that, but we must be very honest with ourselves about the damage that has been done.

Youth Violence

4. **Warinder Juss** (Wolverhampton West) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to tackle youth violence. [900103]

The Minister of State, Home Department (Dame Diana Johnson): We are determined to stamp out the scourge of serious youth violence, and we have set out an unprecedented mission to halve knife crime within a decade. We will introduce legislation to remove dangerous knives from our streets, and will tackle online knife sales with new sanctions for technology executives whose companies fail to obey the law. Our new young futures programme will prevent teenagers from being drawn into violence by bringing services together around them to ensure that they stay on the right path.

Warinder Juss: My constituency is in the west midlands, which, sadly, has been described as the knife crime capital of the United Kingdom. Only last September 16-year-old Terrell Marshall-Williams lost his life when he was stabbed to death with a so-called Rambo knife, and in March this year 17-year-old Harleigh Hepworth was stabbed to death in a park.

When we were previously in government, we used to have a slogan: "tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime". Given that issues such as drug abuse, lack of access to adequate mental health services and cuts in community provision—including youth centres—are considered to be causes of youth crime, how will my right hon. Friend's Department use initiatives such as the young futures programme to tackle not only youth violence but the causes of youth violence?

Dame Diana Johnson: Let me first offer my condolences to the families of my hon. Friend's constituents who so tragically lost their lives. Tackling serious violence and halving knife crime is a core part of our safer streets mission, but to be successful it will require action across Whitehall and with all partners including police, probation youth services, technology companies, charities and community organisations. My hon. Friend mentioned the preventive element provided by our young futures programme. The young futures hubs will be staffed by a range of trained professionals to support young people and help to prevent them from being drawn into violence.

Asylum Seekers: Government Support

6. **Carla Denyer** (Bristol Central) (Green): What steps she is taking to help prevent asylum seekers from becoming destitute. [900105]

The Minister of State, Home Department (Dame Angela Eagle): The last Government lost control of the asylum system, which has meant sky-high asylum accommodation costs but also too many cases in which people have fallen through the net and ended up destitute. That has added to the already heavy burden that local authorities have to deal with. This Government will get a grip. We have already set out plans to process asylum claims that have been stuck in record high backlogs, and have given assurances to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government that we will take action to reset the relationship between the Home Office and local authorities.

Carla Denyer: No recourse to public funds is a policy that prevents most migrants in the UK from accessing most forms of welfare support. I would like to see the policy scrapped altogether to reduce child poverty and homelessness, but, at the very least, will the Minister stop applying it to the visas of any parents of children under 18 to ensure that children can be adequately protected against poverty and destitution?

Dame Angela Eagle: No, the best way to deal with the issue of destitution, in my view, is to decide asylum claims quickly and accurately so that those who are entitled to work can do so and can have such recourse, and those who are not can be swiftly removed.

Retail Crime

7. **Jack Abbott** (Ipswich) (Lab/Co-op): What steps she is taking to tackle retail crime. [900106]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Seema Malhotra): Levels of violence and abuse towards retail workers are unacceptably high, with a shoplifting epidemic plaguing our high streets across the country. That is why this Government will bring in a new offence of assaulting a retail worker, and end the effective immunity for shoplifting of goods below £200. Unlike the Conservative party, we want to send a message that all shoplifting is illegal and that offenders will not escape punishment.

Jack Abbott: Record rates of retail crime and shoplifting are blighting our high streets, including in Ipswich, where too often such instances act as a flashpoint for completely unacceptable levels of violence, threats and abuse directed towards retail workers. I very much welcome the Government's commitment to ending the £200 threshold for prosecuting shoplifters, and the introduction of a stand-alone offence that will give shop workers the protection they need. Will the Minister join me in Ipswich to meet local retail staff, so that she can hear about their experiences and the vital difference that these steps will make?

Seema Malhotra: I commend my hon. Friend for raising this issue. It is true that the steps we are taking owe much to the work of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, the Co-op, the British Retail Consortium and the Association of Convenience Stores. Everyone has a right to feel safe at work, but the March statistics show a 30% increase in shoplifting offences, many of which are violent, over 12 months. We welcome the operational commitments made by the police in the retail crime action plan. I know that the Minister of State, Home Department, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North and Cottingham (Dame Diana Johnson) has heard my hon. Friend's request and that she will be happy to visit Ipswich with him.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Matt Vickers (Stockton West) (Con): As a Back Bencher and chair of the all-party parliamentary group on retail, I campaigned alongside retailers and the likes of USDAW to up the ante on protecting retail workers. I know that retail workers welcomed my party's action on the retail crime action plan, particularly the use of tagging and facial recognition technology. Can the Minister assure us that there will be no let-up in the use of facial recognition and tagging to clamp down on this and other crimes?

Seema Malhotra: I thank the shadow Minister for his question, and I can confirm that we are continuing to look at this issue. We welcome the operational commitments that have been made by the police in the October 2023 retail crime action plan and, indeed, the commitment from police across England and Wales to prioritise attendance where violence has been used towards shop staff.

Antisocial Behaviour

8. **Kirith Entwistle** (Bolton North East) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to tackle antisocial behaviour. [900107]

13. **Mr Alex Barros-Curtis** (Cardiff West) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to tackle antisocial behaviour. [900112]

15. **Laurence Turner** (Birmingham Northfield) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to tackle antisocial behaviour. [900114]

16. **Leigh Ingham** (Stafford) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to tackle antisocial behaviour. [900115]

17. **Jo Platt** (Leigh and Atherton) (Lab/Co-op): What steps her Department is taking to tackle antisocial behaviour. [900116]

The Minister of State, Home Department (Dame Diana Johnson): Antisocial behaviour is blighting high streets and town centres right across the country, and our communities are paying the price. That is why this Government have made tackling it a top priority. We will restore neighbourhood policing, putting bobbies back on the beat in every corner of the country, and we will introduce new respect orders so that the police can get repeat offenders off our streets.

Kirith Entwistle: Antisocial behaviour is one of the most common issues raised my constituents in Bolton North East. Can the Minister assure me and my constituents that her Department will take clear steps to tackle the issue head-on?

Dame Diana Johnson: Absolutely. We have been very clear that we see neighbourhood policing as the bedrock of restoring public confidence in policing, and the neighbourhood policing guarantee is a crucial part of that. The police have powers to crack down on the antisocial use of dangerous and deafening off-road bikes, which causes much concern in many of our constituencies, so that they can be seized and destroyed far more swiftly.

Mr Barros-Curtis: I thank the Minister for her answer, and I would like to associate myself with the comments made by the Home Secretary in respect of Southport. During the election, my constituents in Cardiff West repeatedly raised the issue of antisocial behaviour. I know they will be grateful for the Minister's answer, but can she assure me that this Government will work closely with the South Wales Police and our new police and crime commissioner, Emma Wools, to deliver on this vital mission?

Dame Diana Johnson: Absolutely. As I said in my opening answer, a priority for the Government is tackling the scourge of antisocial behaviour. We know that the police and local authorities have a range of powers to deal with antisocial behaviour, which we will strengthen through new legislation.

Laurence Turner: Crime and antisocial behaviour was the No. 1 issue on the doorstep during the election, and my constituents in Birmingham Northfield are paying the price for years of cuts to community services and neighbourhood policing. Figures released last week show that there was a 10% fall in recorded crime in Birmingham last year, but the number of shoplifting reports was up by a third. Will the Minister arrange a meeting with me, Simon Foster the West Midlands police and crime commissioner, and Birmingham city council, to discuss how respect orders and other measures can reduce the crime and antisocial behaviour that is blighting our communities?

Dame Diana Johnson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about this being one of the top issues on the doorstep during the general election campaign. It is worth reflecting on the fact that the powers in the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 actually weakened the response to antisocial behaviour, and for far too long the Conservatives wrote this off as just low-level crime. That is why we are introducing respect orders and stronger powers for the police to tackle persistent antisocial behaviour offenders and get them out of our town centres. Of course I would be happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss this issue.

Leigh Ingham: Residents in the Highfields area of Stafford have expressed concern around off-road vehicles being used in pedestrian areas. People, especially the elderly and vulnerable, have reported feeling intimidated and concerned for their safety and the safety of others. Could the Minister please tell me what the new Government have planned to tackle this issue?

Dame Diana Johnson: I am very aware of this issue and, as I said in an earlier response, we want to make sure that there is swift action to deal with it. We think the neighbourhood policing guarantee, getting police officers back on to the beat to see what is going on, will provide that reassurance. Stopping antisocial behaviour is key and we will make sure that that happens, but I am happy to discuss it with my hon. Friend as well.

Jo Platt: I welcome my right hon. Friend and her team to their places, and I thank the Home Secretary for visiting Leigh prior to the election to acknowledge the issues that we face in our towns. As my right hon. Friend knows, our town centres are struggling with persistent antisocial behaviour, often fuelled by drugs and alcohol abuse. That is placing a significant strain on our police force, deterring residents from visiting the towns and causing unease in the business community. I welcome the Home Secretary's measures for more policing, but for fear of just moving the problem along, will my right hon. Friend outline the potential for collaboration among support agencies to better manage the complex nature of these offences?

Dame Diana Johnson: I thank my hon. Friend; how nice it is to see her back in her place in this House. Of course, collaboration will be key to tackling antisocial behaviour. In line with our manifesto, we will be introducing powerful new respect orders, giving the police greater powers to get persistent antisocial offenders off our streets. We will also introduce zero tolerance zones through a form of expedited public space protection orders, to prevent antisocial street drinking or local drug dealing, for example, from blighting particular areas.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Matt Vickers (Stockton West) (Con): At Manchester airport this past week we have seen how antisocial behaviour can quickly spiral into serious violence. We have also seen how police officers can become subject to trial by social media with only partial information. The previous Government brought forward the use of force review to give police the clarity and confidence to act in the most challenging of circumstances. Will the right hon. Lady assure the House that she will continue this important work and stand on the side of our brave officers?

Dame Diana Johnson: I would just say to the shadow Policing Minister that one of the incidents he is referring to is clearly still under consideration by the Independent Office for Police Conduct, and it would be wrong for me to make any further comment on that at this time. Of course the police have our backing in the difficult job that they have to do, particularly around antisocial behaviour, and we will of course do what we can to support the police when they need that support.

Mr Speaker: I call the Lib Dem spokesperson.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): As the Minister has said, the physical presence of police officers—coppers on the beat—is crucial to tackling antisocial behaviour, but during recent years we have seen the number of police officers in the highlands of Scotland decline hugely. That is extremely worrying and does nothing for public confidence in the police force. I know that policing is devolved to the Scottish Government, but may I with some passion ask the Minister: what advice does she have for me as a Scottish Member?

Dame Diana Johnson: I am sure the hon. Gentleman does not need advice from me. He is quite clear that this is a devolved matter, so he obviously needs to take it up with the Scottish Government and Police Scotland. As an incoming Government we recognise that having enough police on the beat and police being visible is important to the public feeling safe. That reassurance is vital, so perhaps the hon. Gentleman will take this up with the Scottish Government and Police Scotland.

Live Facial Recognition Surveillance

9. **Kim Johnson** (Liverpool Riverside) (Lab): If she will make an assessment of the potential merits of bringing forward legislative proposals to protect the right to privacy from live facial recognition surveillance. [900108]

The Minister of State, Home Department (Dan Jarvis): Facial recognition technology is being used effectively by police forces to identify suspects more quickly and accurately but, of course, it is essential that any new technologies are accompanied by strong safeguards and are underpinned by a robust legal framework. This Government will give careful consideration to the overall impact of all new policing technology.

Kim Johnson: I welcome my hon. Friend's response, but facial recognition technology is being used by the police in publicly accessible places, and it breaches human rights and discriminates disproportionately against black people.

The previous Government failed to introduce legislation to restrict its use, so can my hon. Friend confirm when there will be legislation to protect us? Will he meet me and representatives of civil liberties organisations to discuss this matter further?

Dan Jarvis: I understand that the National Physical Laboratory has independently tested the algorithms that the police have been using in live facial recognition cases and has found them to be highly accurate. It found no statistically significant differences based on ethnicity at the settings the police generally use.

It is extremely important that any new technology used by the police is accompanied by strong safeguards, including to prevent bias or disproportionality, and that a robust legal framework is in place to govern the use of these new technologies. My hon. Friend still has concerns, and I am sure the policing Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North and Cottingham (Dame Diana Johnson), or I will be happy to meet her.

Asylum Claims Backlog

10. **Laura Kyrke-Smith** (Aylesbury) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to clear the asylum backlog. [900109]

11. **Vikki Slade** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): What steps she is taking to tackle the asylum backlog. [900110]

The Minister of State, Home Department (Dame Angela Eagle): After 14 years of Conservative chaos, we inherited an asylum system that not only does not work but costs billions of pounds. We are determined to restore order to the asylum system so that it operates swiftly, firmly and fairly. Additional caseworkers will be used to clear the backlog of claims and appeals while properly enforcing the rules and ensuring that those with no right to be here are swiftly removed.

Laura Kyrke-Smith: I appreciate the efforts that my hon. Friend has outlined. As the backlog is cleared, what steps will the Home Secretary take to ensure that newly recognised refugees do not face homelessness and destitution in the weeks after being granted status? Specifically, will she consider extending the move-on period to 56 days, in line with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017?

Dame Angela Eagle: The Government are aware of the need for a smooth transition between asylum accommodation and other accommodation for those asylum seekers who are granted leave to remain. We understand this issue, and we are considering it.

Vikki Slade: According to a 2022 YouGov poll, 81% of people support a right of asylum seekers to work. Currently, successful asylum seekers have little choice but to present to their local authority as homeless, as they have no way of saving for a deposit or proving an income to a potential landlord. Some councils, such as Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole council, of which I was formerly leader, have joined the "lift the ban" coalition in supporting people's right to work after six months.

I accept that the Minister has talked about speeding things up, but two thirds of asylum seeker claims are currently taking more than six months, so it will take some time to do that. A right to work would reduce the homelessness burden on councils and improve the mental health of asylum seekers, helping them to integrate with the host authority and filling vacancies in our economy. Will the Minister work with Refugee Action to consider that?

Dame Angela Eagle: No, the answer is to speed up the asylum system so that we can get proper results much faster, and swiftly remove those who do not have a right to be here, while ensuring that those who do can be integrated and begin to work.

Elections: Foreign Interference

14. **Melanie Ward** (Cowdenbeath and Kirkcaldy) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to prevent foreign interference in elections. [900113]

The Minister of State, Home Department (Dan Jarvis): It will always be a Government priority to protect our elections against foreign interference. Established processes are in place to protect the UK's democratic integrity, including the National Security Act 2023, providing security services and our law enforcement agencies with the tools they need to tackle state threats. Last week, the Home Secretary and I convened the defending democracy taskforce to consider any issues arising from the election.

Melanie Ward: During the recent general election, some of my constituents in Cowdenbeath and Kirkcaldy were understandably frustrated by delays in the postal voting system. I understand that the Electoral Commission is looking into this and I hope that lessons will be learned. Our democratic system must always be protected from both domestic and foreign malign interference, including misinformation. Will the Minister update the House on the work being undertaken by the defending democracy taskforce to review measures put in place to protect the general election? Will he also explain what efforts are being made to protect our wider democratic system?

Dan Jarvis: I welcome my hon. Friend to her place. The defending democracy taskforce met for the first time under the new Government on 25 July. The taskforce brings together Ministers from across Government, along with representatives from law enforcement and the intelligence community. Last week's meeting discussed how political intimidation and harassment has no place in our society, and how the taskforce will drive a whole-of-Government response to the full range of threats to our democracy. The taskforce will bring to bear the full range of tools and capabilities to meet this challenge.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I warmly welcome the appointment of the Minister and congratulate him on it. Like me, he will appreciate that the security and intelligence agencies are reluctant to be seen to interfere in the democratic process, but does he agree that steps must be taken to ensure that the proceeds of kleptocracy in countries such as Russia are not used to infect democratic political parties in this country and elsewhere?

Dan Jarvis: The right hon. Gentleman speaks with great wisdom and authority on these matters, and he has huge experience of them, so I will not detain the House any further, but say yes, I agree with him.

Topical Questions

T1. [900126] **Adam Jogee** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Yvette Cooper): Last week's crime figures showed that shoplifting has increased by 30% in a year and street crime has gone up by 40% in a year. At a time when antisocial behaviour has become a serious challenge in some town centres, neighbourhood policing figures are down by a further 28%. This is deeply damaging because communities need to feel safe, particularly at the heart of their communities. That is why this Government are determined to restore neighbourhood policing. The new crime and policing Bill announced in the King's Speech will include strong measures to support neighbourhood policing and to give the police stronger powers to crack down on shoplifting and antisocial behaviour in order to keep our streets safe.

Adam Jogee: I am grateful to the Home Secretary for that answer. My constituents in Newcastle-under-Lyme raise crime and antisocial behaviour with me almost daily, which is why they welcome the Government's commitment to restoring meaningful and effective neighbourhood policing. Will she meet me to discuss how Newcastle-under-Lyme can best benefit from this important step in the right direction?

Yvette Cooper: The policing Minister and I would be very happy to talk to my hon. Friend about the importance of rebuilding neighbourhood policing in his constituency and across the country. Fundamentally, this is about making communities feel safe, and about restoring the confidence of local communities in policing and community safety in their area.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Home Secretary.

Mr James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): The scrutiny of Government can work properly only when Ministers are open, honest and transparent. It is therefore disappointing that the Home Secretary has still failed to respond to my letter of 10 July—*[Interruption.]* Well, if Ministers on the Treasury Bench do not believe that responding to letters from the Opposition Front Bench matters, that is probably something that they might like to take up with you, Mr Speaker.

On the right hon. Lady's first outing at the Dispatch Box, her statement was late and, in that statement, she used unpublished figures—almost a week later, she has still not provided any published evidence for the figures she used. My question today is simple. I have raised it with her previously but she has still not given me an answer. Where is she going to send failed asylum seekers from Afghanistan, Syria and Iran?

Mr Speaker: Order. We are on topical questions, which are meant to be short and quick. Members on both sides of the House will be unable to get in, so please, look to those on the Front Bench and others who have held us up.

Yvette Cooper: For the former Home Secretary to talk about scrutiny and transparency, given that he failed to tell the House that he was spending £700 million over two and a half years on sending four volunteers to Rwanda, is just shocking. The problem with his policies is that he was not sending failed asylum seekers or asylum seekers anywhere. In fact, his Government sent more Home Secretaries to Rwanda than they did asylum seekers.

T2. [900127] **Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): The use of e-bikes and e-scooters has been causing an increasing problem. In Sheffield city centre and pedestrian areas, they are a threat now to public safety, particularly when they are used by Deliveroo and other drivers. Guide Dogs UK is concerned that people who are visually impaired cannot hear these vehicles coming. Will the Minister give clear guidance to the police about what action should be taken to police these vehicles properly?

The Minister of State, Home Department (Dame Diana Johnson): I totally sympathise with what my hon. Friend has set out. The police do have powers to seize vehicles being used illegally or in an antisocial manner, and to fine individuals who fail to stop when instructed to do so. We will set out our plans to crack down on antisocial road users in due course.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesman.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): There is a crofter living in the Rhiconich-Kinlochbervie area of my constituency. He is very hard-working, he is well-liked locally and he has done a great deal for the local community, but he is German and he is trying ever so hard to get leave to remain, but it is taking forever. I would be very grateful if the Minister asked her officials to meet me to see how we can speed this matter on.

The Minister of State, Home Department (Dame Angela Eagle): I would be more than happy to meet the hon. Gentleman.

T6. [900131] **Lauren Edwards** (Rochester and Strood) (Lab): Last week, a horrific incident took place in my constituency, with the attack on uniformed Royal Engineer Lieutenant Colonel Mark Teeton on the streets of Brompton. Will my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary join me in paying tribute to Kent police, ambulance and NHS workers, Medway council and senior officers from the Brompton barracks, who worked so well together to quickly arrest the suspect, save Mark's life, support his family and reassure the local community?

Yvette Cooper: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that important case. This was an awful attack on a serving soldier in her constituency. All of our thoughts will be with him and with his family and friends, and we wish him a most speedy recovery. We give Kent police our full support in investigating this incident and in providing reassurance and community patrols in the area.

T3. [900128] **David Mundell** (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con): My constituents Colin and Mandy Mackie set up Spike Aware UK after their son Greg

tragically died after having his drink spiked. I very much welcome the fact that this Government are bringing forward the previous Government's proposals to outlaw spiking. Does the Home Secretary agree that the fight against spiking needs to be UK-wide, and will she encourage the Scottish Government to join her in banning spiking across the UK?

Yvette Cooper: The right hon. Gentleman makes an important point. Spiking is a terrible crime, it is extremely dangerous and too often it is not taken seriously enough. We will work with anyone and everyone to tackle this appalling crime, so that not only is more work done to prevent spiking in the first place, but, when it does take place, the perpetrators feel the full force of the law.

T8. [900133] **Ben Goldsborough** (South Norfolk) (Lab): Under the Conservatives, rural crime rocketed by 22%, costing our economy an estimated £49.5 million—those are National Farmers Union figures, so hon. Members can question the NFU if they are not convinced. What action will the Minister take to ensure that this Tory mess is sorted and that our country lanes are protected from crimes such as heating oil theft, machinery theft and livestock theft?

Dame Diana Johnson: The Government recognise the importance of tackling rural crime. We are committed to safeguarding rural communities with tougher measures to clamp down on antisocial behaviour and strengthen neighbourhood policing and stronger laws to prevent farm theft and fly-tipping. The national rural crime unit provides police forces with specialist operational support in respect of the theft of farming or construction machinery, livestock theft, fly-tipping, fuel theft and equine crime.

T4. [900129] **Sir David Davis** (Goole and Pocklington) (Con): In December 2023 a plot was exposed in which members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps planned to assassinate two journalists working for Iran International on UK soil. Since January 2022 there have been about 15 such incidents in Britain. Is it not now time to ban the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps?

The Minister of State, Home Department (Dan Jarvis): The right hon. Gentleman, who has a long-standing interest in these matters, knows that we do not comment on whether an organisation is being considered for proscription. What is clear is that Iran's malign activities, including the activities of the IRGC, are completely unacceptable. I can give him an assurance that we keep these matters under very close review.

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): For the communities in my constituency mourning the loss of a young person to knife crime, the Government's commitment to ban zombie knives, machetes and ninja swords cannot come soon enough. Can the Home Secretary confirm that, in bringing forward this vital legislation, she will ensure that the penalties for selling those weapons illegally will be substantial and that they will apply personally to executives at the highest level in any retail outlet, including online marketplaces such as eBay and Amazon?

Dame Diana Johnson: The Government have a manifesto commitment to ban ninja swords and other weapons and will be taking it forward as soon as possible. I have listened carefully to what my hon. Friend has said. Ensuring that lethal blades that have been used to kill teenagers on our streets are no longer available to buy or sell is a key priority. We will also implement the ban on zombie knives and zombie-style machetes, which was approved by Parliament in April.

T7. [900132] **Carla Denyer** (Bristol Central) (Green): The Government have rightly scrapped the Rwanda scheme, but the UK is falling behind our international counterparts in providing safe routes for refugees. We are now one of the only countries in Europe where refugee children cannot sponsor their family members to join them here. Organisations such as the Refugee Council have documented the harm that causes. Will the Home Secretary please confirm that the Government's mission to improve opportunity for all extends to refugee children, and that they will amend the immigration rules accordingly?

Yvette Cooper: I think most people in this country want to see strong border security and a properly controlled and managed asylum system, where we do our bit for those who have fled persecution and conflict, but where those who have no right to be here are returned. We do not have any of those things at the moment. That is why we are strengthening our border security and why we continue to support important routes such Homes for Ukraine and the support for Afghanistan.

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab): In Tooting town centre, we have had Operation Kenny rolled out this year, which has been fantastic in tackling violent crime and making people feel safer. It has meant more police patrolling the streets on a continuous basis and has led to a 70% reduction in crime. We would like to see that programme rolled out across the country, so can I tempt the Home Secretary to visit Tooting to see the fantastic effects that it is having?

Dame Diana Johnson: I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting that important work being done on the streets of London. We want to ensure that policing has the support it needs from central Government. I am sure that the Home Secretary or I would very much enjoy a visit to see that in action.

T9. [900134] **Robbie Moore** (Keighley and Ilkley) (Con): Unfortunately, in certain parts of Keighley—namely Bracken Bank, Guard House, Braithwaite and in other areas—residents are constantly being plagued by selfish individuals who ride motorbikes at high speeds, doing wheelies, wearing balaclavas and revving their engines, and who have no regard for their fellow road users, or indeed, neighbouring residents, who are quite rightly fed up. Can the Home Secretary outline her plans to deal with this increasing problem?

Yvette Cooper: I agree with the hon. Member that the problems we have seen with off-road bikes—the deafening and distressing harassment that they can sometimes cause—are serious. That is why this Government are determined to strengthen the law on off-road bikes to give the police more powers and to put more police on the street. I hope that his party will support that now.

Chris Webb (Blackpool South) (Lab): In my home town of Blackpool, knife crime has risen 416% since 2015-16. When I was out with young people in Blackpool a few

weeks ago, they told me that it is now the norm that young people across my town carry a knife. Will the Secretary of State agree to meet me to discuss this matter urgently and address the issue in Blackpool?

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend is right that we have seen deeply damaging increases in knife crime. That is why we are making it part of our mission on crime to halve knife crime over the next 10 years. That has to involve stronger action on knife sales, stronger action in the law and stronger prevention with the new young futures programme.

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): The seasonal agricultural workers scheme remains absolutely vital for farmers, largely due to the piecemeal nature of its running by the last Government, which means that farmers have not been able to make the investment decisions that they want to. Will the Home Secretary commit now to a scheme for the whole of this Parliament to provide certainty to farmers and workers?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Seema Malhotra): The hon. Member will know that the Migration Advisory Committee recently produced a report on the seasonal workers scheme. The report is being kept under review and we will update the House in due course.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall and Camberwell Green) (Lab/Co-op): I had the pleasure of visiting the Metropolitan police special operations unit in my constituency with the new policing Minister on Saturday. We discussed a range of issues with the officers, from counter-terrorism to dealing with violent crime, protests and antisocial behaviour. Does the Home Secretary agree that we need additional resources for our police officers and urgent action to work with the Met to keep our streets safe in London?

Dame Diana Johnson: It was a great pleasure to be on that visit with the local constituency MP. We will consider funding around the police settlement in the weeks and months ahead.

Dr Kieran Mullan (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): A few days ago, the Home Office published a notice about the use of the Northeye detention centre in my constituency, telling residents very little except that no decision had been made. As a matter of urgency, will the Home Office publish what options it is considering for the centre's use and commit to a timetable for telling residents when it will come to at least a provisional decision that I and my constituents can feed into?

Dame Angela Eagle: The site was purchased by the former Government. I understand the uncertainty that has been caused by this, especially in the local community, and they will want to know the Home Office plans for the site. A decision will be made on the use of the Northeye site at the earliest opportunity and I will keep the hon. Member informed.

Public Spending: Inheritance

3.33 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rachel Reeves): Before I begin my statement, my thoughts and prayers are with those affected by the events in Southport, and I am sure that the whole House will join me in paying tribute to our emergency services who are dealing with this ongoing situation.

On my first day as Chancellor of the Exchequer, I asked Treasury officials to assess the state of public spending. That work is now complete and I am today presenting it to this House. In this statement, I will do three things. First, I will expose the scale—and the seriousness—of what has been uncovered; secondly, I will lay out the immediate action that we are taking to deal with the inheritance; and thirdly, I will set out our longer-term plans to fix the foundations of our economy. Let me take each of these points in turn.

First, I turn to the inheritance. Before the election, I said that we would face the worst inheritance since the second world war: taxes at a 70-year high, debt through the roof, and an economy only just coming out of recession. I knew all of those things, and during the campaign, I was honest about them and about the difficult choices that they meant. The British people knew them too. That is why they voted for change. But upon my arrival at the Treasury three weeks ago, it became clear that there were things that I did not know—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. This is an important statement for all constituents, including mine. If I am struggling to hear it, they are struggling at home as well. You will all get your chance to ask questions; I think it is more important to hear, and then comment.

Rachel Reeves: There were things that the Conservative party covered up—covered up from the Opposition, from this House and from the country. That is why today we are publishing a detailed audit of the real spending situation, a copy of which will be laid in the House of Commons Library. I take this opportunity to thank the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West (Darren Jones), for his leadership, and Treasury officials for all their work in producing this document.

Let me now explain what that document has uncovered. The previous Government published their plans for day-to-day spending in the spring Budget in March, but when I arrived at the Treasury, I was alerted by officials on the very first day that that was not how much the Government had expected to spend this year. It was not even close; in fact, the total pressure on those budgets across a range of areas was an additional £35 billion. Once we account for the slippage in budgets that we usually see over a year and the reserve of £9 billion designed to respond to genuinely unexpected events, that means that we have inherited a projected overspend of £22 billion. That is a £22 billion hole in the public finances now—not in the future, but now. It is £22 billion of spending this year that was covered up by the Conservative party. If left unaddressed, it would mean a 25% increase in the budget deficit this year, so today I will set out the necessary and urgent work that I have already done to reduce that pressure on the public finances by £5.5 billion this year and over £8 billion next year.

Let me be clear: I am not talking about costs for future years that the previous Government signed up to but did not include, like the compensation for infected blood, which has cross-party support. I am not talking about the state of public services in the future, like the crisis in our prisons that they have left for us to fix. I am talking about the money that the previous Government were already spending this year and had no ability to pay for, which they hid from the country. They had exhausted the reserve and they knew that, but nobody else did. They ducked the difficult decisions, put party before country, and continued to make unfunded commitment after unfunded commitment, knowing that the money was not there. That has resulted in the position that we have now inherited: the reserve was spent more than three times over only three months into the financial year, and the previous Government told no one.

The scale of this overspend is not sustainable, and to not act is simply not an option. This month, we have seen official Office for National Statistics figures showing that borrowing is higher this year than the Office for Budget Responsibility expected, and the disaster of Liz Truss's mini-Budget shows what happens if we do not take tough decisions to maintain economic stability. Some, including the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Godalming and Ash (Jeremy Hunt), have claimed that the books were open. How dare they? It is not true, and I will tell the House why: there are very clear instances of specific budgets that were overspent and unfunded promises that were made, but that—crucially—the OBR was not aware of for its March forecast. I will take each in turn.

The first is the asylum system. The forecast for the number of asylum seekers has risen dramatically since the last spending review, and costs for asylum support have risen sevenfold in the past three years, but instead of reflecting those costs in the Home Office budget for this year, the previous Government covered up the true extent of the crisis and its spending implications. The document I am publishing today reveals a projected overspend on the asylum system, including the previous Government's failed Rwanda plan, of more than £6.4 billion for this year alone. That figure was unfunded and undisclosed.

Next, in the wake of the pandemic, demand for rail services fell. Instead of developing a proper plan to adjust to that new reality, the Government handed out cash to rail companies to make up for passenger shortfalls, but failed to budget for this adequately. Because of that, and because of industrial action, there is now an overspend of £1.6 billion in the transport budget. That was unfunded and undisclosed.

Since 2022, the Government, with the support of the whole House, have rightly provided military assistance to Ukraine in response to the Russian invasion. The spending audit found that there was not enough money set aside in the reserve to fund all these costs. We will continue to honour these commitments in full, and unlike the previous Government, we will make sure that they are always fully funded.

On top of these new pressures, since 2021 inflation was above the Bank of England's target for 33 months in a row—hitting 11% at its peak—but the previous Government had not held a spending review since 2021,

[Rachel Reeves]

which means that they never fully reflected the impact of inflation in departmental budgets. That had a direct impact on budgets for public sector pay.

When the last spending review was conducted, it was assumed that pay awards would be 2% this year. Ordinarily, the Government are expected to give evidence to the pay review bodies on affordability, but extraordinarily, this year the previous Government provided no guidance on what could or could not be afforded to the pay review bodies. That is almost unheard of, but that is exactly what they did. Worse still, the former Education Secretary had the pay review body recommendations sitting on her desk. Instead of responding and dealing with the consequences, the Government shirked the decisions that needed to be taken.

I will not repeat the previous Government's mistakes. Where they provided no transparency to the public, and no certainty for public services, we will be open about the decisions that are needed and the steps that we are taking. That begins with accepting in full the recommendations of the independent pay review bodies. The details of these awards are being published today. That is the right decision for the people who work in, and most importantly the people who use, our public services. It gives hard-working staff the pay rises they deserve while ensuring that we can recruit and retain the people we need.

It should not have taken this long to come to these decisions and I do not want us to be in this position again, so I will consider options to reform the timetable for responding to the pay review bodies in the future. This decision is in the best interests of our economy too: the last Government presided over the worst set of strikes in a generation, which caused chaos and misery for the British public and wreaked havoc on the public finances. Industrial action in the NHS alone cost the taxpayer £1.7 billion last year. That is why I am pleased to announce today that the Government have agreed an offer to the junior doctors that the British Medical Association is recommending to its members.

My right hon. Friend the Health Secretary will set out further details. Let me pay tribute to him: his leadership on the issue has paved the way to ending a dispute that has caused waiting lists to spiral, operations to be delayed and agony for patients to be prolonged. Today marks the start of a new relationship between the Government and staff working in our national health service, and the whole country will welcome that.

Where the previous Government ducked the difficult decisions, I am taking action. Knowing what they did about the state of the public finances, they continued to make unfunded commitment after unfunded commitment that they knew they could not afford, putting party before country and leaving us with an overspend of £22 billion this year. Where they presided over recklessness, I will bring responsibility. I will take immediate action. Let me set it out in detail.

On pay, I have today set out our decision to meet the recommendations of the pay review bodies. Because the previous Government failed to prepare for these recommendations in the departmental budgets, they come at an additional cost of £9 billion this year. The first difficult choice I am making is to ask all Departments to find savings to absorb as much of this as possible, totalling at least £3 billion. To support Departments as they do this, I will work with them to find savings ahead of the autumn Budget, including through measures to stop all non-essential spending on consultancy and Government communications. I am also taking action to ask Departments to find 2% savings in their back-office costs.

I will now deal with a series of commitments made by the previous Government that they did not fund, because if we cannot afford it, we cannot do it. First, at the Conservative party conference last year, the former Prime Minister announced the introduction of a new qualification: the advanced British standard. That is a commitment costing nearly £200 million next year, rising to billions across future years. This was supposed to be the former Prime Minister's legacy, but it turns out that he did not put aside a single penny to pay for it. So we will not go ahead with that policy, because if we cannot afford it, we cannot do it.

Next, the Illegal Migration Act 2023, passed by the previous Government, made it impossible to process asylum applications or remove people who have no right to be here. Instead, they relied on a doomed policy to send asylum seekers to Rwanda on planes that never took off, leaving tens of thousands of people stuck in hotels on the public purse. We need a properly controlled and managed asylum system where rules are enforced, so that those with no right to be here are swiftly removed. So we have scrapped their failed Rwanda scheme, which placed huge pressure on the Home Office budget. To bring down these costs as soon as possible, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has already laid before Parliament legislation to remove the retrospective element of the Illegal Migration Act, which will significantly reduce the use of hotel accommodation. These measures will save nearly £800 million this year and avoid costs spiralling even further next year. This was a bad use of taxpayers' money, and we will not do it.

The previous Government claimed they were levelling up the country. They made promise after promise to the British people, but the spending audit has uncovered that some of those commitments were not worth the paper that they were written on. At the autumn statement last year, the former Chancellor announced £150 million for an investment opportunity fund, but not a single project has been supported from that fund. So following discussions with my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, I am cancelling it today, because if we cannot afford it, we cannot do it.

The previous Government also made a series of commitments on transport, promises that people expected to be delivered and promises that many Members across this House campaigned on in good faith, but the Conservative party has failed them. We have seen from the National Audit Office the chaos that the previous Government presided over, with projects over budget and delayed again and again. The spending audit has revealed £1 billion of unfunded transport projects that have been committed to next year, so my right hon. Friend the Transport Secretary will undertake a thorough review of these commitments. As part of that work, she has agreed not to move forwards with projects that the previous Government refused to publicly cancel, despite knowing full well that they were unaffordable. That includes proposed work on the A303 and the A27, and my right

hon. Friend will also cancel the restoring your railway programme, saving £85 million next year, with individual projects to be assessed through her review. If we cannot afford it, we cannot do it.

The previous Government had plans for a retail sale of NatWest shares. We intend to fully exit our shareholding in NatWest by 2025-26. But having considered advice, I have concluded that a retail share sale offer would involve significant discounts that could cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of pounds. It would therefore not represent value for money, and it will not go ahead. It is a bad use of taxpayers' money, and we will not do it.

Next, let me address the unfunded pressures in our NHS and our social care sector. In October 2020, the Government announced that 40 new hospitals would be built by 2030. Since then, only one new project has opened to patients, and only six have started their main construction activity. The National Audit Office was clear that delivery was wildly off track, but since coming into office, it has become clear that the previous Government continued to maintain their commitment to 40 hospitals without anywhere close to the funding required to deliver them. That gave our constituents false hope. We need to be straight with the British people about what is deliverable and what is affordable, so we will conduct a complete review of the new hospital programme, with a thorough, realistic and costed timetable for delivery.

Adult social care was also neglected by the previous Government. The sector needs reform to improve care and to support staff. In the previous Parliament, the Government made costly commitments to introduce adult social care charging reforms, but they delayed them two years ago because they knew that local authorities were not ready and that their promises were not funded, so it will not be possible to take forward those charging reforms. This will save over £1 billion by the end of next year.

Hon. Members: Outrageous!

Mr Speaker: Order. I want Government Members to be quiet as well—I want to hear the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Rachel Reeves: I can understand why people, and Members, are angry. I am angry too. The previous Government let people down. The previous Government made commitment after commitment without knowing where the money was going to come from. They did this repeatedly, knowingly and deliberately.

Today, I am calling out the Conservatives' cover-up and I am taking the first steps to clean up what they have left behind, but the scale of the inheritance we have been left means that the decisions we have so far announced will not be enough. This level of overspend is not sustainable. Left unchecked, it is a risk to economic stability—and unlike the Conservative party, I will never take risks with our country's economic stability. It therefore falls to us to take the difficult decisions now to make further in-year savings.

The scale of the situation we are dealing with means incredibly tough choices. I repeat today the commitment that we made in our manifesto to protect the triple lock, but today I am making the difficult decision that those not in receipt of pension credit or certain other means-tested benefits will no longer receive the winter fuel payment, from this year onwards. The Government will continue to provide winter fuel payments worth £200 to households receiving pension credit or £300 to households in receipt of pension credit with someone over the age of 80. Let me be clear: this is not a decision I wanted to make, nor is it the one that I expected to make, but these are the necessary and urgent decisions that I must make. It is the responsible thing to do to fix the foundations of our economy and bring back economic stability.

Alongside this change, I will work with my right hon. Friend the Work and Pensions Secretary to maximise the take-up of pension credit by bringing forward the administration of housing benefit and pension credit, repeatedly pushed back by the previous Government, and by working with older people's charities and local authorities to raise awareness of pension credit and help identify households not claiming it.

This is the beginning of a process, not the end. I am announcing today that I will hold a Budget on 30 October, alongside a full economic and fiscal forecast from the Office for Budget Responsibility. I have to tell the House that the Budget will involve taking difficult decisions to meet our fiscal rules across spending, welfare and tax. [Hon. Members: "Ah!"] Mr Speaker, they still don't get it, do they? Parties in Downing Street, crashing the economy, gambling on the election—party before country, every single time.

It will be a Budget to fix the foundations of our economy, and it will be a Budget built on the principles that this new Government were elected on. First, we will treat taxpayers' money with respect by ensuring that every pound is well spent, and we will interrogate every line of public spending to ensure that it represents value for money. Secondly, I can repeat from the Dispatch Box our manifesto commitment that we will not increase taxes on working people. That means that we will not increase national insurance, the basic, higher or additional rates of income tax, or VAT. Today, my hon. Friend the Exchequer Secretary is publishing further detail on our manifesto commitments to close tax loopholes and clamp down on tax avoidance to ensure that we bring in that money as quickly as possible. My third principle is that we will meet our fiscal rules: we will move the current budget into balance and we will get debt falling as a share of the economy by the end of the forecast.

These are the principles that will guide me at the Budget, but let me be honest: challenging trade-offs will remain, so today I am launching a multi-year spending review. This review will set departmental budgets for at least three years, providing the long-term certainty that has been lacking for too long. As part of that process, final budgets for this year and budgets for next year, 2025-26, will be set alongside the Budget on 30 October.

I will look closely at our welfare system, because if someone can work, they should work. That is a principle of this Government, yet under the previous Government, welfare spending ballooned, while inactivity has risen sharply in recent years. We will ensure that the welfare system is focused on supporting people into employment, and we will assess the unacceptable levels of fraud and error in our welfare system and take forward action to bring that down.

To fix the foundations of our economy, we must ensure that never again can a Government keep from the public the true state of our public finances. The fiscal framework I have inherited had several flaws. It allowed

[Rachel Reeves]

the Government to run down the clock on departmental budgets to avoid difficult decisions and to push them back beyond the election, so I am announcing the most significant set of changes to our framework since the inception of the Office for Budget Responsibility. These changes will come into effect in the autumn.

First, we have introduced legislation to ensure that we can never again see a repeat of the mini-Budget. Secondly, we will require the Treasury to share with the Office for Budget Responsibility its assessment of immediate public spending pressures, and we will enshrine that rule in the charter for budget responsibility, so that no Government can ever again cover up the true state of our public finances. Finally, we will ensure that never again do public service budgets get set at only a few months' notice. Instead, spending reviews will take place every two years, with a minimum planning horizon of three years, to avoid uncertainty for Departments and to boost stability for our public finances. I have already spoken to the chair of the Office for Budget Responsibility to brief him on the findings of our audit and our reforms.

By launching the spending review, I am also today starting the firing gun on a new approach to public service reform to drive greater productivity in the public sector. We will embed an approach to government that is mission-led, that is reform-driven, with a greater focus on prevention and the integration of services at a national and local level, and that is enabled by new technology, including through the work of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology on the opportunities of artificial intelligence to improve our public services. We will establish a new office of value for money, with an immediate focus on identifying areas where we can reduce or stop spending, or improve its value.

We will appoint a covid corruption commissioner to bring back money that is owed to taxpayers after contracts worth billions of pounds were handed out by the previous Government during the pandemic. Ahead of the spending review, I will also review the cost of our political system, including restricting eligibility for ministerial severance payments based on time in office. I expect all levels of government to be run effectively and efficiently, and I will work with leaders across our country to deliver just that. That means effective local government, a civil service delivering good value for the British taxpayer and reform of our political institutions, including the House of Lords, to keep costs as low as possible.

The Budget and spending review will also set out further progress on our No. 1 mission: to grow our economy. Economic growth is the only way to sustainably improve our public services and our public finances, so we will use the spending review to prioritise specific areas of capital investment that leverage in billions more in private investment. It will not happen overnight—it will take time and it will take focus—but we have already made significant progress, including: planning reforms to get Britain building; a national wealth fund to catalyse private investment; a pensions investment review to unlock capital for our businesses; Skills England to create a shared national ambition to boost skills across our country; and work across government on a new industrial strategy, driven forward by a growth mission board, to ensure that we deliver on our commitments.

Our country has fundamental strengths on which we can build, and I look forward to welcoming business leaders to the international investment summit in Britain later this year. I know that if we can create the stable conditions that investors need to thrive, we will return confidence to our economy so that entrepreneurs and businesses big and small know that this is the best place in the world to start and grow a business. That is the bedrock on which economic growth must be built.

The inheritance from the previous Government is unforgiveable. After the chaos of partygate, when they knew that trust in politics was at an all-time low, they gave false hope to Britain. When people were already being hurt by their cost of living crisis, they promised solutions that they knew could never be paid for, roads that would never be built, public transport that would never arrive and hospitals that would never treat a single patient. They spent like there was no tomorrow because they knew that someone else would pick up the bill. Then, in the election—perhaps this is the most shocking part—they campaigned on a platform to do it all over again, with more unfunded tax cuts and more spending pledges, all the time knowing that they had no ability to pay for them. No regard for the taxpayer. No respect for ordinary, hard-working people.

I will never do that. I will restore our country's economic stability. I will make the tough choices. I will fix the foundations of our economy so that we can rebuild Britain and make every part of our country better off. I commend this statement to the House.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer.

4 pm

Jeremy Hunt (Godalming and Ash) (Con): I thank the Chancellor for advance sight of her statement, and I echo her thoughts for the people and emergency services of Southport.

Today, she will fool absolutely no one with a shameless attempt to lay the grounds for tax rises that she did not have the courage to tell us about—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I want the Cabinet to act like a Cabinet, not like a rabble that is trying to shout at the shadow Chancellor.

Jeremy Hunt: The Chancellor says that the information is new, but she told the *Financial Times*:

"You don't need to win an election to find"

out the state of public finances, as

"We've got the OBR now."

Paul Johnson of the Institute for Fiscal Studies has said:

"The state of public finances were apparent pre-election to anyone who cared to look",

which is why he and other independent figures say that her argument is not credible and will not wash.

Those public finances were audited by the OBR just 10 weeks before the election was called. We are now expected to believe that, in that short period, a £20 billion black hole has magically emerged, but for every single day in that period—in fact, since January, in line with

constitutional convention—the right hon. Lady had privileged access to the Treasury permanent secretary. She could have found out absolutely anything she needed. Will she confirm to the House that she did have meetings with the permanent secretary of the Treasury before the election? Will she tell the House whether they discussed public finances? Will she tell the House whether they discussed any of the pressures that she is talking about today? If so, why are we only hearing today what she wants to do about them? That is why today's exercise is not economic—it is political.

The Chancellor wants to blame the last Conservative Government for tax rises and project cancellations that she has been planning all along. The trouble is, even her own published numbers expose the fiction behind today's announcement. Just four days ago, she presented to the House the Government's estimates of spending plans for the year. Those estimates are a legal requirement. The official guidance manual is clear that Departments are responsible for ensuring that estimates are consistent with their "best forecast of requirements". They are signed off by the most senior civil servants—the accounting officers—in every Department. Yet, four days on, she is saying that those estimates are wrong. Who is right: politically neutral civil servants or a political Chancellor? If she is right, will she ask the cabinet secretary to investigate those civil servants and apologise to the House for laying misleading estimates? Of course not, because she knows that those civil servants are right and today's black hole is spurious, just like when she says that she inherited the

"worst set of economic circumstances"

since the second world war. When BBC Verify asked a professor at the London School of Economics about that claim, he responded:

"I struggle to find a metric that would make that statement correct."

The metrics speak for themselves. Inflation is 2% today—nearly half what it was in 2010 when we had to clear up the mess inherited from a Labour Government. Unemployment is nearly half what it was then, with more new jobs than nearly anywhere else in Europe. So far this year, we are the fastest growing G7 economy. Over the next six years, the IMF says that we will grow faster than France, Italy, Germany and Japan.

Just two days before the election was called, the managing director of the IMF praised the previous Government's handling of the economy, and said it was in a good place. This week, the Institute for Fiscal Studies said that it was

"not a bad situation to take charge of"

and certainly not comparable to the 1940s or 1970s. If the right hon. Lady is in charge of the economy, it is time to stop trash talking it. What is the point of going to New York or Brazil to bang the drum for more investment if she comes home with a cock and bull story about how bad everything is? She should stop playing politics with Britain's reputation and get on with running the economy.

When it comes to public finances, will the Chancellor confirm to the House that, far from being broke and broken, as Downing Street briefed the media, the forecast deficit today is 4.4%, compared with 10.3% when Labour left office in 2010? In other words, when Labour was last in office, we were borrowing double the current levels. Will she confirm another difference between today and 2010? The Conservatives came to office then, honest about our plans and saying straightforwardly that we needed to cut the deficit. She has just won an election telling us repeatedly that taxes will not go up. How many seats were won on the back of commitments not to raise tax, while she is quietly planning to do the exact opposite?

On the details that the Chancellor has announced today, will she confirm that around half of today's fictitious black hole comes from discretionary public sector pay awards—in other words, not something that she has to do, but something where she has a choice? Will she confirm to the House that, apart from the teachers recommendation, none of the other pay review body recommendations was seen by the last Government, as they arrived after the election was called? Today she has chosen to accept those recommendations, but before doing so, was she advised by officials to ask unions for productivity enhancements before accepting above-inflation pay awards, to help to pay for those awards, as the last Government did? If she was advised to do that, why did she reject that advice and simply tell the unions, "Here's your money, thanks for your support"? Will she confirm—*[Interruption.]* I know Labour Members do not like the truth, but here it is. Will she confirm that one of the reasons for her funding gap is that she has chosen to backdate a 22% pay award to junior doctors, to cover the time when they were striking?

We are just three months into the financial year, so why did the Chancellor not mention today that, at the start of the year, the Treasury had a reserve of £14 billion for unexpected revenue costs, and £4 billion for unexpected capital costs? Additionally, why has she not accounted for the Treasury's ability to manage down in-year pressures on the reserve—last year alone by £9 billion? Why has she apparently not accounted for underspends—typically £12 billion a year? Has she totally abandoned the £12 billion of welfare savings planned by the last Government? If so, will she confirm that to the House? Has she also abandoned £20 billion of annual productivity savings planned by the last Government? If not, why are they not in her numbers? Finally, for someone who claims continuously the mantle of fiscal rectitude, will she confirm that in order to pay for her public spending plans, she will not change her fiscal rules to target a different debt measure, so she can increase borrowing and debt by the back door?

Every Chancellor faces pressures on public finances. After a pandemic and an energy crisis, those pressures are particularly challenging, which is why in autumn 2022, the previous Government took painful but necessary decisions on tax and spend. But we knew that, if we continued to take difficult decisions on pay, productivity and welfare reform, we could live within our means and start to bring taxes down. She, on the other hand, knew perfectly well that a Labour Government would duck those difficult decisions. She has caved in to the unions on pay, left welfare reform out of the King's Speech and soft-pedalled on our productivity programme. That is a choice, not a necessity.

That choice means that taxes will have to go up and the right hon. Lady chose not to tell us before the election. Instead, in 24 days—just 24 days—she has announced £7.3 billion for GB Energy, £8.3 billion for the national wealth fund and around £10 billion for

[Jeremy Hunt]

public sector pay awards. That is £24 billion in 24 days: around £1 billion for every day she has been in office, leaving taxpayers to pick up the tab for her profligacy.

Doing it this way, she makes the first major misstep of her time as Chancellor, because that great office of state depends more than any on trust—*[Interruption.]* In her first big moment, she breaks that trust with an utterly bogus attempt to hoodwink the public about the choices she has. Over 50 times in the election, Labour told us it had no plans to raise taxes. Now, in a U-turn that will forever shame this Labour Government, she is laying the ground to break her word. When she does, her first Budget will become the biggest betrayal in history by a new Chancellor. Working families will never forgive her.

Rachel Reeves: The shadow Chancellor had an opportunity this afternoon to admit what he had done, the legacy he had left. Instead, he takes no responsibility. The word the country was looking for today was sorry. He could not find those words; no wonder the Conservative party so definitively lost the trust of the British people at the election three and a half weeks ago. We say never again. *[Interruption.]* Never again should a party that plays fast and loose with the public finances be in charge of the public finances—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Can I just say to the Whips, who hold responsible jobs and I expect them to keep them that way, that just because they might not be at the end of the Bench does not mean they have to chunter all the way through and pass comment? I don't need it and I won't put up with it.

Rachel Reeves: First, specifically on the black hole, we could not have known these numbers because the Conservative party did not tell the OBR these numbers. That is why we are in the position we are in today. That is the biggest scandal of them all.

The shadow Chancellor asks about the estimates. He should recognise the estimates we laid before Parliament yesterday because he produced them. We had to lay those estimates to allow public spending to continue, but since those estimates were produced, information was given to us by Treasury officials about the true scale of the overspending by the Conservative party.

The shadow Chancellor mentions the IFS. Paul Johnson from the IFS has just said that it appears that these overspends are genuinely unfunded—words not from me, but from the independent IFS, which the shadow Chancellor referenced.

The shadow Chancellor mentions what happened to the reserve. Well, the reserve has been spent, shadow Chancellor. It was spent by you three times over. That is why we are in a position of a £22 billion in-year gap between spending that was happening and the funding to produce it.

If the shadow Chancellor could do all the things he spoke about today, why were they not in the forecasts? If he was able, as he says, to make those in-year changes on welfare and productivity, they would have been in the forecasts. They were not.

On the issue of the pay review bodies, the previous Government set the remit for those but they refused to give them any indication of affordability. That is almost unprecedented. The teachers, body reported before the election and that recommendation sat on the former Education Secretary's desk. Today, we are drawing a line under the industrial action: the £1.7 billion cost to the NHS alone last year and 1.4 million cancelled appointments. We are incorporating a third of those pay increases into efficiencies in our public services, as the shadow Chancellor suggested we should.

When it comes to tax, I am not going to take any lessons from the Conservative party. The Conservative party took the tax burden to the highest level in 70 years.

The response of the shadow Chancellor just confirms what we already knew: the previous Government were deluded, out of touch and grossly irresponsible. Today, we begin to fix the mess that they have created.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): In 2010, we repeatedly heard the words, "The Labour Government did not fix the roof while the sun was shining." Is it not the case that the last Government not only did not fix the roof, but destroyed the entire foundations of our public services?

In the context of difficult decisions, I welcome two points made by my right hon. Friend. First, there was the encouragement to work with local councils to increase the take-up of pension credit. The Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee called for that repeatedly in the last Parliament, but it was not taken up. Secondly, can the Chancellor confirm that she intends to provide multi-year settlements, ultimately, for local councils, which—again—have called for that repeatedly? It would be a welcome step to help them with the very difficult financial situation that they are facing.

Rachel Reeves: I can confirm that we will be arranging multi-year settlements with local authorities, as well as with Departments. It is extremely important that both Departments and authorities can plan for the future knowing what money is available, rather than running down the clock towards the end of the year.

I thank my hon. Friend for welcoming the announcement that I made today about working with local government to improve the take-up of pension credit. It is woeful that it is so low. It is vital that everyone receives the money to which they are entitled, especially pensioners, which is why we have taken on those recommendations from elderly people's charities today to ensure that we work with local government to boost take-up of that benefit.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): I thank the Chancellor for advance sight of her statement. Let me associate myself with the expressions of gratitude to our emergency services; the thoughts of all Liberal Democrats are with those affected by the incident in Southport.

Years of Conservative chaos and mismanagement have left our economy on life support and in desperate need of emergency care. Things cannot go on like this any longer. We must now revive growth by getting people off NHS waiting lists and back into work, so we

urge the Government to invest wisely in GPs, dentists and hospitals, not only to support patients but to improve efficiency in the NHS and deliver the growth that is so desperately needed after years of Conservative failure.

The outgoing Conservative Government will go down in the history books as one of the most damaging Administrations that our country has seen, and today's statement has thrown that picture into even starker relief. It was not just their catastrophic mini-Budget; we saw a vicious cycle of stagnation and recession, driven by years of chaos and uncertainty. For the first time, living standards declined over the course of a Parliament as people experienced the harshest cost of living crisis in generations. Our public services were abandoned: waiting lists soared, schools crumbled, and our social care was in crisis. The dire state in which the Conservatives left our public finances is indicative of their irresponsibility.

People are painfully aware that Conservative chaos has real-life consequences. Interest rates were sent soaring, and millions of people saw their mortgage payments increase by hundreds of pounds a month. That is why, more than ever, we need to foster economic stability to draw a line under the uncertainty of the last few years. An important step in rebuilding confidence in our economy is the setting up of a long-term industrial strategy. That will help to unlock vital investment, create good jobs, and help us to tackle the climate emergency. Will the Chancellor reassure the House that the Government will start work on such a strategy as soon as practically possible?

We cannot talk about rebuilding our economy without talking about the crisis in health and social care. Millions have long-term health conditions that make them too ill to work, and millions more are stuck on NHS waiting lists. Many others cannot leave hospital because there is no care provision. The Liberal Democrats have always understood that we cannot have a thriving economy and strong public finances until we fix the crisis in health and social care, which is why we put forward detailed proposals to deliver more GPs, invest in dental services, and cut ambulance waiting times. Equally, we must give people the good-quality care that they deserve, so we urge the Government to work across party lines to implement a system of free personal care and give our unpaid carers the proper support that they need. The last Conservative Administration left people with crippling care costs. That is why it is urgent for us to have cross-party talks on social care, and I urge the Government to begin those as soon as they possibly can.

Investing in health and care is not just about giving people the fair deal that they deserve; it is also about sound management of our public finances. Will the Chancellor guarantee that the NHS and social care will be at the heart of her plans to address the Conservative party's legacy of mismanagement? Part of that legacy is the previous Government's promise to deliver 40 new hospitals, which was postponed, redefined and never properly funded. It turned out to be yet another empty Conservative promise, but having listened to many colleagues on these Benches over the last few years, some hospitals are clearly in dire need of investment, with crumbling roofs and buckets to catch the leaks. Will the Chancellor meet Members whose constituents will be affected by today's announcement, to hear directly about the situation in their hospitals?

Lastly, let me turn to the other side of the equation: securing the funding that our public services so desperately need. Over the last Parliament, we saw the Conservative party raise taxes on hard-working households again and again, just to pay for its own mistakes. Does the Chancellor agree that it would be unfair to ask working people to pick up the tab a second time, after they have already suffered through years of painful tax rises? My party has set out detailed proposals to raise funding for our public services in a fair way—for example, by reversing the Conservatives' tax cuts for big banks, putting in place a proper windfall tax on oil and gas producers, and raising the digital services tax on social media giants. I urge the Chancellor to draw from these ideas, which could raise billions of pounds by asking some of the largest companies in the world to pay their fair share.

There is no doubt that our economy, our public services and our public finances have been left in a precarious position. Now the hard work must be done to repair the damage and return stability, growth and prosperity to our country. That is what the Liberal Democrats will always champion, and we sincerely hope that the Government will look closely at our proposals to end the crisis in health and social care, grow our economy and give people a fair deal.

Rachel Reeves: I thank the hon. Lady for her contribution, particularly the theme about helping people into work and fixing our national health service. I totally agree with her about the immense damage that the Tory mini-Budget did, particularly in pushing up mortgage costs for so many of our constituents.

The hon. Lady asks about industrial strategy. My right hon. Friend the Business and Trade Secretary will be setting out more details of the modern industrial strategy, which will enable us to work in partnership with business to exploit the big opportunities that the country and the economy have for growth and prosperity in all parts of the UK.

The hon. Lady asks about health and social care. She is absolutely right to highlight the huge challenge of the waiting list—it was at 7.6 million when the Conservatives left office. I welcome the deal to get junior doctors back to work, and I am sure the whole country will, because it will mean that people can get operations and treatment when they need. After last year's industrial action cost our economy £1.7 billion and caused 1.4 million appointments to be missed, the deal will be welcomed by people on NHS waiting lists. Of course, this Government have made a commitment to provide 40,000 additional appointments every single week. That is why we will crack down on tax avoidance and ensure that, finally, non-doms who make their home in Britain pay their fair share of tax here.

My right hon. Friend the Health Secretary will meet constituents who are affected by the previous Government's betrayal on building 40 new hospitals, because we recognise, as the hon. Lady says, the importance of ensuring that all our constituents have the health services they deserve. I could not agree more with her that it should not be working people who pick up the tab for the Conservative party's failure. That is why I have restated our commitment not to increase taxes on working people—there will be no increases in income tax, national insurance or VAT. That is the commitment on which we campaigned in this election, and I stand by that commitment.

Dame Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my right hon. Friend and the Labour Government on making such a strong start, and particularly on the emphasis on transparency and accountability for the hard-earned money of our tax-paying constituents. She said that the Treasury will be asked to share with the Office for Budget Responsibility its assessment of immediate public spending pressures, and that she wants to enshrine that rule in the charter for budget responsibility. Will she also make sure that that is a public document that is reported to Parliament, to maintain this vital transparency going forward?

Rachel Reeves: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. She speaks from her experience as Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, and I agree with her entirely. The charter for budget responsibility will be published. We have already introduced legislation for the new fiscal lock that we set out in our manifesto, so that we can ensure that a Government can never again do what the previous Government did, which was to overspend by £22 billion within one year.

Dame Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): What a chilling political choice, to choose to take away the winter fuel allowance from a 90-year-old on an income of £10,000 a year. And that was a political choice. I want to ask the Chancellor more about productivity. She used the word once during her speech. What discussions has she had about improving productivity, which according to the Office for Budget Responsibility is still 5% lower in the public sector and has not recovered since the levels we enjoyed before the pandemic?

Rachel Reeves: The challenge of productivity sits across both the public and private sectors. In the last 14 years, productivity has flatlined in the public and private sectors and we need to boost both. We need to boost productivity in the public sector to ensure that we get better value for money for our public services, but we also need to improve productivity in our private sector so that we can improve living standards and have the money for our public services.

Jon Trickett (Normanton and Hemsworth) (Lab): I welcome the Chancellor's statement about public sector pay, but is it not clear that, after savaging public services, holding down public sector pay and driving 3 million people into food banks, this crazy ideological austerity programme of the Tories has failed massively, while at the same time, the richest 250 people in the country gained wealth of £500 billion? Can I tempt the Chancellor to say that, while we accept that there are hard decisions to make, we reject the ideological commitment to this form of Tory austerity?

Rachel Reeves: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. We do owe it to our armed forces, our prison officers, our police officers, our nurses and our teachers to reward them properly for their work, and that is what we did today in implementing in full the recommendations of the pay review bodies. I echo his view that a return to austerity would be no way to run our economy. It resulted in growth haemorrhaging in the last Parliament, with all the damage that that did to living standards and to the money for our public services.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): The Chancellor is like a dodgy car mechanic. She says she has done all the searches, she gives you a fixed price, you hand in your car keys and then, a few weeks later, she has found all these new problems. The price has doubled, but it is too late—you have given her your car and you both know that this was her plan all along. Trust and credibility are critical to a Chancellor. Why has she been so careless and so quick to throw hers away?

Rachel Reeves: If the right hon. Gentleman has any chance of fixing the mess that his previous Government made, he might want to start with an apology.

Sam Carling (North West Cambridgeshire) (Lab): I thank the Chancellor for her honesty on the incredibly serious situation that she has just outlined. Does she agree that the above-inflation pay deals agreed by this Government with our public sector staff will begin the process of rebuilding trust between them and our Government and will benefit the public purse by reducing strike action?

Rachel Reeves: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. Let us just be clear that the pay recommendations today are in line with private sector pay. These are just the pay deals that are received by the majority of workers in the private sector. My hon. Friend is right that we owe a debt of gratitude to our frontline workers, who got us through the pandemic and so many other challenges over the last few years, and they deserve to be paid properly for their work.

Seamus Logan (Aberdeenshire North and Moray East) (SNP): During the recent election campaign, we in the SNP repeatedly warned about an £18 billion hole in the Labour party's spending plans. Now that the Chancellor has confirmed that today, will she apologise to those voters in Scotland who supported the Labour party leader in Scotland when he said:

"Read my lips, no austerity"?

Will she also reverse the 9% cut in Scotland's capital allocation, please?

Rachel Reeves: I am not sure if hon. Gentleman was paying attention. The £22 billion black hole is this year. The Institute for Fiscal Studies was warning about a black hole of £18 billion over the lifetime of the Parliament. Those are two very different things and both of them can be true. What we are showing today is an in-year gap of £22 billion that the hon. Gentleman did not know about, that no one on this side of the House knew about, that the OBR did not know about, and that the country did not know about. This is new information that is being published today, above and beyond what anyone knew when we were campaigning in the election.

Ms Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): Frankly, the Conservatives' response leaves something to be desired. After 14 years of stripping the engine of this country's economy, their response is simply taking the piston.

I am so proud that we now have a Chancellor who is not penny wise and pound foolish, but is conscious that all our constituents will have to pick up the pieces after the past 14 years. Can the Chancellor tell us a little more about her audit and what it has identified about

the money wasted by the previous Government and their mismanagement of capital projects? We now know, for example, that the failure to rebuild Whipps Cross hospital has cost us an extra £15 million in the last few years alone. Our constituents will pay the price of the last Government for many years to come. This new Labour Government need to be honest with them. Sorry seems to be the hardest word for the Conservatives to say, but can the Chancellor tell us just how much money it will cost?

Rachel Reeves: This country is owed a £22 billion apology by the Conservative party, and my hon. Friend is right to highlight the overspends, including on the hospitals programme; there is a £4 billion gap between what was announced and what is needed for those hospitals. There is also a £6.4 billion overspend on the asylum system. That was all unfunded and undisclosed until I disclosed it today.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): I welcome the affirmation of the funding for Ukraine, which I presume was already fully allocated from the Treasury reserve, in the usual way.

On the mainstream defence budget, the Chancellor has announced that all departmental spending will now be reviewed every two years. Given the speed at which Whitehall works, this means that the minute one review is finished, work will start on the next. All public spending, particularly capital spending, will effectively be under permanent review. This will not work. How can we commit to 10-year defence programmes, such as the vital new Tempest fighter, if all departmental budgets are up in the air every two years?

Rachel Reeves: First, there is a £9 billion reserve for departmental expenditure, and it was spent three times over before I arrived in the Treasury. That is why we face these problems today.

Secondly, yes, we fully intend to set longer-term budgets for capital expenditure, but we will have three-year spending reviews every two years for day-to-day departmental expenditure, which is really important for giving certainty, so that Government Departments can plan for the future. Today, no Department or local authority knows its budget beyond next March. That is no position to put Departments in, including the Ministry of Defence.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, and particularly what she said about the public sector pay award. Could she share a little more about how, given the appalling economic conditions that we now face, she will incorporate equity in her decisions on how to address the in-year deficit?

Rachel Reeves: I have to be honest that the decisions I have made today are tough decisions. They are not the decisions that I wanted to make, or that I expected to make. Given the seriousness of the inheritance that I face, they are the right decisions, the responsible decisions, and the fairest decisions that I could make in the circumstances.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): The legacy of the Conservatives' new hospitals programme is dire, but the Chancellor will know that there is also a cost to delay. We have life-expired buildings that will continue to need to be patched up until they are replaced, so I urge the Chancellor, as I urged the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care last week, to give the go-ahead to those projects that are ready to go and involve life-expired buildings. Will she review the outdated rules, and allow hospitals to spend more of their capital funds on helping with repairs and rebuilds?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call the Chancellor.

Rachel Reeves: I welcome you to your place, Madam Deputy Speaker. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care will meet with people affected. We were promised a new hospital in Leeds that has never been built, so I understand the concerns that right hon. and hon. Members have about the hospital programme. However, there is a £22 billion in-year overspend, which means taking incredibly difficult decisions. They are not the decisions that we would want to make, but they are responsible ones in the circumstances, given our dire inheritance from the Conservative party.

Dr Jeevun Sandher (Loughborough) (Lab): I used to work in the Treasury; what we have heard today about the Conservative party is shocking and shameful. The Chancellor has set out how far away the last Government were from meeting their own targets on hospital building. Does she agree that our plan, by contrast, represents a deliverable way to ensure we get waiting lists down?

Rachel Reeves: My hon. Friend is welcome on the Government Benches with his expertise. Everything in our manifesto was fully costed and fully funded, including 40,000 additional NHS appointments every single week, which will be funded by cracking down on tax avoidance and ensuring that people who make their home in Britain pay their taxes here. We will finally deal with the terrible situation of non-doms claiming that they do not live in Britain for tax purposes, despite making their home here. Those people should contribute to the public purse; under Labour, they will.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call Sir Julian Lewis.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Congratulations on your election, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I cannot hope to match the splendid double entendre of the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Ms Creasy), but I may I say to the Chancellor that one effect of being here for a long time is a realisation that no one party has a monopoly on wisdom? Given the impartial assessment by the Library that covid cost this country between £310 billion and £410 billion, is she willing to at least concede that the previous Government did a pretty good job in getting inflation down to 2% less than two years after the pandemic?

Rachel Reeves: The pandemic is no excuse for making unfunded spending commitments, which is precisely what the previous Government did. The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the pandemic, during which the Government handed out contracts to friends and donors to their party, putting them in a VIP lane. That is why we are appointing a covid corruption commissioner. We want that money back in our public services, where it belongs.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call Bill Esterson.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): Welcome to your place, Madam Deputy Speaker.

It was not just the public finances that the Conservatives mismanaged over 14 years; they failed to support industry too. Figures published today demonstrate that Britain has dropped out of the top 10 countries for manufacturing for the first time since the industrial revolution. I welcome my right hon. Friend's commitment to leveraging millions more in private investment to make up for the record low levels of private investment we saw under the previous Government. Does she agree that the latest manufacturing figures show how critical it is that the Government work closely with business and trade unions on a long-term industrial strategy?

Rachel Reeves: I too saw the numbers today that show that Britian is out of the top 10 manufacturing countries, which is shameful given our history at the heart of the industrial revolution. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his work, which ensured that Labour went into the election as the most pro-business party. Through the reforms that we have already announced in our first three weeks in government—planning reforms, the creation of a national wealth fund, reform of our pension system and a modern industrial strategy—we will go about making Britain the best place to start and grow a business, and the best place to invest. We look forward to holding our international investment summit in the UK later this year.

Adrian Ramsay (Waveney Valley) (Green): I have sympathy for the Chancellor's seeking to address the issues that she has outlined, but the solutions that she has set out today are focused on spending cuts. Will she please say more about the opportunities that she is looking at for bringing revenue into the Exchequer, so that we can have the investment that is needed, whether in new hospitals—we all know that hospitals around the country are crumbling—or in the railways, as people are stuck in traffic jams and struggling with high rail fares? In particular, has she considered introducing a wealth tax? A tax on the very wealthiest in society—people with assets of more than £10 million—would raise tens of billions of pounds during this Parliament, and it could address the fact that we have growing billionaire wealth, while ordinary people are suffering from these cuts.

Rachel Reeves: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that question. I have just set out the non-dom tax loophole closures, and my hon. Friend the Exchequer Secretary has published a written ministerial statement today setting out our manifesto commitments around the energy profits levy, VAT on private schools, and the non-dom changes, which we will consult on and introduce in the Budget. We will not be introducing a wealth tax. We want this to be a great place for investors, and a wealth tax would have the opposite effect.

Claire Hazelgrove (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Lab): May I thank my right hon. Friend for her transparency and openness about the dire state of our inheritance from the Conservatives? The Tory leadership race is now clearly in full swing, which is important. People across the Filton and Bradley Stoke constituency, and across the country, deserve to know why none of the contenders came clean about this black hole when they were in government. Or were they kept in the dark by the Chancellor's predecessor as well?

Rachel Reeves: Far be it from me to give advice to Tory leadership contestants, but if I were taking part in this contest, I would want to distance myself as much as possible from the Government in the previous Parliament who caused this terrible mess.

Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): The Chancellor committed to long-term planning for capital expenditure. Last March, the then Chancellor committed £20 billion to carbon capture, usage and storage, without which a net zero future cannot be delivered. In the light of the right hon. Lady's review, can she set out for the House what commitment this Government will make to investment, including to that £20 billion for CCUS?

Rachel Reeves: We have already created a national wealth fund, which will leverage in billions of pounds of private sector investment, including in carbon capture and storage, as well as green hydrogen and renewable-ready ports. We will set out all our spending in the spending review later this year.

Dawn Butler (Brent East) (Lab): Congratulations on your appointment, Madam Deputy Speaker. It feels really good to be back on the Government Benches. The annual accounts of the Department of Health and Social Care show that £9.9 billion spent on personal protective equipment was written off. Does the Chancellor agree that we could claw back this money through the covid corruption commissioner, and then possibly use some of it to eradicate child poverty?

Rachel Reeves: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. It is to the previous Government's huge shame that they spent billions of pounds of taxpayers' money on VIP-lane contracts, and on PPE that was never used; in some cases, it has literally gone up in smoke and been burned. We are appointing a covid corruption commissioner because that money belongs not in the pockets of Tory donors, but in our public services, and we will do everything within our power to get their money back.

Ben Obese-Jecty (Huntingdon) (Con): Last week, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care said:

"Hospitals with reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete are at the top of my list of priorities."—[*Official Report*, 23 July 2024; Vol. 752, c. 517.]

If the new hospitals programme is delayed via review, so will be the rebuilding of the five RAAC hospitals that are not among the 40 referenced. Without avoiding the question with a soundbite, what reassurances can the Chancellor give that we will break ground on any of the new RAAC replacement hospitals, and specifically Hinchingbrooke hospital in my constituency of Huntington, during this Parliament?

Rachel Reeves: The hon. Gentleman should blame the previous Government for not funding the commitments that they made. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care will meet all the people affected, including those affected by hospitals with RAAC problems, as soon as possible. As a Leeds MP, I recognise

the importance of new hospitals and ensuring that our hospital estate is fit for purpose, but we cannot spend money that we do not have.

Mark Ferguson (Gateshead Central and Whickham) (Lab): The shadow Chancellor said the books were open and that the Office for Budget Responsibility had audited the Government's figures shortly before the election. However, the chair of the OBR has today published a letter confirming he intends to launch a review into the preparation of the March forecasts, stating:

"We were made aware of the extent of these pressures at a meeting with the Treasury last week."

I am only new here; perhaps the Chancellor can inform me how to get the shadow Chancellor to correct the record?

Rachel Reeves: The OBR has just published a letter, as my hon. Friend said, which states:

"We were made aware of the extent of these pressures at a meeting with the Treasury last week",

and goes on to state:

"If a significant fraction of these pressures is ultimately accommodated through higher DEL spending in 2024-25, this would constitute one of the largest year-ahead overspends against DEL forecasts outside of the pandemic years."

This is incredibly serious. That is why I came to this House today to set out that £22 billion overspend compared with what the Government set out at the previous Budget. This letter from the chair of the Office for Budget Responsibility can leave no one in this Chamber in any doubt about the seriousness of the situation.

Dr Al Pinkerton (Surrey Heath) (LD): I thank the Chancellor for her candour and her clarity today. There will be many residents and patients at Frimley Park hospital in my constituency—surrounded by a forest of acrow props holding up RAAC-riddled roofs—who will be deeply anxious at her announcement. Can she recommit to the Health Secretary's commitment last week to prioritising spending, where possible, on those RAAC-affected hospitals and bring some comfort and clarity to the patients and the staff of Frimley Park hospital?

Rachel Reeves: I fully understand the hon. Gentleman's concerns. I know that during the election campaign, like so many Members across the House, he will have campaigned in good faith, believing that the money was there. I can say in all candour today that the money was not there for this hospital programme. Although it is not my apology to make, I apologise on behalf of the Conservatives for the state of the public finances that they have left for us to sort out. My right hon. Friend the Health Secretary will meet the hon. Gentleman and everyone affected so that we can do whatever we can to make sure that we can get hospitals in the condition that his constituents, and so many of our constituents, rightly expect.

Ms Polly Billington (East Thanet) (Lab): Will the Chancellor confirm that, despite the Conservatives' failure to set aside money for transport commitments, Labour's plan to modernise the network—vital for my community in East Thanet—will deliver a unified rail system that means we can deliver more for passengers and local communities?

Rachel Reeves: We have had to make difficult decisions today to cancel road and rail infrastructure projects. These are not decisions we wanted to make, but if the money is not there, we cannot go ahead with those projects. It is as simple as that. The money has to be there and the sums always have to add up, because I will not make the mistakes of the previous Government and Liz Truss, crashing the economy and sending interest rates and mortgage rates spiralling for our constituents. That is why I have had to take these actions today to get a grip on public spending and public finances. I make no apology for that, but I recognise the damage it does to so many constituents with projects that they had expected to see happening.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): When the Chancellor's legislation enables illegal entrants to leave their current accommodation, where will they go?

Rachel Reeves: Under the previous Government, no applications were being processed and so nobody was being sent home. We will process those applications and send people who have no right to be here back home.

Jim Dickson (Dartford) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend the Chancellor for her excellent statement, putting public finances and public services back on their feet. Having seen how extensive this Tory cover-up has been, with unfunded commitments in multiple Departments, does she agree that it is not just her predecessor as Chancellor, but every member of the last Cabinet who is complicit in that cover-up?

Rachel Reeves: I do not believe that any member of the previous Cabinet could not have been aware of the scale of this cover-up and the scale of the overspending. They should hang their heads in shame. Instead of coming to this Chamber today and issuing platitudes, they should have done the right thing and apologised to the country.

Greg Smith (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): The Chancellor has made two key political decisions this afternoon: one, to fund extraordinarily high public sector pay increases; and two, to clobber pensioners to pay for it. Will she explain to the House and every pensioner who will lose their winter fuel allowance in the process why she did not challenge the Bank of England on the taxpayer bailouts that it requires, to the tune of tens of billions of pounds, to cover its losses from bond sales?

Rachel Reeves: First, it is an extraordinary omission that the previous Government did not set affordability criteria for the independent pay review bodies, which meant that they were able to come back with these recommendations. It would be almost without precedent not to accept recommendations from an independent pay review body. If the hon. Gentleman wants to go to the doctors, nurses, teachers, police officers and those in the armed forces in his constituency and say that they do not deserve a pay increase in line with private sector wages, that is up to him, but I believe that those public sector workers deserve those pay increases.

On pensions and the winter fuel payment, this is not the decision I wanted to make and it is not the decision I expected to make, but we have to make in-year savings,

[Rachel Reeves]

which is incredibly difficult to do. Without doing that, we would put our public finances at risk. We are ensuring that everybody who is entitled to pension credit—the poorest pensioners—continue to get the winter fuel payment, and we will work with the Department for Work and Pensions, local authorities and charities to boost the take-up of pension credit.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call Rachael Maskell.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and welcome to your place.

I thank my right hon. Friend for her forensic approach to the nation's finances. As she digs deeper, she will see that York, the city I represent, is at the bottom of many of the matrices for the funding formulas. Will she look at the funding formulas before the Budget so that we can see the distribution of funding? The last Government handed out, for pet projects, much of the money that she is trying to get control of now, but will she look at how that is distributed across the country?

Rachel Reeves: I know, particularly around flood defences, that there are many great needs in the York constituency that my hon. Friend represents. These decisions will all be made at the time of the spending review.

Josh Babarinde (Eastbourne) (LD): Residents of Eastbourne will be outraged to learn that the Conservatives' promise of a brand-new hospital for our town was not worth the paper it was written on. Eastbourne deserves better. Under-investment has consequences and, at the moment, Eastbourne district general hospital is closed for births due to that under-investment, and it has been since December. It needs investment. Will the Chancellor confirm that her Government will invest in midwives, doctors and nurses, as well as hospital buildings, to protect local services there and across the country?

Rachel Reeves: I can see, on behalf of the hon. Gentleman's constituents, the frustration and anger that he feels at the previous Government letting his constituents down so badly by not funding the hospitals that they promised. I commit to my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary meeting everybody affected. We also have a workforce plan, to invest in the future workforce in our national health service, and we are announcing today that we are accepting in full the recommendations of the independent pay review bodies to pay properly our doctors, nurses and others who work in our NHS.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call Torsten Bell.

Torsten Bell (Swansea West) (Lab): Congratulations on your new post, Madam Deputy Speaker.

There can be reasonable political debate across the House about the total levels of public spending—there was a lot of that during the election campaign, with our calling for higher levels of public investment—but there should be complete agreement about the need for the Treasury to ensure that public money is well spent. At the top of that is making sure that the policies and commitments of every Department match their budgets. We hear from experts right around the country today that they do not match those budgets, so can the Chancellor reassure this ex-Treasury official, this House and my Swansea constituents that this will never happen under this Labour Government?

Rachel Reeves: I thank my hon. Friend for that question and welcome him to his place in this House—he speaks powerfully, based on his previous experience. I will fix the mess that we have inherited, but it is a terrible mess: a £22 billion in-year gap between what was forecast to be spent and what was actually being spent by the previous Government. We will get a grip on our public finances; that requires tough choices, but that is the role of Chancellor, and it is the role of Government. These are choices that the previous Government ducked and diverted, but we will make the difficult decisions to get our public finances back on a firmer footing.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): We could do with some masterclasses in short questions and short answers.

Nick Timothy (West Suffolk) (Con): Earlier, the Chancellor quoted Paul Johnson of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, but she omitted the end of his comments. He said that half of the spending hole she claims is public sector pay,

"over which govt made a choice".

That is the truth, is it not? The Chancellor does a good shocked face, but she chose to create her own spending hole, did she not?

Rachel Reeves: It was the previous Government who set the mandate for the pay review bodies. It is extraordinary that they did not include in that remit a measure of affordability, but they did not, which is why the pay review bodies made these recommendations. The previous Education Secretary could have rejected those recommendations, but she let them sit on her desk, because the previous Government were not willing to make tough decisions. We have made those decisions, including making sure that a third of the cost of these pay awards is absorbed, but there is a cost to inaction: last year, there was a £1.7 billion cost to the NHS alone because of industrial action.

Derek Twigg (Widnes and Halewood) (Lab): Under the previous Government, there was at least a £17 billion black hole in defence, and of course they had hollowed out the armed forces. However, it is a surprise to find out today that not enough money was set aside in reserve to fund all the military assistance needed for Ukraine. Would the Chancellor say a bit more about that?

Rachel Reeves: The problem that the previous Government got into was that every time they wanted to make a commitment, they said it would be paid for from the reserve. By the time I came into the Treasury on 5 July, that reserve had been spent three times over, because they put so many commitments into that reserve that they could not afford. That is the situation that we inherited, that is where the £22 billion black hole comes from, and that is why I am having to make difficult decisions today to get a grip on the public finances.

Paul Holmes (Hamble Valley) (Con): The Chancellor spent the election campaign saying that she was going for growth through investing in infrastructure. Instead, she is cutting it, while funding inflation-busting pay deals and scrapping pension benefits for the worst-off. Does she agree that in the battle for the two faces of the Labour party, the face of tax rises, borrowing and boom and bust won, and the British people—hard-working people—will ultimately lose under her leadership?

Rachel Reeves: There is nothing pro-growth about making unfunded spending commitments. There is nothing pro-growth about a lack of respect for taxpayers' money. We will continue to provide the winter fuel payment for the poorest pensioners, those in receipt of pension credit.

Gregor Poynton (Livingston) (Lab): I thank the Chancellor for her statement today and for being straight with the public about the state of our finances—I know my constituents want a Government who tell it to them straight. Does she agree that ducking tough decisions and hiding bad news, as the Conservative party has done, just makes a bad situation even worse?

Rachel Reeves: The previous Government and the previous Chancellor should hang their heads in shame for the inheritance they have left for this Government to fix, but I will fix this mess: I will put our public finances and our public spending on a firmer footing. That is the responsible thing to do, and that is what I will do.

Pete Wishart (Perth and Kinross-shire) (SNP): I welcome you to the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Everybody and their granny knew that there would be a multi-billion-pound black hole; only the Chancellor seemed to be deaf and blind to the situation. We knew that she would be here explaining the sheer scale of it, yet when we raised this issue during the election campaign, we were told that we were being misleading and that it was all mince. Well, we know now. Does cutting winter fuel payments to all pensioners not seem and feel like Tory austerity? What discussions has the Chancellor had with the Scottish Government, because as she will know, this is a devolved responsibility?

Rachel Reeves: My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury briefed the Scottish Government today on these decisions. These decisions are necessary: it is not in the interests of the Scottish people to have unfunded commitments, and to put our public finances and reputation for economic stability at risk. These are not easy decisions—they are difficult decisions—but the fault for them lies with the previous Government. The hon. Gentleman claims that what I have announced today is austerity, when we have just given a pay rise to more than 2 million public sector workers—he does not know what he is talking about.

Katie White (Leeds North West) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend for her clarity and candour. After 14 years of sluggish growth and low living standards, and then a cost of living crisis, how callous was it that the Tories went into the election asking for another five years in power with a manifesto of false hope, undeliverable promises and no mention of the numerous black holes that she has now uncovered? What will she do instead to offer my constituents some real hope?

Rachel Reeves: I thank my hon. Friend for that question; I am pleased to have her as a constituency neighbour in Leeds. She is absolutely right that the previous Government went into the election knowing that there was a £22 billion black hole. What did they do during that election? They made more unfunded spending commitments and more unfunded promises about tax that they knew they could not keep. That was deeply irresponsible. After all the damage that they have done, they should have come to the Chamber today and apologised.

Stuart Anderson (South Shropshire) (Con): Would the Chancellor confirm that all the information presented today was not known to her before last Thursday, when the estimates were laid?

Rachel Reeves: When I arrived at the Treasury three weeks ago, I asked Treasury officials to do a full analysis. We concluded that analysis over the weekend and I am publishing it today for the House of Commons.

Natasha Irons (Croydon East) (Lab): I thank the Chancellor for the urgent update. With living standards now worse than when the previous Government took office, people across the country continue to suffer the consequences of their broken promises and mismanagement, but this final fiscal mic drop is truly shocking. Does she agree that, in contrast to the unfunded fantasy promises put forward by the Conservative party, Labour's manifesto showed cast-iron discipline in being fully costed?

Rachel Reeves: I thank my hon. Friend for the question. Everything in Labour's manifesto was fully costed and fully funded. We now know that on top of the £22-billion black hole that the previous Government left, they made unfunded commitments during the election. That was deeply irresponsible and the country was right to reject them.

Mr Peter Bedford (Mid Leicestershire) (Con): Does the Chancellor think that one of her first decisions to cancel infrastructure projects is consistent with her desire to grow the economy?

Rachel Reeves: There is nothing pro-growth about making commitments that we cannot afford. There is nothing pro-growth about having £22 billion of unfunded commitments. We saw that when Liz Truss did her mini-Budget less than two years ago, and right hon. and hon. Opposition Members would do well to learn that lesson.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call Clive Lewis.

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): I welcome you to the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor will probably not be too surprised to hear that when it comes to wasteful and expensive vanity projects, the Conservative party has not confined itself to national matters. Conservative-run Norfolk county council is attempting to push through a £300 million vanity road known as the Norwich western link, which measures 3.9 km, at a cost of more than £70 million a kilometre. Will she look at that environmental and financial disaster, and work with those of us who know that there are more cost-effective and ecologically sound alternatives?

Rachel Reeves: I thank my hon. Friend for raising this issue. I will ask my right hon. Friend the Transport Secretary to meet him and discuss it further.

Ben Lake (Ceredigion Preseli) (PC): I am grateful for the Chancellor's clarity on the state of the public finances and for confirming that the Government will accept the recommendations of the independent pay review bodies. She explained that doing so incurs an additional in-year cost of £9 billion and that Departments will be tasked with finding savings of up to £3 billion. Can she outline whether she anticipates that they will have to cover the entire cost of the pay review bodies' recommendations, or does she anticipate that the Treasury will need to make additional funds available to make up the shortfall?

Rachel Reeves: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the question. We have asked Departments to absorb £3.2 billion of the pressures, but it will be different in different Departments. We know that in the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Education, for example, it will be harder to absorb those pay pressures, given the huge challenges that they face. It will be different in different Departments, as we will set out in written ministerial statements by the relevant Secretaries of State.

Dr Zubir Ahmed (Glasgow South West) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend the Chancellor for coming to this House and outlining the difficult decisions she has had to take on behalf of us all—decisions that she would not have had to take were it not for the opaque fiscal negligence of the Conservative party. Can she reassure me that a Labour Government will always protect the vulnerable, and that under a Labour Government pensioners in this country will still be over £1,600 better off per year by the end of this Parliament?

Rachel Reeves: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. We were determined to protect the most vulnerable, which is why we made the decision to ensure that the winter fuel payment would still be paid to the poorest pensioners on pension credit. More than that, we will work with local government and charities to increase the take-up of pension credit, so that everybody who deserves pension credit gets it, and with it the winter fuel payment.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Stamford) (Con): We all remember Gordon Brown's raid on pensions. It has taken just three weeks for Labour to revert to type, and it is pensioners who are suffering most. Martin Lewis has already criticised the decision online. On the estimates, the right hon. Lady cannot claim that, when permanent secretaries were signing off these estimates—over the weekend, I assume—they did not know about these supposed holes, but if that is so and they did sign them off with holes in them, that would be a breach of their legal duties. So will she be investigating them, or will she be apologising to them for throwing them under the bus today?

Rachel Reeves: Instead of blaming civil servants, the hon. Lady should blame the people who are really responsible, and that is the previous Government. The country did the right thing by kicking them out three weeks ago. They deserve never to get their hands on power again.

Ian Lavery (Blyth and Ashington) (Lab): During the last Parliament, the Government paid substantial amounts to the train operating companies to make good their losses during a prolonged period of industrial dispute, causing mayhem and causing chaos to the general public. At the same time, the train operating companies paid huge dividends and they also paid their executives massive increases in bonuses. Can my right hon. Friend say how much this actually cost the British taxpayer, and can she ensure that this never ever happens again?

Rachel Reeves: Yes, page 5 of the "Fixing the foundations" document that we have published today sets out the pressures on public spending. On rail services,

"Pressures have emerged on rail finances, primarily due to the weaker-than-expected recovery in passenger demand",

as well as the cost of industrial action, which has led

"to a pressure of £1.6 billion"

in this financial year alone.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call Christine Jardine.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): I would also like to welcome you to the Chair, Madame Deputy Speaker.

Much of what the Chancellor says I welcome—no fresh increase to income tax, national insurance or VAT—but I am sure the Chancellor will recognise the concern that many pensioners, particularly in the coldest areas of the country, will be feeling at the announcement of the withdrawal of winter fuel payments. Although she is saying that she will work on bringing more people forward and encouraging them to sign up for credits, can she tell us how she is going to do that if she is also going to cut the Government communications budget?

Rachel Reeves: I think the hon. Lady for that question. There are a couple of things we are committed to doing. First, pension credit and housing benefit are due to be amalgamated. The previous Government put that back; we will bring that forward. We know that take-up of pension credit will increase when it is merged with housing benefit. That will make an impact in ensuring that people get the money they are entitled to. However, we have also committed, as elderly people's charities have asked, to central Government working with local government to better identify people who are entitled to pension credit, but are not claiming it today. We want to make sure that everyone who is entitled to pension credit gets it, and with it the associated winter fuel payment.

Johanna Baxter (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the key failures of the Conservative Government over the past 14 years was their failure to grow the economy, and that that lack of growth meant they simply did not have the money to do the things that they none the less committed to voters in this country to do? That is why we should take no lessons on trust and credibility from the Conservative party.

Rachel Reeves: If our economy had grown at just the average rate for OECD economies over the past 14 years, it would today be worth £140 billion more. That would

have been worth £5,000 for every family in Britain and would have meant an additional £58 billion for our public services, without increasing tax by a single penny. That shows how important economic growth is, which is why getting our economy growing is the No. 1 mission of this Government.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call David Simmonds.

David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): Thank you and welcome to your place, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The estimates day provisions presented by the Chancellor to the House last week included a capital departmental expenditure limit of £12.655 billion for the Department of Health and Social Care. We know that it included the funds for the new Hillingdon hospital, which was granted planning permission and on which work has already started. Does the Chancellor of the Exchequer stand by what she told the House in the estimates day debate, on which we all relied when casting our vote? Can she therefore assure my constituents that that hospital project, which was fully budgeted for and on which work has already started, will be delivered by this Government?

Rachel Reeves: As the hon. Gentleman knows, estimates have to be published to ensure that Government funding continues, so we had to publish those main estimates, but we will be presenting new estimates to the House based on the revelations that we have set out today.

Luke Murphy (Basingstoke) (Lab): Can I express the anger that many of my constituents will be feeling, not just about the economic mismanagement and the litany of broken promises from the Conservative party, but about the complete failure to be transparent both with them and with the British public at large? What does the Chancellor have to say to the Conservative party about the way it behaved in office?

Rachel Reeves: We have now been in the Chamber for one hour and 40 minutes, but we have not had a single apology from any Opposition Members. They should have come to the Chamber today and apologised; they have not done so. The country kicked them out of office three and a half weeks ago, and we can tell why.

Lucy Rigby (Northampton North) (Lab): May I point out to certain Opposition Members who might question the difficult decision that the Chancellor has taken to restrict the winter fuel payment to those on pension credit that this approach has been put forward by the Conservatives and the Lib Dems in recent manifestos? The Scottish Government's own anti-poverty advisory body has stated that, as it stands,

"this particular instrument is extraordinarily poorly targeted as regards…addressing poverty."

Does the Chancellor agree that although it is difficult, this decision is a sensible step towards fixing the huge Tory black hole in our public finances?

Rachel Reeves: None of the decisions that we have made today was easy. None of them was a decision that I wanted to have to make, but leaving unaddressed a £22 billion in-year hole in our public finances was not an option. We saw what happened when a previous Prime Minister and Chancellor played fast and loose with the public finances. I will not do that, which is why today I have been honest with this House about the scale of the inheritance that we now have to deal with and the necessary decisions, including on winter fuel payment, that I have had to take today.

Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): Richard Mitchell, the chief executive of the University Hospitals of Leicester NHS trust, emailed me only a few days ago asking for a meeting about the new hospital programme. Putting aside the politics, will the Chancellor help to arrange a meeting with Labour and Conservative MPs of Leicester and Leicestershire to discuss the matter alongside the chief executive of Leicestershire's hospitals?

Rachel Reeves: My right hon. Friend the Health Secretary has agreed to meet all MPs affected and will, of course, also be talking to people who run our health service, to make sure that we can put right the mistakes made by the previous Government.

Anna Sabine (Frome and East Somerset) (LD): Constituencies across the south-west, including my own, have waited years for final confirmation of plans to improve the A303 with a tunnel, a vital piece of infrastructure for our local communities and our regional economy. We now learn that, due to mismanagement of public finances by the previous Government, those plans are under severe threat. This is a hammer blow to our constituents, who have waited so long. Will the Chancellor meet me, my regional Lib Dem colleagues and the local communities who will be affected by this news?

Rachel Reeves: I understand the hon. Lady's frustration and anger on behalf of her constituents that today we had to be honest about the scale of the inheritance we face. There was no money allocated for the A303 works by the previous Government, despite their saying that they were going ahead. That is the state of affairs that we inherited. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Transport Secretary would be happy to meet the hon. Lady and colleagues to discuss the matter.

Mr Jonathan Brash (Hartlepool) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend for outlining the Conservative cover-up, for which they should apologise. One of the more shocking things to hear this afternoon is the repeated constant criticism of the idea of paying public sector workers properly. With the election of a Labour Government, are the days of scapegoating public sector workers when it comes to the public finances over?

Rachel Reeves: I know how hard our teachers, doctors, nurses, armed forces, police officers and prison guards work to keep us all safe, healthy and educated. They deserve the pay awards that we have announced today. It was the independent pay review bodies that recommended those pay increases. It would be extraordinary not to honour them, and we have done so today.

Robbie Moore (Keighley and Ilkley) (Con): May I welcome you to the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker? During the general election campaign, the now new Health Secretary and the local Labour party in Keighley

[Robbie Moore]

and Ilkley told my constituents that they were fully committed to delivering the full rebuild of the Airedale hospital—one of those hospitals that struggles with aerated concrete—following my efforts to secure the full funds. With millions of pounds being spent on the project and works well under way, can I seek reassurance from the Chancellor that this new Labour Government will not deny my constituents their right to a full rebuild of Airedale hospital?

Rachel Reeves: The hon. Gentleman says he secured the funds, but he did not; the money was not there. That is why I am having to make this statement today. I share his frustration and anger, but it should be with the previous Government, who did not fund these schemes.

Jake Richards (Rother Valley) (Lab): My constituents will be concerned about the revelations that the Chancellor has set out to the House this afternoon. Reading her statement, it is particularly shocking that the projected overspend on the asylum system, including the Conservatives' failed Rwanda plan, will cost more than £6.4 billion this year alone. Does my right hon. Friend agree that instead of chuntering and shouting, a period of reflection would better serve the Conservatives, along with an apology to the country they have let down?

Rachel Reeves: My hon. Friend is right. The people of Rother Valley will be shocked and appalled by the gross mismanagement of public finances, including a £6.4 billion overspend on asylum. That is why we are getting a grip on the public finances and public spending to put them on a firmer footing.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): I congratulate you on your ascension, Madam Deputy Speaker. The right hon. Lady says she is keen on transparency. Can she confirm to the House that she had extensive access talks with senior civil servants in the Treasury in the run-up to the general election? It might be helpful, for transparency purposes, if she could lay the minutes of those meetings in the House of Commons for the rest of the House to understand. I am also concerned about the issue of misleading estimates being laid before the House. May I suggest, for the elucidation of Members, that she asks the permanent secretary at the Treasury, and the permanent secretaries of those Departments impacted by the decisions she has made today, to confirm to the House in writing that none of the information that should have been in the estimates was not included—if they were correct, was it included?—so we can see for ourselves whether she is covering up?

Rachel Reeves: The cover-up was from those on the Opposition Benches. The sooner we get an apology to the British people, the better.

Deirdre Costigan (Ealing Southall) (Lab): While the headline figures that the Chancellor has revealed are astonishing from an economic perspective, does she agree that it is important to remember the impact of Conservative mismanagement on our public services, our NHS, our education system and our national security? Indeed, how can the Conservatives be trusted to run our economy or our public services ever again?

Rachel Reeves: The response today from former Conservative Ministers just shows how deluded and out of touch they were. The British people delivered their verdict three weeks ago, and after the evidence they have seen today, they will understand that things are even worse than they had thought.

Clive Jones (Wokingham) (LD): Welcome to your place, Madam Deputy Speaker. I wish the Chancellor well in reversing years of economic mismanagement by the previous Government. I really welcome the commitment to speak to MPs who are affected by the failure to provide 40 new hospitals, which were promised four and a half years ago. Patients and—just as importantly—staff at those hospitals will have been waiting for a long time. Will the Chancellor ensure that there is a decision soon so that the staff and patients do not have to wait another four and a half years to know what is happening with their hospitals?

Rachel Reeves: I share the hon. Gentleman's frustration, anger and disappointment that the promises made by the previous Government turned out to be built on sand. The money simply was not there.

The decisions that we are having to take today are not easy. They are not the decisions that I want to make, but we have to put our public finances on a firmer footing. That is essential. My right hon. Friend the Health Secretary will meet the hon. Gentleman and others affected as soon as possible to talk through the next steps to ensure that all our constituents have the public services, including the hospitals, that they rightly deserve.

Oliver Ryan (Burnley) (Lab/Co-op): The brass neck of Opposition Members is astonishing after what we have heard from the Chancellor today. My residents in Burnley, Padiham and Brierfield will be so disappointed to hear of the mismanagement over the last 14 years that she has uncovered in the Treasury—it was to be expected, anyway. Does she agree that the now shadow Chancellor should apologise and that, if he will not, he should resign?

Rachel Reeves: I find it staggering that in almost two hours in the Chamber, not a single Opposition Member has apologised for the state they left our public finances and public services in. It has fallen on this new Government to address that challenge. We will rise to that, but they should never have been left in this state.

Saqib Bhatti (Meriden and Solihull East) (Con): I welcome you to the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Chancellor spoke about the need to lay the estimates. That is really important, and the legal duty is not just to lay them but for them to be accurate. The Chancellor is right that we have been here for nearly two hours, but we have not got an answer to the question of what she knew and when she knew it. Did she know any of the information that she has set out today before the estimates were laid? Please answer the question.

Rachel Reeves: I have done more in three and a half weeks to get a grip of our public finances than the previous Government did in 14 years. I have worked these last three and a half weeks to get a grip of the public finances and to understand the true extent and scale of the challenge. We have pulled this together over

the last three weeks, and at the weekend we were able to produce the document showing the £22 billion gap between what the previous Government were spending and what they had budgeted for.

Leigh Ingham (Stafford) (Lab): It is clear now that even the OBR, whose express purpose is to provide independent analysis of the public finances, was simply not told about the black hole in Conservative spending plans. What will the Chancellor do differently to ensure that we never end up in such a position again?

Rachel Reeves: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. In the letter that the Office for Budget Responsibility published this afternoon, the Chair said,

"I welcome the important actions announced today by HM Treasury to improve the transparency and credibility of their institutional arrangements for forecasting, planning, and controlling DEL."

That is really important. By taking these actions, we will ensure that never again can any Government do what the Conservative party did: cause a £22 billion black hole in our public finances.

Gregory Stafford (Farnham and Bordon) (Con): Residents in Farnham and Bordon will be concerned to hear about the scrapping of the new hospital programme, especially those living in the north of the constituency who are served by Frimley Park hospital. Will the Chancellor confirm that work on RAAC-affected hospitals, like Frimley Park, will still go ahead? Will she tell us when we can have assurance on that so that we can reassure our constituents?

Rachel Reeves: The hon. Gentleman's constituents will be rightly angry with the previous Government for making unfunded spending commitments that they knew they could not pay for. My right hon. Friend the Health Secretary will meet all those with affected hospitals—including those affected by RAAC—to ensure that we can as quickly as possible address the challenges that his constituents and so many others now face because of the unfunded promises made by the previous Government.

Michael Payne (Gedling) (Lab): May I congratulate you on your election, Madam Deputy Speaker? I thank the Chancellor for demonstrating today that she will always put country first and party second. The Conservative party's response to its own failures is always to cover them up—from partygate to the state of our prisons, and now the black hole in our public finances that has been revealed today. What will my right hon. Friend do differently?

Rachel Reeves: We have already introduced legislation to Parliament for a new fiscal lock. We will publish a new charter for budget responsibility at the time of the Budget on 30 October. I have set out new institutional changes to the Office for Budget Responsibility to ensure that never again can a Government withhold information from this House, the country and the Office for Budget Responsibility.

Danny Kruger (East Wiltshire) (Con): The Chancellor claims to have discovered a black hole in this year's Budget, yet she is proposing to cut infrastructure investment for years to come. It makes no sense. One example is the Stonehenge tunnel, which was due to cost very little money this year, yet she has cancelled the whole thing. My constituents in Shrewton, Amesbury and all the villages around the A303 will be really disappointed to hear that news. What would she say to those residents? What will she do to relieve the traffic congestion that has blighted those communities for so long?

Rachel Reeves: The hon. Gentleman's constituents will rightly be annoyed with the previous Government for saying that they would go ahead with the A303 work but not budgeting a single penny for it. That is where the responsibility lies for these failures and for the difficult announcements that I have had to make today.

Peter Swallow (Bracknell) (Lab): Cash-strapped councils are projected to spend £12 billion to support children with special educational needs and disabilities by 2026. That is up from £4 billion a decade ago. Does the Chancellor agree that the Tories' failure to get to grips with the SEN crisis has put public finances at risk while letting SEN children down?

Rachel Reeves: I think every single Member of the House will have faced often very difficult constituency casework about young people who are not getting a diagnosis on time and not getting the support they need at school. We will set out all our spending plans and priorities at the spending review later this year.

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): I welcome the Chancellor of the Exchequer and her team to their place. I am concerned that I have not seen anything in the Chancellor's statement or the accompanying report on the 1950s women who suffered maladministration of their pensions. The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, which we all utilise when doing constituency casework, was clear that maladministration was suffered. Could the Chancellor confirm whether she is considering the report and will she provide a statement before the Budget on 30 October, or is the message to WASPI women today that she will not do it?

Rachel Reeves: My right hon. Friend the Work and Pensions Secretary is considering that report as we speak.

Catherine Atkinson (Derby North) (Lab): For my constituents, this mess goes beyond money. It is about trust in politics. Does the Chancellor agree that the damage goes even deeper than the harm to our economy that she has set out?

Rachel Reeves: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Today's revelations of a £22 billion in-year overspend come on top of partygate and the handing of contracts to friends and donors to the Conservative party during the pandemic. That dents public trust. I have come to the House today to be open and transparent about the state of the public finances and the action that I will take to sort out this mess.

Dr Danny Chambers (Winchester) (LD): Congratulations on your recent election, Madam Deputy Speaker. My training as a veterinary surgeon and my work in public health programmes around the world have taught me that it is always more cost-effective to keep people healthy rather than treat them when they get sick. Our hospital in Winchester is a good example, as 20% of people in the A&E department are there because they cannot get

[Dr Danny Chambers]

a GP appointment. People are there with tooth abscesses because they cannot get dentist appointments, and 30% are there with a mental health crisis and often are already on a waiting list. Does the Chancellor agree that when finances are so stretched, there must not be the temptation to view primary care as a cost to be cut, because investment in dentists, doctors, public health and mental health will make the NHS more efficient, and that will be better for patients and the taxpayer in the long run?

Rachel Reeves: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The spending review will focus on both integration and prevention, because we know that that saves taxpayers' money and delivers better outcomes for people.

Matt Turmaine (Watford) (Lab): I congratulate you on your election, Madam Deputy Speaker. I thank the Chancellor for her candour in her statement to the House. My constituents will be bitterly disappointed by the consequences of the announcement made, in particular in relation to the rebuild of Watford hospital. It was promised under the last Labour Government and scrapped by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, and then promised again and again in the run-up to the general election, when the Conservative party said that the money was definitely there. Can the Chancellor tell me: where was the money?

Rachel Reeves: We have heard today that hon. and right hon. Members across the House campaigned in good faith on projects that they thought the money was there for. The money simply was not there. We cannot go on like that, which is why I have been open, transparent and honest about the state of our public finances and the £22 billion black hole left by the previous Government. The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care will meet my hon. Friend and all MPs who are affected by the problems left by the previous Government.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Congratulations, Madam Deputy Speaker, on your new role. This Labour Government have chosen to take the winter fuel payment away from pensioners. The right hon. Lady does say she will keep it for those on pension credit, but the threshold for that is very low. That means someone on an income of just £220 a week may find themselves receiving nothing. It is long established that being cold increases ill health among vulnerable people. What estimate has she made of what her changes will cost the NHS?

Rachel Reeves: Pension credit is paid to a single person who has an income of just under £12,000 and a pensioner couple to with one of just under £18,000. We will indeed keep pension credit for the poorest pensioners and boost take-up of pension credit to ensure that everybody who is entitled to it gets it, but we cannot make promises—the previous Government should not have made promises—without being able to say where the money is going to come from. That is the road to ruin. We saw that with Liz Truss, and I am afraid it was repeated under the current Leader of the Opposition and the current shadow Chancellor. They should hang their heads in shame for what they have done to our public finances and our public services.

Mr Luke Charters (York Outer) (Lab): The OBR chair's letter referenced earlier suggests that we could now be facing one of the largest ever year-ahead expenditures outside of a pandemic. This level of cover-up would never be tolerated in the private sector. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this is exactly why my constituents deserve transparency about the state of the public finances?

Rachel Reeves: My hon. Friend speaks powerfully on behalf of his constituents in York Outer. They voted for change because they were sick and tired of unfunded commitments, broken public services and the deterioration in living standards after 14 years of Conservative Government. Today, they found the legacy the previous Government left is even worse than we could have anticipated, with a £22 billion black hole in the public finances.

Mr Gideon Amos (Taunton and Wellington) (LD): I congratulate you on your post, Madam Deputy Speaker, and the right hon. Lady on her position as Chancellor. Does the Chancellor share the anger of the people of Taunton and Wellington in finding that not only is the whole new hospital promised by the Conservatives not funded, but that apparently, as we now discover, even the maternity unit might not be funded? On the restoring your railways programme, will the cancellation of projects also apply to those, such as Wellington station, which have already begun funding and have had GRIP—governance for railway investment projects—stage 4 approval?

Rachel Reeves: I can fully understand why the hon. Gentleman's constituents are so angry with the previous Government for leaving this mess and making unfunded commitments. I assure him that projects that have already started, such as the station he mentions, will go ahead.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): Final question. I call Jim Shannon.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Still the strongest legs in the Chamber, Madam Deputy Speaker. Thank you for calling me to ask a question.

I am very pleased to hear the Chancellor's statement. The clear financial predicament is one that all the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is in together. Will she confirm that, in light of the budget gap and the welcome announcement of the junior doctor pay offer, savings will be made in ways that do not affect required pay increases or come at the expense of our health staff, but that they will focus on cutting back on unnecessary quangos, on the estimated £500 million of taxpayers' money that has been spent on issues such as diversity and inclusion—although important, they do not deserve priority in public spending—or on vanity projects such as Casement Park in Northern Ireland?

Rachel Reeves: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his questions, and for persevering for so long. I fully agree that the focus should be on frontline public services. We have committed ourselves to back-office efficiency savings of 2% in all Government Departments, and a reining in of consultancy and Government communications spending. Those things got out of hand under the last Government, and we will rein them in.

May I end by saying this? We have been here for two hours, and in that time not a single Conservative Member on either the Front Bench or the Back Benches has apologised for the state of the public finances and the state of our public services. That says all we need to know about the outgoing Conservative Government, and they should never have their hands on power again.

Paul Holmes: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I raise a significant issue that I am concerned about, in relation to the Chancellor's statement? *[Interruption.]* The Chancellor obviously does not want to stay in the Chamber to hear this.

In the course of her remarks, the Chancellor appeared to indicate that the Government had knowingly laid wrong or misleading estimates before the House on Thursday last week that differed significantly from what she has presented today, one working day since those estimates were laid. This, if true, is of serious concern. What steps can we take to ensure that the Government retract either the estimates laid or the document that they produced today, and can you tell me whether this possibly constitutes a breach of the ministerial code?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): The hon. Member will know that the Chair is not responsible for the content of contributions made by Ministers, but I am sure that his concern has been heard on the Government Benches. I am sure that if an error has been made in this instance, the Minister will seek to correct it as quickly as possible. It is for the Government to decide on the estimates that they put before the House.

Kit Malthouse: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Chancellor of the Exchequer made certain assertions about timing during her statement. However, we know from the media that the contents of the statement were briefed to *The Guardian* at 8.58 pm on Thursday, just after the estimates had been voted on. While I understand that the Chair is not responsible for the content of what is said at the Dispatch Box, the Chair is responsible for the integrity of documents that are laid before the House and on which we vote and rely. May I ask whether this is a matter for the Prime Minister in his governance of the ministerial code, or for the Commissioner for Standards in his upholding of standards in the House? Prima facie, in the absence of any evidence from the Chancellor, it looks as if we have all been misled.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The right hon. Member will know as well as I do that that is not for the Chair to decide. It is for the Government to decide what they put in their estimates and in documents that are published.

Stuart Anderson: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Chancellor said—for transparency—that she had found out about everything this weekend, but last week, prior to this weekend, she said that the Treasury had also met the Office for Budget Responsibility to explain how bad things were. The two cannot both be correct. Could the Chancellor come to the House and correct the record?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have made it very clear that it is not a matter for the Chair. Those on the Government Benches will have heard three points of order on the same subject. If they wish to come to the House, I am sure the Chancellor will.

Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Bill

Second Reading

5.38 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Louise Haigh): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

At the general election, when millions of people called time on years of dysfunction, disruption and decline, they demanded change, not only in how the country is governed but in how it works, because for too many, from our economy to our public services, the country simply does not work any more. The things on which we rely are letting us down too often. Lifelines have turned into liabilities. That is why this Government have already started the work of rebuilding Britain, brick by brick, Bill by Bill. Five transport Bills in this year's King's Speech show not just the scale of our ambition, but how transport is at the heart of our plans for change. Growing the economy, becoming a clean energy superpower, making our streets safer, spreading opportunity, rebuilding our NHS—whatever this Government's mission, transport is now mission critical.

Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): I am grateful to the Transport Secretary for giving way so early in her comments. There is a very controversial planning proposal for South Leicestershire, which is sitting on her desk as we speak—it is for the Hinckley national rail freight interchange. I am for rail freight interchanges, but the issue that has united Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative politicians in and around the area is that there are about five other rail freight interchanges within a 30-mile radius. Can she give a commitment from the Dispatch Box that whatever she says today will not ride roughshod over the views of Labour-led Rugby council and Conservative-led Blaby district council? Both have very serious concerns about this matter.

Louise Haigh: I am grateful to the hon. Member for putting his views on the record. He will know that I have a quasi-judicial role in determining the development consent order for that project. He is right to say that it is on my desk now, and I am considering it carefully. Nothing in today's Bill will influence that decision.

National renewal requires nothing less than the biggest overhaul of our public transport in a generation. That starts with improving performance on our railways and kick-starting reform, which brings us to today's Bill. It should surprise no one in this House when I say that our railways are not fit for purpose. For two and a half years, I said as much from the Opposition Benches to no fewer than three Tory Transport Secretaries. I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the new shadow Transport Secretary, the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately), to her place. I should note that my three predecessors, who sat on this side of the House, are no longer Members—I am not sure whether it is her job or mine that is cursed, but I wish her luck in the role.

Under three Tory Transport Secretaries, we were promised reform, yet, three years after Keith Williams's review, little has changed. We were promised better services, yet some of the worst-performing operators were rewarded with new, lengthy contracts and handed performance bonuses.

Mike Amesbury (Runcorn and Helsby) (Lab): When can we expect to see the shambles that is Avanti West Coast kicked into touch and returned to public ownership? I would certainly welcome that, and so would lots of northerners up and down the country.

Louise Haigh: I had a feeling that my hon. Friend might mention Avanti, and he knows my views. One of the first meetings I held as Secretary of State was with Avanti. I called it in, as one of the worst-performing operators, with representatives of its Network Rail business unit—a meeting that was not held by any of my three predecessors while I was shadow Secretary of State. I made it clear that Avanti's level of performance will not be tolerated, and we will use all measures under its national rail contract to hold it to account. That does not exclude terminating the contract before it expires if Avanti defaults.

We were promised High Speed 2 to Manchester, yet that was axed—in Manchester, no less—leaving a west coast main line that is now bursting at the seams. Meanwhile, passengers continue to suffer, with overcrowded trains and poor facilities, record-high cancellations—almost one in three trains is late—some of the most expensive fares in Europe, and regular bouts of industrial action.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): May I welcome the Minister to her place and wish her well in her new role? I thank her for bringing forward a Bill to modernise the railways.

I make a plea on behalf of those who are disabled. Whenever we have had debates on the railways in this Chamber, including Adjournment debates, the issue of disabled access has come up over and over again. Does the Secretary of State agree that disabled access at all railway stations should be a bare minimum and must be a priority, given that we have commuters who must still take private taxis to get to a wheelchair-friendly station? Further, does she agree that rural communities should not be disadvantaged by the closure of small stops in order to provide more streamlined timings?

Louise Haigh: I marvel, as always, at the hon. Gentleman's ability to find something of interest and relevance to the debate at hand. He is absolutely right to say that accessibility is far too often overlooked, and we made it clear in the plans we set out ahead of the general election that accessibility would be one of the key measures against which we would eventually hold Great British Railways to account. The way in which people with accessibility needs are treated by our public transport system is undignified.

The broken model that our railways rely on is holding back talent, holding back opportunity and holding back Britain. It must be fixed, and we are wasting no time in doing so. By amending the Railways Act 1993, today's Bill will fulfil one of our central manifesto commitments: to bring rail passenger services into public ownership. It overturns the privatisation by the John Major Government and allows us to take action as soon as contracts expire, or earlier if operators default on their contracts. It is a sensible approach, ensuring that taxpayers do not fork

out huge sums to compensate operating companies for ending contracts early. Public ownership will become the default option for delivering passenger services, instead of the last resort.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her appointment as Secretary of State and thank her for bringing in this excellent Bill. Since coming under the operator of last resort, TransPennine Express, which had been one of the worst-performing rail companies, became the most improved operator, so will this Bill mean that passengers on South Western Railway will see the same level of improvement, and how long will it take?

Louise Haigh: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that we have seen immediate improvements on bringing previously privately run operators into public ownership, but we can go further still, and that is the benefit of taking the two-pronged approach that I will set out later in my speech. She should be in no doubt that South Western will be brought into public ownership, as will all remaining contracts within the first term of this Government, and ideally within the first three years of this Bill receiving Royal Assent. We will act swiftly. I have no doubt that we will hear plenty of voices from the Opposition Benches labelling this an ideological move. Those accusations are way off the mark. There is nothing ideological about fixing what is broken and reforming what does not work.

Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab): I very much welcome this Bill and I congratulate my right hon. Friend on all her work in getting us to this point. Since our railways were taken out of public ownership, tens of billions of pounds have been lost to shareholder dividends and the inefficiency of a privatised system, all while ticket prices have soared. Does she agree that it is high time that we put passengers before profiteers?

Louise Haigh: My hon. Friend is exactly right, and that is what is at the heart of these proposals. This is an opportunity to genuinely reform our railways from top to bottom, to ensure that the needs of passengers and growing the railways are the only objectives that they should serve—not the needs private operators of shareholders, or not the whims of the engineers that run Network Rail. This is a once in a generation opportunity to make sure that our public transport system serves the public, so it is not ideological. What was ideological was the previous Government sitting back and presiding over a broken system while passengers and the economy paid a heavy price. I know that the Tories have been trying to pretend that the last 14 years of failure have not happened, but they cannot deny that after 30 years of privatisation we find ourselves in a position where taxpayers are responsible for 50% of the rail industry's income and underwrite almost every penny spent, while profits are siphoned off to shareholders.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her appointment as Secretary of State. I note that clause 2 of the Bill talks about the extension of the current contracts. Could she set out the circumstances in which that could occur, because we know that rail safety is best when track and train are brought together, as they would be under Great British Railways?

Louise Haigh: Clause 2 is purely a fail-safe if, for whatever reason, DOHL—the operator of last resort—does not have the capacity to take in a private operator's contract at the moment it expires. We have allowed ourselves that flexibility if taking on a contract is not practically possible but, to demonstrate that it is not enabling franchising or private operations by the back door, we have also included the provision to remove that power again, to make sure that public ownership remains the default. It will happen only in exceptional circumstances for a very limited time.

As the railways' passenger-in-chief, I am acting decisively today. This is the only response to the failure of privatisation to deliver reliable and affordable services for passengers. It also makes financial sense, saving tens of millions of pounds each year in private sector fees. That money can now be reinvested in the railways. Running the railways in the interest of passengers and taxpayers, not to the benefit of shareholders, also makes operational sense.

Kim Johnson (Liverpool Riverside) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Louise Haigh: Yes, and I will then make some progress.

Kim Johnson: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her new position.

As a long-suffering Avanti West Coast passenger, I welcome the Government's prioritisation of this Bill, but does my right hon. Friend agree that railway workers should not be outsourced? Will she say a little about what she intends to do to ensure that they are not?

Louise Haigh: Network Rail has done a considerable amount of work on insourcing over the last few years, and I will ask it to do a more comprehensive review to see whether there is more it can do. As private operators are brought in, their contracts and supply chains will be considered, to ensure that they are delivering the best possible service for passengers. My hon. Friend raises a very important point.

The case for public ownership should not be controversial. After all, rail infrastructure was brought into public ownership by the last Labour Government following private sector failure. Germany, France and Spain, our European neighbours, all have models of public ownership. Indeed, the architect of the previous Government's rail reform plan endorsed Labour's plans ahead of the general election.

As has been said, four franchises—Northern, TransPennine, Southeastern and London and North Eastern Railway—are already in public hands and have seen some improvements. As someone who relies on TransPennine, I accept that it is still far from perfect, but cancellations have fallen from 20% in January 2023 to around 5% since it was taken into public ownership. LNER recently achieved a financial surplus, which was returned to the taxpayer.

Bringing the remaining 10 operators under public control will take time but, as passenger-in-chief, I am putting them on notice. I will not tolerate the status quo, I will not hesitate to demand improvements, and I will not be afraid to rip up contracts early if operators default on their obligations to the public.

[Louise Haigh]

The Bill means that the railways will finally be run for the public by the public, but owning the house is just the first step. Next, we must fix the crumbling foundations. That means fundamental reform, no ifs and no buts. We will set up Great British Railways as a new directing mind. Running the network, both track and train, as one integrated system will finally put an end to the fragmentation and waste that make our railways among the least efficient because of their spiralling costs and falling revenues, competing interests and industry inertia.

We will build a growing, innovative railway that is relentlessly and single-mindedly focused on passengers. There is no questioning the benefits at stake. Because GBR will take a whole-system view, we will be able to simplify the overly complex fare system so passengers can be confident that they are getting the best value. We will take aim at overcrowding by moving rolling stock to where it is needed in the network. We will end the piecemeal approach to innovation and roll out benefits such as digital pay-as-you-go and digital season tickets, and we will put accessibility at the core of our rail offer so that passengers with disabilities can expect a consistent level of service.

Of course, such change does not happen overnight. That is why setting up GBR and delivering our plans in full will be the focus of separate legislation later in the Session. But we will not sit back and wait for that legislation to be on the statute book; we plan to use every lever available to us urgently to improve services for passengers. That includes creating shadow Great British Railways, which will focus squarely on driving improvements in the short term, from ticketing to better services. This is a crucial next step, putting passengers back at the heart of the railways and firing the starting gun for reform.

Ben Maguire (North Cornwall) (LD): What benefit will this Bill bring to my North Cornwall constituents who currently do not have a single railway station? Will the Secretary of State please explain to them what mainline train services will be coming to towns in North Cornwall such as Bude, Bodmin, Wadebridge and Launceston?

Louise Haigh: As the Chancellor has set out today, we will not only be reviewing the previous Government's unfunded, underfunded and, in some places, cancelled capital projects, but we will be taking forward an integrated long-term infrastructure strategy. I would be delighted to meet the hon. Gentleman to talk about his constituents' needs.

When I became Transport Secretary, I told the Department that we had a new motto: "Move fast and fix things." The Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Bill, the first major piece of legislation under this Labour Government, shows we are doing exactly that. The 30-year privatisation experiment has failed. Passenger satisfaction remains too low, while costs soar. Even before the pandemic, half of all trains in the north of England were late. All of this failure has consequences—communities cut off, talent stifled and ambition limited. It leaves Britain stuck in the sidings, unable to realise this Government's mission of economic growth.

Today we start the work of repair, bringing our railways back into public service, restoring pride to an industry we should be proud of, and taking back control so that our railways finally work for everyone, wherever they live. In this mission, I am absolutely determined. I commend the Bill to the House.

5.57 pm

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Madam Deputy Speaker. Congratulations on your election.

It is my honour to respond to the first Second Reading of a Bill moved by this new Government, which I see as an opportunity to set the tone for how we will act in opposition. We are not going to oppose for the sake of it, and I do not believe that a single person on either side of the House, among the public, among those working on the rail network or even among those running the train companies would say that everything is as it should be with our rail system. We are in no doubt that rail needs reform.

Covid fundamentally changed the way we travel. Far fewer people now commute five days a week. The contracts that were brought in to save the railways are now stifling the companies they kept afloat, and the Treasury is subsidising the network's day-to-day running to the tune of £3 billion a year, so things need to change.

That is why, in government, we commissioned a landmark review into our rail system. I welcome the fact that Labour is taking forward our plan for Great British Railways, which is the product of that review. Joining up track and train into a single public body will make the system more efficient and save passengers time and money, which is important because affordability and reliability are what people care about, and the point of being in government is delivering on what people care about.

Mike Amesbury (Runcorn and Helsby) (Lab) *rose—*

Helen Whately: I worry about what this legislation tells us about how the Labour party plans to act in government. My worry when I first saw the Bill—multiplied many times over by the Chancellor's statement, to which I will return—is that it seems to be based solely on ideology. There is no evidence, barely even a suggestion, that this Bill will actually improve journeys for passengers. The Secretary of State, perhaps to her credit, has even admitted so herself, saying that she cannot promise that fares will be any cheaper or that the trains will be more likely to run on time.

The Bill is the embodiment of the same old Labour mantra that anything run by the state is simply better than anything run by the private sector, and that the answer to a problem is putting politicians in charge, when it has been proven time and again that that is not the case.

Mike Amesbury: I thank the shadow Secretary of State for finally giving way. She referred to being ideologically wedded to a certain model of providing railway services. Will she explain why, despite its appalling record, Avanti West Coast was awarded a nine-year extension? Surely that was an ideological decision—the wrong decision.

Helen Whately: The point I will come to is that the Opposition and I, as shadow Secretary of State for Transport, do not choose to take an ideological approach. The important thing is what works. If the hon. Gentleman will hold on for a moment and listen to what I am coming to, he will understand my argument.

I confess I may be a little jealous if the Secretary of State is too young to remember life under British Rail: the dusty carriages, the worn seats, the clonk and rattle of the carriage doors, and hours spent waiting on deserted platforms wondering if, let alone when, the trains would ever arrive, without any information available. Even the sandwiches were tired. It is no wonder that in British Rail's nearly 50-year history, passenger numbers across the network actually went down. There was a reason why private provision was introduced into the rail network and why the previous Labour Government stuck with it throughout the 13 years they were in power: it worked.

Today's railway is unrecognisable from that under British Rail, not despite privatisation but because of it. In the first 20 years, passenger numbers doubled, a point that Labour's own Rail Minister, who now sits in the other place, made in his 2015 report as the head of Network Rail. The majority of that growth is attributable to the private sector's involvement, and it was achieved while operating one of the safest railways in Europe. Billions of pounds of private capital has been invested in rolling stock; there is now live real-time information on services; and, instead of British Rail catering, passengers can now choose between the likes of M&S and Greggs.

The railway went from costing taxpayers hundreds of millions of pounds a year to generating an operating surplus for much of the 2010s. It was not just taxpayers and passengers that benefited. To quote the general secretary of ASLEF, Lew Adams, back in 2004:

> "All the time it was in the public sector, all we got were cuts, cuts, cuts. And today there are more members in the trade union, more train drivers, and more trains running. The reality is that it worked".

We often hear it said in this country that our rail system should be more like those in Europe, where under a utopian system of public ownership, the trains always run on time and every journey costs less than a pint of beer. However, that is not how the European see it. In fact, in terms of the growth in passenger numbers and the controls on costs that privatisation delivered, our network is envied by Europe. *[Laughter.]* I knew Government Members would laugh, so listen to what I have to say.

Ruth Cadbury: On that point, will the shadow Secretary of State give way?

Helen Whately: I will give way but not right now because I heard the reaction.

Right now, many European countries are in the process of unravelling their public models. They are introducing private provision and competition into their networks. The Dutch, the Czechs and members of the European Union will all be very confused to see us hurtling past them in the other direction.

Of course, free enterprise does not always succeed. That is why we already have a system in place for times when state intervention would—or, at least, should—benefit passengers. As I am sure the Secretary of State knows, the Department for Transport is already running several train operating companies, such as Northern Trains, which was taken into public ownership back in 2020. Four years ago, when the state took it over, a measly 61% of its trains arrived on time. Today, free from the greedy profit vultures who previously feasted on its carcase, that figure remains at 61%.

Compare that with Greater Anglia, whose contract comes up for renewal in September. By the way, Greater Anglia is the first train operating company in the Secretary of State's crosshairs, and why the Government are choosing to rush this Second Reading through before recess. All of Greater Anglia's services are running new trains. Some 94% of those trains arrive within three minutes of the scheduled time. The company manages to deliver that while paying a premium back to the Treasury. It is not failing.

In fact, every single one of the top five performers across the network is a private provider. By contrast, are hon. Members aware which company accounts for more delays than anyone else? Network Rail—some 60% of delays are caused by a single public sector organisation.

Ruth Cadbury: I am old enough to remember British Rail. On quite a lot of measures, British Rail was improving before it was privatised. While the hon. Lady wants to make an ideological attack on a state-owned railway, British Rail was 40% more efficient than eight comparable rail systems in Europe used as benchmarks in 1989. Does the hon. Lady agree with the former Secretary of State, Grant Shapps, when he admitted that the franchise system was no longer sustainable? What is her idea?

Helen Whately: I was perfectly clear at the beginning of my speech that we agree that reform is needed. That is why we commissioned a review and set out ambitious plans for reform, including the Great British Railways. I welcome that the new Government intend to introduce that.

I am not here to make an ideological argument. To respond to the point made by the hon. Member for Runcorn and Helsby (Mike Amesbury), sometimes, as with our plan for Great British Railways, the public sector is the right vehicle to solve a problem. At other times, a competitive, private model will lead to better results. The point is, if the Government are going to change things in the first piece of legislation they bring before this House, they need some pretty clear evidence as to why, so I have some questions for the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Wakefield and Rothwell (Simon Lightwood), who will be summing up.

How exactly will bringing train operating companies into public ownership benefit passengers? Unfortunately, the Government's impact assessment does not tell us, for sure. What improvements can passengers expect? Who is the Secretary of State going to get to run these companies? Where are all these different, better train operating experts going to come from? If they are out there, twiddling their thumbs in the hope that this day would arrive, would the Department for Transport not have brought them on board already to help with the running of Northern Trains or Southeastern?

It is the same question across the network. Will the Secretary of State be sacking everyone currently working for the train operating companies and replacing them

[Helen Whately]

with a horde of superior, yet currently out-of-work, staff? Or, as I suspect, will passengers simply encounter the same group of people in a different colour shirt? What we need to hear is what tangible difference this will make for passengers, because if the answer is nil, then there are lots of other things she could be doing with her time, such as prioritising the railways Bill.

The railways Bill is the legislation that will actually make a difference to how passengers experience our railways, with simpler tickets, joined-up decision making and efficiency savings that can be passed on to passengers. She could be modernising working practices, instead of bending over backwards for the unions, as reports suggest she has already done. How does she think that creating a single employer and, in the process, uplifting every rail worker's terms and conditions in the way that is least favourable for passengers, will benefit the network? She could start by saving the train manufacturer, Hitachi—something that, when in opposition, she said she could do with the stroke of a pen. I notice that it has been three weeks and that pen is yet to materialise. Perhaps she no longer takes for granted the work her predecessor did saving the Alstom factory in Derby. Or she could prioritise investment in the network, like the £100 billion we spent improving the railways since 2010.

On that point, I feel for the Secretary of State because I know what it is like to argue with a Chancellor for investment in something and not win that argument. It is clear from the Chancellor's statement earlier that the Secretary of State for Transport lost the argument pretty catastrophically. Rather than setting out to reform welfare or control public spending, the Chancellor opted to slash a host of transport infrastructure projects. She will now review all transport infrastructure plans, putting the entire transport pipeline into chaos, letting down communities across the country and letting down a fair few of her new colleagues, too. Those new colleagues will be dismayed to find that they campaigned on false promises to the electorate, and that their pledges to invest in economic growth and not to raise taxes were not even worth the glossy paper on which their leaflets were written.

Although I know what it is like to lose an argument with the Chancellor, I do not share the experience that the Secretary of State and many of her colleagues will now be going through: of changing their tune just three weeks after they were given a mandate by the electorate and less than two weeks after their party leader had said that trust was the new battleground of politics. It seems as if he has given up on that battle already.

All the same, I welcome the right hon. Lady to her post, and I do genuinely wish her well. I will gladly offer my support to anything that she does to make our railways more reliable and more affordable. This Bill will not do that. It is a rushed piece of left-wing ideology. The evidence, both here in the UK and across Europe, shows that an effective public-private model, where the incentives are properly aligned, delivers more choice, more passengers and greater efficiency.

Over the next few weeks of recess, the Secretary of State and her team will have some time to reflect and reconsider. I hope that they will return in the autumn with a Bill that jettisons the baggage of ideology and takes up the mantle of evidence—a Bill that will have more prospect of improving the rail service for passengers, because, as I said, I have no interest in opposing for opposition's sake, but this Bill as it stands will not be receiving the support of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call Andy McDonald.

6.11 pm

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough and Thornaby East) (Lab): I congratulate you, Madam Deputy Speaker, on your elevation.

As I start my contribution, I wish to put on record how proud I am of my relationship with our trade union movement. I declare both the political and financial support that I have received, including from affiliated and non-affiliated railway trade unions, as reflected in my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

It is an immense honour to speak on Second Reading of this most welcome of Bills. In the recent election, we set out in our manifesto how we will put passengers at the heart of the service by reforming the railways and bringing them into public ownership. With today's Bill, that is what we are doing. The restoration of our railways to public ownership is something that I have spent much time working to achieve in this place, especially in the four years from 2016 as shadow Transport Secretary.

In that role, I produced a shadow White Paper entitled, "GB Rail: Labour's plan for a nationally integrated, publicly owned railway". It was nice to see that the then Transport Secretary tried to pinch the title, but I suppose that I should be flattered by that. In the document, I set out how the privatised UK railway has not delivered for passengers or taxpayers for a long time. I said, when we published our paper, that the railways must be run with the public interest as its primary objective, and I was looking at the sector more broadly, not just as passenger services. I am delighted that this Bill is before us today. I heartily congratulate the Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Heeley (Louise Haigh), on securing the first substantive debate and moving the first piece of legislation under this Labour Government.

The Bill is necessary because the privatisation model for Britain's railways, introduced by the Major Government with the Railways Act 1993, has long been failing passengers. Even Margaret Thatcher was reluctant to privatise rail. The privatised rail system has put private profit-taking before the provision of public service. Far too many of Britain's train franchises have been wholly or partly run by the subsidiaries of other countries' publicly owned railway companies. Over the years, Deutsche Bahn, Nederlandse Spoorwegen and Trenitalia, to name just a few, have extracted value out of our railways to pump back into their own home railways, yet the only nation state that was precluded from running railways here was our own. Well, all that changes today.

I have previously said that the primary aim of Britain's railway should be supporting the health of the economy and society, not other nation states and a small group of private franchise shareholders. The outgoing model has resulted to the commercial objective of delivering in the concept of public service giving way the wider public goods.

At the height of private franchising, it was estimated that more than £700 million a year in total was going to those companies' shareholder dividend payments. That was

unproductive, wasteful, and the opposite of value for money. This has been funded by the fleecing of fare-payers. The Commons Library sets out that the cost of rail fares has increased by 20% in real terms over the past 20 years, while average real wages across the economy struggle to match 2008 levels. The additional revenue is not used to remunerate staff. Rail staff are incredibly hard-working public servants—employed by private companies since 1993—and RMT union members should not have needed 18 months of industrial action to get a pay deal on which they could settle. The position is similar with ASLEF union train drivers. It shames the Conservative party that these drivers, who had not had a pay rise in five years, were forced to wait for a general election and a Labour Transport Secretary to hold direct pay talks.

I pay tribute once again to the rail unions—the RMT, ASLEF and the TSSA—which keep our rail sector running, despite the problems of privatisation, and which deserve a better deal than they have had in recent years. The rising dividends, funded by rising fares, at the expense of employee pay, have been paid out regardless of performance.

According to the most recent statistical release by the Office of Rail and Road, 8.5% of Avanti West Coast trains were cancelled in the last quarter and 10% were more than 15 minutes late. Similarly badly, 7% of CrossCountry trains were cancelled and 6% were more than 15 minutes late.

Under the Conservative's rail network, the private sector took the profit; the public sector picked up the pieces when things went wrong. When the covid pandemic led to falling passenger numbers, the Government stepped in to prop up the railway with funding. During the recent rail pay disputes, the RMT has argued that rail companies were being indemnified against any losses to the tune of £1 billion, on the same day that there was a national strike on the railways.

Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, the public have had enough. They want change, and Labour is now delivering it. The public voted for it. We believed that they would do so, because polling has always shown that they support public ownership and that is right across the political spectrum. In a YouGov poll just after the King's Speech, 76% said that they backed public ownership of rail, up from 60% at the 2017 election. That also reflects the increase in support for public ownership of energy: something else on which we are making a start.

Across the economy, it is clear that voters have had enough of rip-off privatisation and are embracing public ownership. There is much, much more that we will achieve, enabling all of us to travel much more easily and reliably, with simpler fares, connecting with other modes of increasingly decarbonised public transport, to give our economy and quality of life a massive boost.

With this marvellous Bill, my right hon. Friend has the golden opportunity to make sure that our railways work for our people and our businesses, not for the private profit of train operators. I look forward to speaking with her about the much-discussed expansion of rail connections to our capital city and across the northern region from my Middlesbrough and Thornaby East constituency. I commend her for the superb job that she has done thus far by bringing forward this Bill today. I wish her and the Bill every success.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call Wera Hobhouse.

6.18 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): Thank you for calling me to speak, Madam Deputy Speaker. I do not think that I have yet had the opportunity to express my pleasure in seeing you in your new role. May I also congratulate the right hon. Lady on securing her new role as Secretary of State?

Our railways are in dire need of improvement. Under the last Conservative Government, passengers were repeatedly failed. Services are poor and the ticketing system is in shambles. All the while the public keep paying more and more, year on year. Rail fares in the UK are already some of the highest in Europe and are set to rise again. I am sure that all Members of this House have heard about, or experienced, cancellations, delays and a ticketing system not fit for purpose. People are crying out for a functioning rail network that they can rely on.

Too often, my Bath constituents would rather travel by train, but take the car instead because a train ticket is far too expensive. If we are serious about meeting our net zero target and reducing emissions, rail must be not just a green option, but an affordable one. Since privatisation, passenger journeys have more than doubled to 1.71 billion per year. However, satisfaction is at its lowest level in over 10 years. We agree with the Government that competition is not working as intended. Fewer and fewer companies are bidding for new franchises as the costs have ballooned. Meanwhile, Government subsidies have increased and intervention is desperately needed.

The UK needs a world-class rail network to support growth and reach net zero. For too many years, it has been held back by under-investment and lack of ambition, particularly in the north and south-west. However, may I ask what will happen to investment after nationalisation, when Great British Rail will have to compete for funding with the NHS and schools? I am sure this Government will agree with us that they must guarantee that funding for a nationalised rail network will not come at the expense of other public services.

We Liberal Democrats want the fairest deal for passengers. Anything that brings down fares is welcome and I look forward to the Government setting out how services will improve when in public hands. Nationalisation is an interesting idea, but Liberal Democrats want an approach that benefits passengers right away. We would freeze fares immediately and then get on with reforms to the broken system. Passengers might not be that interested in who is running the trains, but they are interested in whether they are running on time and at a fair price.

There is inconsistency within the proposed policy: just as private companies do now, Great British Rail will continue to lease rolling stock. Rolling stock leasing companies benefit from a monopoly out of the 1994 privatisation and make excess profits. One quarter of operators' costs go to those companies and I hope the Government will urgently look into that.

The Liberal Democrat approach is pragmatic. We will scrutinise the legislation according to what is best for passengers. We want one nationwide body with proper powers to put investment in the right place and hold

[Wera Hobhouse]

train companies to account. Our proposal is for a railway agency to act as a guiding mind for the railways, putting commuters first, holding train companies to account and bringing in wholesale reform of the broken fare system.

It is currently unclear what the financial impact of nationalisation will be. There are potential savings due to management and performance fees no longer being payable. However, subsidies might increase after nationalisation. Private operators are already subsidised to run unprofitable services, and public sector companies would similarly need financial support, which might increase over time. We are putting down these concerns to make sure that we are properly holding the Government to account on their proposals. Can the Government really ensure that funding will be adequate without fares increasing further?

There is no reason for nationalising companies purely based on their contract expiry date; the Government should start by focusing attention on operators that are demonstrably failing passengers. GBR could then focus on turning those services around to deliver tangible improvement for the public. The Government should at least look at that, and operators that are performing well should be deprioritised. That would be better for travellers and reduce the cost to taxpayers.

There are other questions that we need clarity on. When the contract is up, will train operating companies go straight to Great British Rail or to the operator of last resort? If it is to the operator of last resort, what incentives will there be for operators to grow rail revenues, which are still at 70% of pre-pandemic levels? A larger OLR team will be necessary to manage the increased number of rail journeys while GBR is being set up. The explanatory notes to the Bill do not consider that increased cost.

All that must be part of a wider, long-term rail strategy. Instead of our fixating on the issue of ownership, our railways need a rapid and significant change to put passengers first with a focus on the quality of service. We are interested in looking at what benefits nationalisation will bring, but we urge the Government to be pragmatic.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call Josh Dean to make his maiden speech.

6.25 pm

Josh Dean (Hertford and Stortford) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am grateful for the opportunity to make my first contribution in this House and welcome you to your place following your election. I congratulate all hon. Members and hon. Friends who have given their maiden speeches over previous days. They have been a reminder of the immense talent of those joining this House, and what a privilege it is for me to be among them. I look forward to hearing their many contributions to debates over the coming months and years.

I begin by paying tribute to my predecessor, Julie Marson, who served our residents for four and a half years. I thank Julie for her hard work in helping to secure banking hubs to protect our residents' access to in-person banking services in parts of our community—work that I look forward to continuing. I know that the whole House will want to join me in wishing Julie and her family the very best for the future.

It is the honour of my life to represent the community where I grew up and that I call home, as the first Labour MP in Hertford and Stortford's 41-year history. Our town centre in Hertford gave me my first job, our railways carried me to the university education I thought I had missed out on and, although I am not sure that at age 24 I count as an old boy of the school, I am a proud former student of Richard Hale. I am deeply humbled by the trust that our residents have placed in me, and I will work every day to ensure that it is repaid.

Hertford and Stortford is a historic community. When plague overran London in the 1500s, this Parliament moved to Hertford castle, where the gatehouse is now home to Hertford town council. Bishop's Stortford is suspected to be a Roman new town, and may once have sat at an ancient transport interchange. Sawbridgeworth boasts architecture from the Tudor, Stuart and Georgian periods, and Ware was home to a malt-making industry that lasted from the civil war to the 20th century.

Our constituency represents so much of what is great about our country: hard-working communities, historic towns, and hubs of innovation, creativity and commerce. I had the chance to visit one such hub of innovation on a recent visit to Wickham Hall in Bishop's Stortford. There I was inspired by David and Suzy Harvey, self-styled "custodians of the countryside", whose creativity and passion have transformed a 100-year-old family farm into a thriving business community, making use of the green technologies of the future and with a mission to protect our environment.

Our natural environment is as diverse as it is beautiful, with some of Britain's rare chalk streams, of which our residents are rightly fiercely protective, running right through our constituency. I therefore warmly welcome this Government's commitment to cleaning up our precious waters. I will work tirelessly, within this House and in my community, to ensure that they are protected.

Today, many of our Hertford and Stortford residents will travel to and from work using our local railways, whether they are going from one town to the next, from our constituency into London or even further. However, when I speak to residents in our community, too often I hear stories of a broken rail network that is not working for local people. Indeed, just today one of my residents contacted me to say that yet more services had been cancelled to Hertford North this evening due to a lack of staff.

Our railways were once the pride of Britain, connecting people and places with new opportunities, but the current model of privatisation is failing passengers and staff across the country. I am heartened by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's promise to "move fast and fix things". We know that publicly owned, passenger-focused rail can deliver the efficient, high-quality and reliable service that our Hertford and Stortford residents need, and make our railways something to be proud of once again.

I have not followed a traditional path through life, as my sometimes frustrated parents would agree. I left school at 17 and went straight into work, first in my town centre, then commuting into London, before working in recruitment in a local business park. I returned to education during lockdown, enrolling at the University

of Westminster to study—perhaps unsurprisingly—politics, blissfully unaware that in a few years' time, I would be desperately trying to navigate the corridors of this place.

I would not have found the path that was right for me had it not been for the inspirational work of our youth clubs in Hertford and Stortford, and it is to them that I wish to pay tribute now. I have experienced at first hand the difference that their work makes to the lives of our young people, and I can say with confidence that, had it not been for the support and guidance of a youth worker named Russell Cairns, I would not be in this Chamber today. I have since had the privilege of visiting the Thirst youth café in Bishop's Stortford and volunteering at FUTUREhope youth café, in the very building where I once sought advice from Russell. I look forward to working with them and many others as our Member of Parliament, to ensure that every young person in our community is supported to find the path that is right for them, just as I was supported to find mine.

I hope I can also show our young people that, if they wish, the path they choose can lead them here. During the election, I had the chance to visit some of our local schools, taking part in a hustings at Herts and Essex high school in Bishop's Stortford and answering the questions of sixth-formers at Leventhorpe school in Sawbridgeworth and Richard Hale school in Hertford. I was struck by their insightful questions and genuine passion for politics.

We know that young people are at the sharp end of so many of the crises we face today, whether it is the climate crisis or the crisis in housing and mental health, but too often they feel powerless to make a difference and that politics is not a place for them. I am proud to be a young person representing his community, joining this place among a cohort of younger parliamentarians. But it is incumbent on all of us to show our young people that they have a place not only in politics, but in this Parliament too, and I look forward to working with colleagues across the House to make that happen.

Finally, I would like to reflect on two people without whom I would not be here: my mum and dad. My mum taught in local schools before becoming a special educational needs co-ordinator. I have grown up watching her give so much to her profession in often challenging circumstances. Hers is the story of teachers and support staff across our schools across the country, and she continues to be an inspiration to me—as is my dad, who now lives just outside Bishop's Stortford and, like so many of our residents, commutes into London every day.

My parents moved to Hertford in the late 1990s because they wanted the best start for me. I cannot think of a better moment than now to thank them for everything they have given me over the last 24 years. My parents are examples of hard work and dedication, principles that they have instilled in me, and those are principles that I will carry with me every day as I go to work in this place.

6.32 pm

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I congratulate you on your new role, Madam Deputy Speaker. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Josh Dean) on making his maiden speech. I am sure that he will learn and appreciate, as the weeks, months and even years go by, that there are times when we will argue and debate in this place, but there are many things that we also have in common. Like him, I left school and did not go to university until much later in life. The other common point I will mention—I will come to this in my contribution—is the importance of rail links to our local communities. They create a link to opportunity for young and old alike. I sincerely wish him well.

I was clear in my contribution to the King's Speech debate that where I agree with the Government, I will say so. As a former Rail Minister, I would be one of the first to agree that the rail system needs reform. Post pandemic, we have seen that commuting and business travel have changed beyond all recognition, but so too has leisure travel, and the demand has changed greatly. The current system needs to make greater use of the public-private model, but crucially, it must also have a greater passenger focus.

There are 20 franchise train operating companies in Great Britain, with—let us be honest—levels of operational performance and cancellations that vary dramatically, as I am sure all across the House would agree. There is nothing more frustrating for someone than arriving at the train station on their way home at the end of the day, or at the end of the week from this place, only to find that their train is delayed or, worse still, has been cancelled.

For example, at one end of the spectrum, we have Avanti West Coast, one of the worst performers; its contract expires in 2026. Let us contrast that with West Midlands trains, one of the much better performers; its contract expires in September this year. I would hope that if the new Government were truly passenger-focused and wanted to get us moving forward, they would seek to address the worst performers first.

I have a few questions that I hope the Secretary of State or her Minister will answer in their summing up. What does the Bill actually mean for passengers? I have yet to understand that fully. I have yet to hear the Secretary of State confirm that prices will be cheaper, but perhaps she can do so today. We have heard that there will be a focus on the taxpayer, but what about the traveller? For too many, rail travel is still unaffordable, and I fear that it will become more unaffordable under these proposals.

What about the other aspects of the services? Will cleaning contracts be nationalised? What about catering? Will we see a return to the days of the British Rail sandwich? I do not think I am quite old enough to remember those days, but I have it on good authority that the British rail sandwich is somewhat emblematic of the unappetising fare of the nationalisation of our railways.

What about ticket offices and ticketing? We have heard that there should be improvements to ticketing, but what plans does the Secretary of State have? Will she keep them open or close them? Will there be more staff out on the platform to help passengers?

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South and South Bedfordshire) (Lab): The right hon. Member mentioned ticket office closures. I remind her that that was the proposal from her previous Government.

Wendy Morton: It may well have been, but I am here to scrutinise the Government of the day. I will be the first to recognise that where ticket offices are selling one ticket a day, it makes much better sense to have those operators out on the platform helping people with, for example, accessibility issues and the machines. This whole point is about being truly passenger-focused.

I would also like to better understand what the investment will be in the training of train drivers. It takes a very long time for a train driver to be fully trained for any given route. Without a sufficient number of train drivers, we end up being in hock to the unions. Similarly, I would like to understand whether the new Government truly believe in a seven-day railway service, because that is what passengers expect. We expect trains to operate not just from Monday to Friday, but for seven days a week. I would therefore expect any rail operator, particularly under nationalisation, to offer that service as well.

On open access, I would like a greater understanding of what that model will look like. Will it be kept or not? The reason I ask that is really parochial and community-focused. My constituency is one of the very few that does not have a train station. Hon. Members may become rather tired of me saying this in the forthcoming weeks and months, but under the former Mayor of the West Midlands, we secured funding through the city region sustainable transport settlements, working with the council to move forward. We have the train line and the site identified for the car park. Everything was going forward. We even have an open access operator that is looking to put in a service from Wales direct to Euston, which would be an absolute game-changer for young and old alike in my constituency.

Sadly, the new Mayor of the West Midlands will not confirm that that project is going ahead; he prefers to hide behind a review. And after today's announcement by the Chancellor, I fear that she is probably backing him and encouraging him down that route. As ever, though, I remain hopeful and wait to be convinced otherwise.

As we have heard today, Great British Railways is not an entirely new idea. When we were in government, our plan was to set it up as a public entity, joining track and train across the country. However, what we have in front of us today is very different: we have ideological nationalisation, risking taxpayers' money, and a plan that the Government cannot confirm will reduce costs or increase capacity or reliability. In short, it does not put the fare-paying passenger first—this is a political choice.

Mr Speaker: I call Paul Foster to make his maiden speech.

6.40 pm

Mr Paul Foster (South Ribble) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for affording me the honour and opportunity to make my maiden speech today. I have listened intently to many speeches over the past few days, and I congratulate all those who have made their maiden speech. I rise with slight trepidation in my aspiration to match the passion and eloquence of others, who have spoken in such an inspiring way about their constituencies, life experiences and priorities. I commend them all.

I would like to start by paying tribute to my immediate predecessor, Katherine Fletcher. Katherine dedicated herself for the past four and a half years, and had a real passion for wanting to improve the lives of many people in the constituency. I also pay tribute to all previous elected Members of Parliament who have served the community of South Ribble: the right hon. Sir Robert Atkins, David Borrow, Lorraine Fullbrook and Seema Kennedy. All are still highly thought of.

Today, we debate the public ownership of passenger railway services. For my constituents, that cannot happen quickly enough. With Avanti West Coast, which in my instance runs the west coast main line between Preston and London, we are subjected to quite possibly the worst franchise in the country—and trust me, given the state of many of the current franchises, that is some achievement.

Being elected on the new boundaries for South Ribble—which, Mr Speaker, now include many areas of Chorley Rural West—on 4 July was a huge privilege, humbling and a great honour. I cannot thank the people of South Ribble enough for giving me this opportunity to represent them. I hope and promise to do my best, using my experience in industry, in the military and, more recently, as their council leader in local government. With a heavy heart, I have now passed on the baton of the leadership of South Ribble borough council to Councillor Jacky Alty, my friend and colleague. I send her and the council my heartfelt best wishes for the future.

However, I am now in a new political chapter and intend to push forward, delivering change with my new Labour Government and colleagues, and I will take every opportunity to advance my constituents' priorities and prospects in every way I can, with all the energy and experience I bring. I remain committed to ensuring that they all begin to thrive following such challenging times.

I was brought up in Barrow-in-Furness, and I have a continuing passion for Barrow AFC. However, during the crippling strikes at the shipyard in 1988 in response to Mrs Thatcher's targeted attacks on the UK's manufacturing industry, I ended up joining the British Army's Corps of Royal Engineers at the tender age of 18. I served for just under 15 years, serving operationally in the first Gulf war on Operation Haven and in the Kosovo conflict in 1999, to name but two. After retiring from the Royal Engineers in 2003 to be closer to my young children, I moved to South Ribble to establish a new life and a fresh start, and made it my home. The people are always warm and welcoming, and I understand that I am the first Member of Parliament actually from the constituency to have been elected to represent it.

Like many constituencies, South Ribble is both rural and urban. We have the River Ribble running through the north of the constituency, and borders with Preston, West Lancashire, Ribble Valley and Chorley. South Ribble is made up of many small villages, like Much Hoole, Hutton, Charnock Richard, Longton, Croston and Eccleston, as well as towns such as Penwortham and Leyland, where—as Members may have guessed—Leyland trucks were historically produced and our fantastic manufacturing base was born. I think we have Leyland Motors to thank for the now well-established global defence manufacturer, BAE Systems, on our doorstep. The draughtsmen, designers, fitters, engineers and fabled toolmakers were all in abundance at Leyland Motors in South Ribble, and that knowledge has been passed on proudly through our local skills and training institutions

for decades. Central Lancashire provides thousands of highly technical workers to many critical sectors, primarily the defence sector.

South Ribble has many unique characteristics, cultures and attractions. As the council leader, I have come to know my constituency intimately: spending time at the longest-standing green flag awarded Worden park and Worden Hall on a Saturday afternoon; having a pint with Martin, Nigel and Rachel in the Market Ale House in Leyland; or working with fellow veterans, who are represented in an astonishing 19% of households in South Ribble. I will continue to support and champion individuals such as 15-year-old Ben Griffiths—or "Boisterous Ben", if Members would like to follow his story on social media. Ben is living an exceptionally tough life, with intractable epilepsy that he has had since birth. He has a desperate need for full access to NHS-prescribed medical cannabis, which he is not being permitted. In my opinion, he is being denied that life-saving medication due to bureaucracy. I will not accept that, and will not rest until Ben gets the support and medication he needs.

I will also continue to support my community, who desperately need new road infrastructure to lessen congestion and travel times and improve air quality, as well as more quality housing and developments in the right places so that communities and families can continue to live together in South Ribble. However, these developments must be sustainable, with infrastructure first, and they must be affordable. I will strive to get the Government to commence a huge council house building programme with local councils up and down the country. I am proud that when I was council leader, we commenced building the first council houses in a generation in South Ribble—houses that are high-quality and affordable.

I will continue to champion inward investment through devolution in the north-west and to work towards an elected mayor and combined authority for Lancashire, permitting local decision makers to have greater powers over their own transport, health, policing, skills, education, housing and employment. The current county combined authority being pursued by Lancashire county council just is not good enough—I have already spoken to the relevant Secretary of State about the issue. We must also optimise the opportunities that will come with the brand-new cyber-security centre on our doorstep, at BAE Systems in my neighbouring constituency of Ribble Valley; it really could become a global centre of excellence, offering huge opportunities to the entire constituency.

Finally, I pay tribute to my beloved mother Marilyn. After losing her to cancer complicated by covid in 2020, I know what losing a loved one feels like. She was only 68 years and one day old when she passed; she was lonely and afraid, and the pain that me and my family, and many thousands of others, went through during the pandemic can never, ever be repeated. Her end of life was desperately traumatic, and could and should have been avoided. I hold a very personal and strong view on the very well-publicised parties that were held down here. We must learn lessons, and must all listen very carefully to what the covid inquiry finds. Given me and my family's experiences with my mum, I also look forward to the passionate debate on assisted dying, which will be a deeply complex but critically important piece of legislation.

I have dedicated 32 years of my life to public service in the British Army and in local government. I now further commit to you, Mr Speaker, to this House, and to each and every one of my constituents, as it states in my Institution of Royal Engineers' motto, "service not self"; I promise my continued public service, upholding fully the principles of integrity, objectivity, accountability, selflessness, openness, honesty and leadership at all times. I am honoured to be here to serve the people of South Ribble.

Mr Speaker: We now come to another maiden speech.

6.49 pm

Mr Gideon Amos (Taunton and Wellington) (LD): I rise to give my maiden speech. I congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your position and the Transport Secretary and the Front-Bench team on their positions.

It is a privilege and a pleasure to follow the maiden speeches that we have just heard, including by the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Josh Dean), who, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Josh Babarinde), significantly increases the Josh quotient in the House. If I contribute nothing else, I clearly increase the Gideon quotient by the massive number of one new Member of Parliament. I also thank the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr Foster), whose public service has been enduring. He has had my congratulations on that already. Their speeches will be a hard act to follow, but I have the advantage of representing Taunton and Wellington, so it should not be too much of a problem.

I give credit to the former Conservative Member for Taunton Deane, Rebecca Pow, who will, I am sure, continue her enthusiasm for gardening and wildlife. She was, of course, a Minister with responsibility for water and for our rivers. I am partial to a dip in the river from time to time, so I was pleased to successfully apply for bathing water status for a stretch of the Tone in Taunton to get the improvement in water quality that we desperately need in our rivers down in Taunton. The River Tone is the silver thread that joins Wellington to Taunton to the levels, close to where the famous cakes were burned near the King Alfred Inn at Burrowbridge.

I also pay tribute to the former Liberal Democrat MP Jeremy Browne, the Member of Parliament for Taunton Deane from 2005 to 2015. He served as a Home Office and a Foreign Office Minister, and remains incredibly well liked in the constituency. He was the first Member to propose a new railway station for Wellington, and I am delighted to have had the Chancellor's assurance in the previous debate that that project will go ahead. I am the eighth Liberal to represent Taunton in Parliament since some guy named Disraeli was defeated by the first one in the 1835 general election. Of course, nothing further was heard of him—at least not in Taunton.

Taunton's parliamentary tradition is very deep-rooted. As the county town with a castle, which today proudly houses the Castle hotel and the superb Museum of Somerset supported by our dynamic town council, its parliamentarians held out in siege after siege. Today, the hard work of so many people in Taunton at the Brewhouse theatre, the Southern Sinfonia, the Bluebirds Theatre Company, the Tacchi-Morris, the Willows and Wetlands visitor centre, the Creative Innovation Centre, Arts

[Mr Gideon Amos]

Taunton, GoCreate Taunton, groups such as Amici and Voce, and the Bradford Players—I have many more—the Taunton Thespians and the @2K Theatre; and in Wellington at the Arts Centre, the Wellesley Theatre, the operatic society, and the Gaumont theatre, which once played host to the Beatles and the Rolling Stones and is now home to the bingo, all comes together to mean that not only do we have a Mecca, but our area is a cultural mecca to which people come from far and wide.

Then, of course, there is the magnificent Somerset county ground, graced by the towers of St James and the minster, where I married Caroline just 28 short years ago. I thank her and our children, Emily, Fraser and Fenner and Felix, from the bottom of my heart for their support. Our schools from North Town and Minerva to Bishop Fox's, Court Fields, Castle, Pyrland, Selworthy and Monkton Wood feed into our nationally renowned Richard Huish College, Bridgwater & Taunton College and University Centre Somerset, which now offers degrees like nursing, in support of the superb staff at Musgrove Park hospital. Funding is urgently needed for the hospital's new maternity unit, because buckets are currently used to catch the rain in the corridors of a building built for the US army—as a temporary building—in 1940.

Similarly, King's and Queen's, Taunton and Wellington's independent schools, make a massive contribution to our area's local economy. We also have a successful home education community that inspires an innovative generation of young people. To all our area's children, I say: "Be yourself. If your name is Gideon, for example, there's no need to change it to get elected to Parliament." That is something I once tried to discuss with the former Member for Tatton. I confess that it has taken me a little time to get to this Chamber—if I had not had to deliver all those bibles to hotels, I would have got here a lot quicker.

All those institutions, together with the UK Hydrographic Office, make Taunton the ideal location for new research and innovation entrepreneurs. It is only 104 minutes from Paddington, so they should all come and enjoy the amazing quality of life that we offer. When they come to Taunton, they will find a ticket office at the station that is still working. I was amazed to hear the right hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) apparently still advocating the closure of ticket offices—a policy about which I can say only "good luck". To encourage people to come to Wellington, I look forward to working hard on the Wellington station project that I mentioned earlier.

I invite the right hon. Lady the Transport Secretary, and the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Wakefield and Rothwell (Simon Lightwood), to visit the project. On their visit, I hope that they will enjoy a glass of famous Sheppy's or Taunton cider—or, to pronounce it correctly for *Hansard*, zyder—at the Ring of Bells, the Green Dragon or the Pump House in Tonedale, in a Rocket and Bird glass with some Somerdale cheese and perhaps some Bumblee's relish, followed by a meal at Guddi and Gikki, Maliha and Taj, the Little Wine Shop or Augustus. They are ideal for planning visits to key organisations in the constituency, like WPA, Pritex or indeed the 40 Commando Royal Marines at Norton Manor camp.

I was delighted to support the Royal Marines, with the help of former Royal Marine Paddy Ashdown—raising an ultimately successful petition to gain a U-turn on the previous Government's shocking proposal to close down the entire facility. In his maiden speech the other day, my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Cameron Thomas) drew attention to the huge sacrifice that previous generations made so that we are all free to sit in this Chamber today. My service in the Territorial Army was pretty minimal, but my father, FJC "Jim" Amos CBE, and my mother, Geraldine Amos MBE, both served in world war two, following their fathers who served in the trenches. I remember discussing it with them all.

When I was growing up, hon. Members will not be surprised to hear that the atmosphere and the memories of war loomed large in discussions around meal tables. Is it not that generation's courage and bravery, not only in rebuilding Britain but in defeating fascism in the first place, that demand our respect? They demand that we do everything we can to defend the liberal and democratic values that make this country so great. Their bravery surely also demands that all hon. Members, on both sides of the House, always say no to those who would stir up division, despair and hatred for nothing more than votes, because they have nothing positive to offer people.

It is the greatest privilege of my life to serve the residents of Taunton and Wellington—from Hatch Beauchamp, Helland and North Curry in the east to Whiteball, West Buckland, and Sampfords Moor and Arundel in the west; and from Bishopswood, Churchinford and Stoke St Mary in the south to Pickney, West Monckton and Kingston St Mary in the north—in this House. I am here to do one thing: work for them and stand up for them to those in power whenever that is the right thing to do. I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to begin that duty today.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call Kevin Bonavia to make his maiden speech.

6.59 pm

Kevin Bonavia (Stevenage) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and congratulations on your own election. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Taunton and Wellington (Mr Amos) on his excellent speech. Today is my first opportunity to speak on behalf of the people who have sent me to this House, the residents of the tremendous town of Stevenage and the vibrant villages of Knebworth, Codicote, Datchworth and Aston. It is such a special honour and responsibility to represent the place that I am proud to call home.

Stevenage itself is a trailblazer town, the UK's very first new town, created by the transformative Labour Government of 1945 to deal with the last great housing emergency after the second world war. It was built around the old town of Stevenage, which made its name many centuries ago as the first staging post on the Great North road from London to Edinburgh. It is also a town ringed by beautiful villages, including Knebworth, the site of many great, world-famous music festivals over recent years.

I would like to record my thanks to my immediate predecessor, Stephen McPartland. I am not sure how much I have in common with him, apart from our shared birthday and our height—or lack of—but what I do know is that, when he cared deeply about a matter, he was a

tenacious advocate for it, including notably in being a champion of those affected by the cladding crisis following the awful Grenfell fire.

I am also mindful that Stevenage has been represented by two amazing women Labour MPs. The first was the redoubtable Shirley Williams, who represented Stevenage up until 1979. In her own maiden speech of 1964, she described Stevenage as a microcosm of modern Britain. That was at a time when the new town of Stevenage was being built, providing the new homes and jobs that attracted people of all backgrounds to start new lives and families there. Our town was, is and always will be a town of aspiration.

Stevenage makes a leading contribution to health and security around the world, whether it is our internationally renowned hub for life sciences, with GlaxoSmithKline being the town's biggest employer and the brand-new Autolus facility manufacturing T-cell therapies for cancer; or our indomitable defence industry, with MBDA manufacturing the Storm Shadow missiles, which I am deeply proud are being provided by this country to Ukraine to fight back against Vladimir Putin's horrific invasion, and the Airbus Defence and Space UK headquarters, which provides a quarter of all satellites used in space. They say the sky is the limit; we in Stevenage like to travel that little bit further.

Yet to be at the forefront of modernity, we need to empower people with the ambition, the vision and the skills to make it happen. This was something the next Labour MP for Stevenage, Barbara Follett, championed formidably. In her own maiden speech in 1997, she noted the need to equip more young people to take on the skilled careers that would be possible with the high-tech employers in Stevenage. She was then part of the Labour Government who placed education at the heart of their programme from early years right through to advanced qualifications.

Now the challenge in Stevenage, as across so much of the country, is to ensure that there are homes in which people can grow up, work hard and grow old with dignity. It is a painful irony that the original residents of our new town now watch as their children and grandchildren face down the lost dream of home ownership or even renting a home. That is why I am so pleased that a priority for this Labour Government is to build many more new homes to meet this housing emergency, including new towns just like Stevenage.

I am delighted that another Labour woman from Stevenage, Baroness Sharon Taylor, is a Housing Minister in the other place. I am looking forward to working with her and others in our new Government to help build the homes that Stevenage and our country so desperately need. So I am proud of the legacy of Labour women from Stevenage.

It was pointed out to me recently that I am the first male Labour MP for Stevenage. I have looked into that, and it turns out I am not. That first goes to Philip Asterley Jones, elected in 1945. He deserves to be remembered for championing the building of Stevenage New Town, despite many misgivings at the time.

I then thought I might be another first. One reaction to my election that I had not been expecting came from the country of my birth, Malta, where it has been proclaimed that I am the first Maltese-born Member of this House. I have looked into that one too, and again there was another first—Gerald Strickland, the Member for Lancaster in the 1920s and subsequently Prime Minister of Malta. I can confirm I have no plans to follow his career path.

I think the point in life is that being the first is not as important as acknowledging how you achieve your dreams and ambitions—not alone, but thanks to the support of others. My mum and dad moved to this country from Malta when I was an eight-year-old boy. They worked hard so that my brother and I could wish for nothing. I was also lucky to have teachers who believed in me so that I could believe in myself.

From a young age, my mum and dad instilled in me that, if you see a problem, you roll up your sleeves and you fix it. Since then, I have done just that. I have worked as a solicitor, getting justice for victims of the phone hacking scandal. I also served for over a decade as a councillor and an armed forces champion, helping residents with their problems and focusing on the needs of veterans. As someone who came to this country as a little boy, I have also campaigned for the welfare of child refugees, who have never had the luck and support that I had. It is that instinctive drive to serve and make a difference to people's lives that brought me to Stevenage, the town of aspiration.

As I talk about championing the needs of residents, I want to touch on the topic of today's debate—a topic that matters a great deal to my constituents. I am delighted that the very first Bill of this new Government is to improve our railways by establishing Great British Railways and bringing train operators into public ownership. Residents in Stevenage and our villages are strivers: they work hard to build a better life for themselves and their families. Key to that is a properly integrated rail network that is affordable, on time and accessible.

Alongside my strong support for the Bill, I will be lobbying for the restoration of the Knebworth express to bring back a fast train in and out of London to Knebworth station, because those who live in villages have no less aspiration to succeed than those who live in towns. I will also work hard to ensure that accessibility in Stevenage station is a priority, from ensuring a full-time working lift to securing the future of the ticket office.

As I start the work in my constituency of returning the role of MP to its founding purpose, public service, I also stand ready to support our new Government in delivering on the change that our country needs. I ask the new Government just one thing: look back to the great reforming agendas of the Labour Governments in 1945, 1964 and 1997, who built our new town, revolutionised the life prospects of a generation and transformed our public services. Aspiration was their watchword, and aspiration has remained the very essence of towns such as Stevenage ever since. Now look to the present day in 2024: let us recapture the imagination, innovation and vision that our predecessors showed, and carry it forward to transform the lives of this generation and the generations to come.

6.58 pm

Siân Berry (Brighton Pavilion) (Green): I thank all the Members who have given their maiden speeches. It was moving to hear all of them, particularly that of the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Josh Dean). I am making a note of everybody who mentions youth services, and he did some very good advocacy: he is on my list.

[Siân Berry]

It is great to be speaking on my first Bill in the House, and that it is a Bill that brings passenger railway services back into public hands. The fact that this measure made it through the dramatic sift of Labour policy that took place before the election, and is among the first and most urgent pieces of new legislation we are looking at, is I believe in no small way due to the Secretary of State's own commitments to this policy and her dedicated internal advocacy for it. I wish that more of her colleagues had been so willing and determined to push for similar Bills to bring other privatised services such as water and the big six energy companies into public hands, but that does not diminish my delight this evening. I recently mentioned to her how much I was looking forward to scrutinising and where necessary helping to improve other upcoming Bills under her remit, including the buses Bill and the more detailed railways Bill. This is all great work.

As far as this Bill's key principle is concerned, the Secretary of State will have noticed that public ownership is popular with me and is popular with the people. In 2024, that principle is supported for the railways by 76% of the public. That support has risen steadily for the past decade; it was even backed before the election by 60% of those intending to vote Conservative.

Bringing the railways back into public hands has been in my party's programme for as long as I can remember. It is also close to the hearts of my constituents in Brighton Pavilion, for whom the legacy of the failed policy of privatisation is one of poor services, inefficiencies and very high costs for passengers. An annual season ticket between Brighton and London currently costs my constituents the best part of £6,000. That cost has risen by approximately 40% in the past 10 years—far more than wages in Brighton have risen. In the face of service cuts and failure to invest, passengers have had to form local pressure groups such as the Preston Park Train Campaign to save services. In so many stations, understaffing and disabled access remain dreadful, creating appalling discrimination against passengers—and don't get me started on toilet provision.

I am not just here to praise the Bill or celebrate its principle. I do have some questions and comments—all to be constructively taken, I hope. The Bill is very short and very simple, and I wonder whether it could benefit from some additional detail and a wider scope. I will keep my comments brief at this stage, but on each point I would welcome more detail from the Secretary of State on her thinking. I also request a meeting with her to discuss the issues before Committee of the whole House.

First, I want to talk about the exceptions from the Bill. From the information I have, it appears that the Bill will not bring into public ownership the regional services currently let by concession contracts, including the Elizabeth line, Mersey Rail and the London Overground, or any of the services on open-access routes, including Eurostar, Grand Central, Heathrow Express, Hull Trains and Lumo. For passengers, hearing the Government promise to bring private operators into public hands, but then hearing that a service they use will be excluded, will be a disappointment. I hope we will hear more soon about how those gaps will be filled.

Also out of scope, as the Bill's title indicates, are rail freight services. The public might have expected those private operators to be among the first for action, especially as getting freight off the roads and on to rail has so many benefits in addressing road danger, congestion and climate emissions.

Another exception from this Bill to bring passenger railways back into public hands is the rolling stock companies. Quite honestly, most members of the public do not have much awareness of it, but the rolling stock in which we travel is another public asset that is worthy of public investment and should not be held merely for private rent and profit by companies that add no real value to the service. At the very least, the Bill could have included a prohibition on new arrangements of that kind.

Finally, I feel that there is a potential gap in the Government's plans around rail devolution. The Bill's definition of "public sector company" will allow franchises to pass only to companies wholly owned by the Secretary of State or her counterparts in Wales and Scotland, not to those owned by other elected bodies whose remit includes, or might in future include, managing transport in an integrated way within an area of the country. I am very interested in further exploring the Secretary of State's thinking on that, because a Green principle close to my heart is subsidiarity: making sure that ownership and power are devolved to the lowest and most practical level.

In the case of integrated, multimodal transport planning and investment, particularly for day-to-day travel, the best level is often a regional or sub-regional travel-to-work area. At that level of planning, sustainable travel across different modes can be linked up in a responsive network with convenient interchanges, rational timetables and shared ticketing across modes. Profitable commuter routes on a railway might also directly help to cut car dependency in isolated villages by subsidising essential connectivity by bus, for example.

This kind of transport planning is best done alongside and in tandem with planning for new homes and businesses, for which the right scale is also a regional or sub-regional area, working with the involvement of local authorities, people and workplaces. Like many people, I am slightly concerned about the centralising tendency that we can detect in a range of recent actions from the leadership of our new Government; I hope that it will not dominate transport and planning policies in this House. If the Secretary of State agrees to meet me as requested, I will be very interested to hear more about how she expects the upcoming devolution Bill to interact with this Bill and with the future railways Bill in respect of her plans for how centralised the future planning, management and ownership of transport as a whole will be.

Admittedly, the places in England where this kind of devolution applies, and where rail franchises might sensibly pass to companies owned by cities and regions in the near future, are currently very few. However, when we have franchises serving nearby metro mayor areas, such as TransPennine Express and Northern, which are already under the wing of the Department for Transport; when the Mayor of London already has his sights firmly set on taking over specific services; and when there might, as I hope, be greater devolution of powers to combined authorities and areas in the south-east region and Sussex, where I now represent many people dependent on rail services, it does seem strange to introduce a Bill that appears to need amendment to rule in such an exciting prospect. When the Government are about to give more powers to local authorities to run buses,

it also seems strange not to help them to work together to run suitable railways. Will the Secretary of State explain what plans there are to better link up railways and bus services? Will she discuss them with me before Committee?

Those are all my comments and questions. I am very much looking forward to the future, and I am looking to help build the best future we can from this new and refreshing approach of public ownership. I reiterate how pleased I am to be making such a speech, rather than one bitterly complaining about a Government who have completely the wrong idea; I hope that my questions and cautions will be taken in that spirit.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call Jon Pearce to make his maiden speech.

7.16 pm

Jon Pearce (High Peak) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and congratulations on your elevation. I congratulate all today's maiden speakers, and particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Kevin Bonavia). Stevenage is very lucky to have such a fine advocate. He is an impossible act to follow—perhaps I am like Kula Shaker coming on after Oasis in 1996—but I will do my best.

I assure you that I will be brief, Madam Deputy Speaker. The best advice I had in prepping for this was from a good friend who said, "No matter how good a speech is, no one has ever said, 'I wish that had been longer.'" [Hon. Members: "More!"] Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech on a Bill that is so important for my constituents in High Peak, for the country and for me personally.

When I was young, my father worked on British Rail as a storeman. The stores were vast warehouses teeming with workers in train manufacturing and maintenance. The privatisation of Britain's railways by John Major's Government resulted in thousands of job losses. Between 1990 and 1997, the number of rail workers in this country decreased from a quarter of a million to 130,000. Those are not just numbers; they are real lives, like those of my dad's friends and workmates. The fear that my dad would be next, and about what that would mean for my family, was an unwelcome guest that lingered far too long in our house. Childhood experiences like that never leave you.

The dignity and opportunity of a secure, well-paid job must be the foundation on which we deliver the economic growth that High Peak and Britain need. I look forward to using my experience as an employment lawyer to help us to deliver a new deal for working people.

Were the pain and the sacrifices made by the families affected by the privatisation of our railways worth it? Did privatisation deliver the competition, the greater efficiencies and the better railway services that it promised? The commuters in Glossop, New Mills, Whaley Bridge, Chapel and Buxton will tell you with barely a dissenting voice, "No." Frequent delays, cancellations and overcrowding have become the norm, while rail fares have increased by more than 40% in real terms, meaning that passengers in Britain face some of the highest fares in Europe. Rail privatisation means pay more, get less.

Research suggests that every pound invested in public transport generates £4 in economic benefits. Since privatisation, too many of those pounds have been going into shareholder pockets and not into improving services for passengers. In 2022-23 alone, the rolling stock companies paid out more than £400 million to their shareholders. That injustice is not fair on my constituents in High Peak, and it is holding back our economy.

High Peak should be the best place to live in the country. We have: strong communities; a rich history of tourism dating back 2,000 years to when the Romans developed the first spa around the warm water spring that still bubbles under Buxton to this day; a rich history in the arts, being home to both Vivienne Westwood and Hilary Mantel; and a rich history in delivering access to nature, being the setting for the mass trespass and Britain's first national park, the Peak District.

High Peak is the most beautiful constituency in the country. *[Interruption.]* I am sensing maybe a few murmurings. I have read my brief, and I respect the importance of being accurate, so while writing this speech, I put down my pen and took a moment to gaze out of my window. With the vista of Hope valley in the foreground and the majesty of the tors beyond, I feel comfortable in reaffirming that High Peak is truly without equal.

Sadly, despite our beauty—that is High Peak's, not my own—we are all too often overlooked. At the northernmost point of Derbyshire, not quite in Greater Manchester, and just on the edge of South Yorkshire, we have been no one's priority for too long. No more. It is high time that High Peak got its fair share—our fair share of economic growth, our fair share of better public services and our fair share of investment. Integrated transport through Great British Railways, taking back control of our buses and building the Mottram bypass—the latter of which I commend my predecessor Robert Largan on championing—have the potential to be the catalyst, moving High Peak from the edge of everywhere to the economic centre, connecting the two core northern cities of Manchester and Sheffield. That is how we will deliver High Peak its future back, attract business investment, encourage tourism and restore pride in our towns again. That future starts where my story began, with the railways back in public ownership.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call Claire Young to make her maiden speech.

7.22 pm

Claire Young (Thornbury and Yate) (LD): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for this opportunity to make my maiden speech. May I congratulate you on your recent election? I also congratulate all those who have made maiden speeches today, particularly the hon. Member for High Peak (Jon Pearce), who spoke so passionately about the beauty of his constituency and the childhood experiences that he brings to this House.

I am honoured to have been elected by the people of Thornbury and Yate to be their voice and champion here in Parliament. Ours is a beautiful and hugely varied rural constituency, with the towns of Thornbury, Yate and Chipping Sodbury and many villages, stretching from Hill, Falfield and Charfield in the north to Bridge Yate,

[Claire Young]

Siston and Wick in the south. To the east is the Cotswold escarpment, part of a designated national landscape. To the west is the Severn estuary, a Ramsar wetland of international importance and formerly home to the Aust ferry, made famous by Bob Dylan.

There is much worth visiting locally, from historic attractions such as Dyrham Park and Acton Court, to the more modern. Bristol Zoo Project carries out important international conservation work, while not far away—I hesitate to mention this, when my leader, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Ed Davey) might be listening—there is an artificial inland surfing lake called the Wave.

There is a real history of innovation locally, although sadly my own parish of Frampton Cotterell's claim to the invention of the Stetson hat appears to be little more than an urban legend. However, we can be proud that the pioneer of vaccination, Edward Jenner, started his medical training in Chipping Sodbury. Nowadays, many of my constituents work in cutting-edge industries in our region, such as aerospace. With a background in maths and software engineering, I take a keen interest in seeing those industries flourish, and I want to ensure that our young people can benefit from the opportunities they bring.

My constituency is of course more than its landscape and history; it is the people who live there and their fantastic community spirit. I saw that in my own village during the pandemic, when hundreds of volunteers rallied to help others. Whether it is the big lunch in Chipping Sodbury, the Yate Ageing Better festival, Thornbury carnival or any myriad other events and groups, they all contribute to making the constituency a wonderful place to live.

I thank my predecessor Luke Hall, who served Thornbury and Yate for nine years, during which time he championed neonatal care leave and held posts in the Department for Education and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. I wish him and his family all the best for the future. I also thank his predecessor, the former Pensions Minister Sir Steve Webb, who has been a great source of wisdom for me and is fondly remembered by many constituents. He set a very high bar for all his successors, and I will do my best to meet it. While I am thanking people, I put on record my gratitude to Councillor Maggie Tyrrell, who has recently succeeded me as the leader of South Gloucestershire council. I know that the council is in safe hands as I bring that experience to this place.

I am grateful for the opportunity to make this speech in this important debate, because if we are to tackle the climate crisis and cut congestion on our roads, we must get rail services back on track to give people genuine alternatives to get around effectively. There are currently three railway stations in my constituency. Yate station was reopened in the 1980s, and we desperately need the proposed redevelopment. I will also be seeking to ensure that the funding for half-hourly services is extended beyond the current end date of 2026. That will not only benefit Yate, but provide an hourly train for the new station planned at Charfield.

The station at Pilning is a parliamentary station, with just one train running a week to avoid formally closing it. Its location, near the growing industrial location of Severnside, means that if properly reopened, it is prime placed to help the many workers who travel from south Wales to make the trip without a car. The third station is Severn Beach. Once a seaside resort, the line now serves commuters. However, commuters can be left disappointed by flooding on the line, as well as the fact that the service is not more frequent. Rail campaigners are also keen to see other stations reopened, such as Coalpit Heath and Thornbury, but for that to be possible, we need national investment in Westerleigh junction to increase capacity and unlock this potential. I hope that the Secretary of State will commit to making that part of the integrated infrastructure review that was referenced earlier.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) said, ultimately passengers are not interested in who runs the trains; they simply want them to run on time and for the tickets to be affordable. Given the continued squeeze on people's finances, we need an immediate freeze on rail fares and our fragmented ticketing system needs simplifying to cut costs for commuters. We also need to think about integration with other forms of public transport. In my constituency, we have seen serious cuts to local bus services, with many villages left with no regular buses at all. My aim in this place will be to champion the rights of people to have affordable and green methods of transport, whether they live in rural or urban areas.

In conclusion, I promise to work tirelessly for my constituents, not only on fixing our railways, but on other issues too, such as the fact that our schools are among the lowest funded in the country and that it is almost impossible to register with an NHS dentist locally. I look forward to working constructively with right hon. and hon. Members across the House to address these problems and ensure that the people of Thornbury and Yate get the fair deal they deserve.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call Gurinder Josan to make his maiden speech.

7.29 pm

Gurinder Josan (Smethwick) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to make my maiden speech in this august Chamber. I join other hon. Members in welcoming you to your place, and the ministerial team and the shadow ministerial team to their places as well. I congratulate all hon. Members who have made their maiden speeches today; we have heard excellent contributions. I thank, in particular, the hon. Member for Thornbury and Yate (Claire Young), who described her constituency so eloquently that it makes one want to visit, but those who know me will know that a visit by me would be accompanied with a Labour party campaign.

May I also please take this opportunity to thank all the staff across the parliamentary estate who have worked incredibly hard and always courteously to help me and, I am sure, many other hon. Members to establish ourselves in this place?

I also take the opportunity to thank the voters of Smethwick, who have entrusted me with the honour and responsibility of being their elected Member of Parliament. It is indeed a great honour to stand here today, and I give the voters my word that I will work to repay their trust to the best of my abilities.

Of course, I would not be here without the support of my family. My grandfathers, Bhan Singh and Niranjan Singh, arrived in the UK in 1956 and 1957 and carried out manual jobs in foundries and brickworks respectively. They came with hope for a better life for them and their families, but they also came with a strong belief that, with hard work, they would be able to forge a better life in Great Britain.

My father, Swaran Singh Josan, was 10 years old when he arrived in Smethwick in 1958. He had most of his education here, and he went on to work as an engineer for the Post Office, which went on to become British Telecom. Alongside that, in 1975 he, my mum and my uncle established a family business—a hardware store and plumbers' merchant—on the high street in Smethwick, and my brothers continue to run the business today. My father was also active in his trade union and the Labour party. He was elected to Sandwell council in 1986 and subsequently three times. Unfortunately, he passed away in 1999, when he was the cabinet member for housing in Sandwell. Being in this place was always his dream. I believe that he would be proud of this achievement.

It is a convention of the House to speak in good terms about one's predecessor. My predecessor is the right hon. John Spellar, and those who know him will know two things. First, it does not require convention for me to speak well of him. Secondly, bearing in mind that his phone ringtone is the theme tune to "The Godfather", it is a convention that I dare not ignore. John was first elected to the House in a by-election in 1982 in Birmingham Northfield. He was then elected as Member of Parliament for Warley West in 1992, and for Warley in 1997. In total, John gave over 32 years of service to the House, during which he served in ministerial and shadow ministerial roles. In addition, he gave stalwart service to the people he was elected to represent and is always greeted fondly across the whole constituency. John also played a considerable role over all those years in working to keep the Labour party in the centre ground—the ground where elections are won and lives can be changed for the better. He leaves me with incredibly big shoes to fill. I am delighted that he is being elevated to the other place.

Smethwick existed as the name for the constituency between 1918 and 1997 and has been brought back following the recent boundary changes. The constituency consists of the former Warley constituency and most of the Blackheath ward. It includes the football ground of West Bromwich Albion—the Baggies. It is an extremely diverse place with a relatively young demographic and a significant black, Asian and minority ethnic community, particularly from the Muslim and Sikh backgrounds.

Smethwick was mentioned in the Domesday Book. Its people are a proud people, who are particularly proud of our industrial heritage. As an example, Smethwick is the location of the Soho Foundry, created by Matthew Boulton and James Watt in 1775, where the oldest working steam engine in the world was built.

Historically, in addition to my predecessor, Smethwick also saw Christabel Pankhurst standing in the 1918 general election just after women were given the vote. Oswald Mosley was the MP between 1926 and 1929. Smethwick also had the shortest serving MP ever elected. Alfred Dobbs was elected in the 1945 general election. However, the day after the election he was killed in a car accident on his way to Westminster. Being aware of that record, I waited three days after the election before driving extra carefully down to Parliament.

Perhaps the most infamous previous MP for the seat was Peter Griffiths, the Tory party candidate who was elected in 1964 after running a disgraceful and nakedly racist campaign with a disgusting slogan, which I will not repeat as it used the racist N-word. The election and racial tensions at the time prompted a visit a few months later to the constituency by Malcolm X, which was just about a week before he was killed. Thankfully, Peter Griffiths's term was brought to an end by Andrew Fauld, who defeated him in the 1966 general election. Smethwick was undergoing huge changes at the time. In 1967, it saw the appointment of the first black headteacher in the UK, Tony O'Connor, at Bearwood primary school.

The general election was about change. After 14 years, the British people have voted for change and given a huge mandate to the Prime Minister and the Labour party. The recent King's Speech contained Bills that will bring huge change to the country, our public services and the lives of the people we represent. The Prime Minister can be sure that his programme has my full support.

Among those Bills, the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Bill will bring much-needed change on our railways. Its provisions that will bring franchises into public control, along with provisions that will set up Great British Railways, were widely discussed and understood by voters during the general election. It is clear that voters support the changes proposed in the Bill.

For me, the election was also about change across our communities. One example of that change in Smethwick is the fact that 60 years after that disgraceful racist campaign, I—a child and grandchild of immigrants—can be elected to this House. That change is the result of many people across Smethwick and Sandwell working hard to build relationships and understanding across all communities and ensuring that we deliver on the aspirations of all our people.

Smethwick is an incredibly diverse yet harmonious place. It is my community. By that, I mean it is the street I live on, the park opposite, the church on Church Hill Street, the Jamia mosque on Oldbury Road, the Bangladeshi mosques in north Smethwick, the Somali community centre, the Smethwick Asian Sheltered and Residential Association, SAFS caring family support, St Albans community centre, Better Understanding of Dementia for Sandwell, the Royal British Legion branches and clubs, Brushstrokes, Brandhall Labour club, the schools where I am a governor, the gurdwaras where I pray, the high street where I worked and so much more. That is my community.

Yet in Smethwick we also have our challenges. Some of those spilt out during the election, as they did in other places. The election saw the rise of smaller parties and independents, including those driven by foreign policy issues and others such as the Reform party. I am chair of trustees at Hope Not Hate Charitable Trust, and I see how hate and aggression increasingly define our public discourse, particularly on online platforms, but also more and more in person. It is a responsibility of all of us to challenge and address that, and to ensure that kindness is the basis of all that we do. To those who

[Gurinder Josan]

did not vote for me in Smethwick, I say: I am still your Member of Parliament and I still want to talk to you about the issues that concern you.

Many Members have said that being in this place is the honour of our lives, so over the weekend I thought about that and questioned why we say it. What came to my mind is that people have voted for us—they have gone out there, put a cross by our names and put their trust in us. We are in the mother of all Parliaments, and we will make decisions that will change this country. Those are all reasons why it is a real honour to be here. But the biggest reason why it is an honour to be in this Chamber is the people. We have heard so many excellent maiden speeches over the past couple of weeks, which signify the strength of this Chamber. The Chamber without its people is just Benches, and Benches do not do anything. Institutions without people in them do not do anything. It is the people who will bring change. The honour is being here alongside so many fantastic people. I may disagree with those on other Benches, fundamentally and robustly, but it is an honour to be here alongside every single one of them.

I have always been driven by a strong sense of humanity, fairness and justice. My upbringing and my Sikhi faith are key to my beliefs. I am reminded of the line in Gurbani written by Guru Nanak:

"Ham Nahi Changae, Bura Nahi Koi."

I am not good; no one is bad. That draws attention to the equality of all of us, regardless of any of our attributes. A good friend in interfaith circles describes Sikhi in a four-letter word: love. We believe that God is omnipresent, across and within all of creation. So to love God is to love other people. For those of no faith, it does no harm to love others in any case.

I consider myself incredibly lucky. I have the incredible support of my family: my wife Harvinder, my son Pavandeep, my daughter Gurkirta, my mum Bhajan Kaur Josan, my nephews Gagandeep, Puneetpal and Ishmeet, who are all here in the Gallery. I have been elected to represent a constituency that is embedded in my heart. I sit on the Benches of a Government who will serve the people. I know that there is incredibly hard work ahead; that there will be disagreements and robust words, and difficult decisions will need to be made. But I am committed to serving this House and the voters of Smethwick to the best of my ability.

7.42 pm

Olly Glover (Didcot and Wantage) (LD): I congratulate you on your election to the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker. I also congratulate the Secretary of State for Transport and her colleagues on their appointments, and I wish them all the best.

I will start by giving the House a commitment that I will not make any laboured or tedious comments about curly British Rail sandwiches. I welcome the fact that the new Government are giving legislative time to transport at this early stage, given that it is a vital policy area that is often neglected—some might even consider it a Cinderella topic for this House. It is a positive contrast to the previous Conservative Government, who presided over industrial relations chaos, utterly incomprehensible contract extensions for failing train operators such as Avanti West Coast—which many Members have been plagued by—and CrossCountry, and a lack of any meaningful fares or industry reform.

I am one of few Members of this House to arrive here following a career on the railways. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Smethwick (Gurinder Josan), and I commend him for his excellent speech praising the diversity of his seat. I have had the privilege of visiting Soho train maintenance depot during my career on the railways in the west midlands. I would like to give some insights from my professional experience working both for state-owned Network Rail and private sector train operating companies.

It is important for everyone in this debate to remember that nearly all the infrastructure and the operation of a third of all daily train services are already publicly owned. The previous Labour Government rightly took action following the safety and financial failures of private sector Railtrack by creating Network Rail in 2002, which was quickly able to tackle safety and performance issues. However, my experience of two stints working at Network Rail for a total of 10 years is that, as a very large, publicly owned organisation, at times, silo working and bureaucracy can be barriers to achieving results.

Some of the issues facing Network Rail either in or near my constituency include infrastructure reliability problems on the great western main line, severely overrunning engineering works affecting the Botley Road and many local residents in Oxford, and a very long construction processing for Reading Green Park station. It is important to note that being in the public sector does not inherently make everything better. In the privatised train operating companies that I worked for, some of the main barriers to progress were the result not so much of them being private sector, but the lack of incentive to invest due to short franchise or contract terms, and micromanagement by the Department for Transport and the Treasury.

In September 2013, I joined London Midland—a train operator that notionally was in the last year of its franchise. That meant that key investment decisions were deferred, such as on-train wi-fi, timetable improvements and car park enhancements. It felt as if I was caught in a "Star Trek"-style temporal paradox, since when I left London Midland in May 2017 it was still in the last year of its franchise, as no decisions had been made about the franchising process. That is an example of how the potential private sector benefit to the railway has often not been realised because of the flawed approach to franchising, rather than the nature of the private sector.

There are examples of positive private sector contributions, perhaps the most significant of which is the benefit of Chiltern Railways' 20-year franchise, which saw investment in new stations such at Warwick Parkway and the Evergreen upgrade of the Chiltern main line, both of which delivered significant passenger benefits and were genuinely heavily funded by the private sector. Had we had more long-term franchises like that, things might be very different today.

The Bill will not tackle the issue of trains being owned privately and leased back, often increasing the whole cost to operators. The current leasing arrangements can also create perverse incentives on rolling stock retention as a result of cliff edges imposed by lease durations and renewal dates. This has created shortages of capacity on a number of parts of the network in recent years,

as short-term financial decisions have been taken to avoid rolling stock lease extensions—for example, on Southern with class 455 trains and Great Northern with class 365 trains.

Government plans to leave freight and open access operators in private hands may indicate inconsistency with the view that the private sector cannot deliver good services. Most seriously, the state versus private sector debate does nothing to tackle the lack of clear vision for what the Government want the railway to achieve or deliver. As other Members have said, fares continue to be complicated and often expensive. There is a lack of integrated timetables within the railway and with other transport modes, and the role of the Office of Rail and Road regulator needs examination.

I am therefore pleased that the new Government have further plans that I hope will address those points. I implore them to move beyond the public versus private debate and focus on what current and prospective rail users need. Doing so will be crucial to achieving a real focus on customer service, which is needed to grow patronage and achieve modal shift, so that the railway can thrive as part of a wider, sustainable and efficient transport system.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call Laurence Turner to make his maiden speech.

7.47 pm

Laurence Turner (Birmingham Northfield) (Lab): Congratulations on your election, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is a privilege to follow so many excellent maiden speeches this evening, including from my hon. Friends the Members for Hertford and Stortford (Josh Dean), for South Ribble (Mr Foster), for Stevenage (Kevin Bonavia), for Smethwick (Gurinder Josan) and for High Peak (Jon Pearce), and the hon. Members for Thornbury and Yate (Claire Young), for Taunton and Wellington (Mr Amos) and for Brighton Pavilion (Siân Berry). I apologise if I have missed any. They were a tribute to the wealth of talent and experience in this Parliament.

I am grateful for the opportunity to make my first speech in support of this Bill, which will hopefully lead the permanent way to better value for taxpayers and better passenger services. Transport has sometimes been seen in this place as an unfashionable Department—a stopping-off point for ambitious politicians on the way up, and occasionally on the way down—but it is clear that this attitude is not held by this Front Bench team or this new Government. There is, however, some historical basis for that view. When Barbara Castle was appointed Transport Minister, Harold Wilson told her:

"Your job is to produce the integrated transport policy we promised in our manifesto. I could work something out myself given half an hour."

When Nicholas Ridley told Margaret Thatcher that he wanted to privatise the railways, she responded:

"Railway privatisation will be the Waterloo of this government. Never mention the railways to me again."

Down the years, hon. Members on the Conservative Benches must have privately wished that Mrs Thatcher's view had been taken to heart by those who came after. In fact, given the previous Government's record of reclassifying Network Rail into the public sector, abandoning the traditional franchising model and nationalising a quarter of passenger services, I half expected to see Conservative Members joining Labour tonight in support of the Bill.

It was a privilege to work as staff in the shadow Transport team during some of those long years in opposition. May I take this opportunity to say how welcome it is to see the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood), in her place? She brings real expertise to the role from her time as Chair of the Transport Committee and in the shadow Transport team. She will be an outstanding Minister, and I am grateful for her support and guidance down the years.

Another shadow Transport Minister in that team was Richard Burden, my Labour predecessor for Birmingham Northfield. Richard ably represented Northfield for 27 years. He is well remembered in this House for his boundless enthusiasm for the motor industry, and for his steadfast commitment to social justice, which has continued into what cannot be called a retirement, through his activism in pursuit of better local health services and support for the humanitarian cause in Palestine. His support meant a lot to me during the campaign, and I am sure his friends on both sides of the House extend their good wishes to him.

I also want to pay tribute to my immediate predecessor. In the space of just one Parliament, Gary Sambrook became well known locally and, through the 1922 Committee, in the Conservative party nationally. He and other candidates fought a campaign that was untouched by the disgraceful tactic of intimidation that was witnessed elsewhere in Birmingham and which must have no place in our public life. I am certain that this is not the end for Gary in Birmingham politics, and I wish him well.

To talk about Birmingham is to tell a tale of two cities. That is as true of the Northfield constituency as it is elsewhere. Pockets of relative affluence sit cheek by jowl with deprivation. The historic village centres of Kings Norton and Northfield lie a short distance from the new estates, like Weoley Castle, that were built to serve the needs of Birmingham's growing economy. The fortunes of the constituency rise and fall with those of Birmingham, but the seat is also defined by its outer estates—New Frankley, Rubery and Allens Cross—which are distant and distinct from the city centre. All these communities face common challenges, including crime and antisocial behaviour, and the decline of the traditional high street. They have been hit hard by cuts to neighbourhood policing and by the decision last year to not proceed with the regeneration of Northfield's high street. There is much to do.

For most of the constituency's history it was best known for the Longbridge car plant, which also drew in workers from the surrounding areas of West Heath, Rednal and beyond. For 100 years, Longbridge paid handsomely into the national purse, and it was essential to our defence in times of crisis. During the second world war, Longbridge and its shadow factories produced many of the armaments and aircraft that kept our nation free. If the House will excuse a diversion, I am reminded at this point of my grandad's story, often repeated with pride to us as children, about his time stationed at the air defences at Billeseley Common, when he—almost—fired a rocket at an encroaching German plane.

[Laurence Turner]

The site that began as the Austin works was an important part of our national life. At its peak, it employed some 25,000 people. Models from the Austin 7 to the Metro became part of our shared culture. It is hard to believe that next year will mark the 20th anniversary of Longbridge's closure. That occasion must be marked appropriately in Birmingham and in Parliament. The site is now home to an ambitious redevelopment project and, importantly, some manufacturing jobs are returning, but travel just a short distance and the scars of that closure are still plain to see. The male employment rate remains a staggering 10 points lower than in Birmingham as a whole. Shamefully, average monthly wages are £300 lower in the constituency than they were in 2010, after inflation. The scourge of in-work poverty is never far away.

Today, my constituents are most likely to be employed in public services. I am proud to be the son of two teachers even if, sadly, the headquarters of the NASUWT, the Teachers' Union, which my parents were members of for many years, is just over the border in the neighbouring constituency of Bromsgrove. There will be more to say—much more—in this Parliament about the funding and delivery of services in Birmingham. It is enough to say today that after 14 years of severe cuts, the second city is bleeding, and I welcome the statements that the new Government have made about the importance of putting local government funding on a sustainable footing.

The new Government's plans to establish a fair pay agreement for adult social care, and to reinstate the school support staff negotiating body, will also make a real, material and long overdue difference to thousands of low-paid workers in the Northfield constituency, most of them women, who I was proud to help represent as an officer of the GMB union, and whose skills and professionalism have been undervalued for too long.

If I could achieve one thing in the time I have in this place, it would be to secure improvements to special educational needs and disabilities provision. It is a cause that is close to my heart: I was one of those children. I know what it means to have to fight to avoid being defined by other people's low expectations. I know the stigma that is the mark of attitudes that are still common and from words that I will not repeat in this place. I wish that I could say otherwise, but it never leaves you. I know, too, that a child's life can turn on access to an identification or a single decision about adjustments and resources—or even for the want of a few encouraging words. So if I speak for a moment in anger, it is because too many children and families in Birmingham and beyond face barriers that are higher now than they were 25 years ago, in breach of the promise that life for each generation will be better than for the last. It is not enough to fight for people within a failing system; we have to change it. That is one of the causes I came to Parliament to advocate for, and I welcome the commitments on SEND made by the Education Secretary and the Prime Minister in the early days of this Parliament.

I would like to end by talking about family. Before me came generations of factory workers, electricians and shopkeepers, painters and polishers, cleaners and coachbuilders, jewellery makers and japanners—some escaping famine's shadow—who were born in Birmingham or who came to call the city their home. In the last few weeks, I have thought about those I knew and those I did not, and what they might have said if they could have seen this day, just as the hard accumulated years of millions of working lives form the prologue to the new deal for working people and the history that this Labour Government will make. I have thought, too, about public service—about the challenge of proving to be equal to the task ahead and to the hopes of the people who trusted us to represent them in this place; Madam Deputy Speaker, I hope to be.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call Brian Mathew to make his maiden speech.

7.57 pm

Brian Mathew (Melksham and Devizes) (LD): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker, and congratulations on your new role. I also congratulate the new Secretary of State.

I thank all those who have made maiden speeches, including—I have a list, too—the hon. Members for Hertford and Stortford (Josh Dean), for South Ribble (Mr Foster), for Stevenage (Kevin Bonavia), for High Peak (Jon Pearce), for Smethwick (Gurinder Josan) and for Birmingham Northfield (Laurence Turner), and my hon. Friends the Members for Taunton and Wellington (Mr Amos) and for Thornbury and Yate (Claire Young).

I welcome this debate on passenger railway services, as one of many railway users who all too often finds himself standing up on the Great Western Railway service to London from the west country. We need a better service and whatever makes that happen is, to my mind, welcome. Also welcome would be the opening of a new Devizes Parkway railway station.

I welcome the Chancellor's statement earlier today concerning the review of the Stonehenge tunnel. As a Wiltshire councillor, I have long opposed this abomination of a scheme, given that alternatives exist to solve the problem on the A303—because of its denial of the birthright of everyone, since time immemorial, to see the stones as they travel the ancient way across Salisbury plain by car, by HGV, by charabanc, on horseback, in a cart or on foot, because of the damage that it presents to the environment and, indeed, because of the loss of world heritage status.

Over the last year I have taken part in a number of water blessings with druids, shamans and interfaith practitioners—including Andrew Rumsey, the Bishop of Ramsbury—partly to celebrate our sacred rivers and streams, but also to highlight the pollution threat to our waterways. One of the springs, the Blickmead, is directly threatened by the building of the Stonehenge tunnel. I can testify to the presence of the two huge pike that we witnessed circling the pool below the spring like nature's guardians. I hope that their future can be assured, and a new way found both to protect and to celebrate our beautiful planet and all the life that lives on it.

In a maiden speech, it is traditional that we mention the good work of past MPs. In my case, the wonderful new seat of Melksham and Devizes is made up of three former constituencies. I should mention James Gray, once of North Wiltshire and known by some as the Minister for Vellum because of his valiant efforts to maintain the use of that material in manuscripts, and the right honourable Michelle Donelan, the former Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology

as well as the former MP for the old Chippenham constituency. I first met Michelle in the street in Chippenham some years ago, shortly after she had been first elected. Thanks to a Lyme disease campaigner who had visited her surgery, she had realised that she was suffering from the disease herself. Her openness about that fact has helped to raise the issue of Lyme disease and the importance of early diagnosis, as well as the need for more research on the long-term treatment for victims of the disease, and I commend her for this. The third former constituency to make up Melksham and Devizes was, of course, Devizes itself, and I look forward to meeting its former MP, who is, of course, still in the House as the hon. Member for East Wiltshire (Danny Kruger), to discuss issues of casework.

The Melksham and Devizes constituency stretches from my own Wiltshire council ward of Box and Colerne across the beautiful Bybrook valley and Isambard Kingdom Brunel's iconic Box tunnel all the way to Devizes, via Bradford-on-Avon, Melksham itself and some of the prettiest villages in England, including Steeple Ashton, Urchfont, the Lavingtons, Seend and Bishops Cannings, to name but a few. Despite the beauty of the place, these communities face the same problems as much of the rest of the country. I have already reached out to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to ensure that NHS issues across my constituency are dealt with, including the plight of the GPs of the Three Shires Group of rural surgeries, who have had to take a two-month salary break to keep their surgeries solvent. In Melksham there are calls for the return of basic services at the local hospital, and across the constituency NHS dental services are in freefall, with people wondering how they will be able to afford the cost of basic treatment.

I want to end by reflecting on the words of the late Jo Cox, who famously said that there is more that unites us than divides us. There is also more that we can achieve across parties by working together on issues such as health and social care and, indeed, social housing provision. I look forward in this Parliament to doing just that, not only with members of all parties in this place but with councillors of all parties, across my constituency.

8.4 pm

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South and South Bedfordshire) (Lab): I congratulate all those who have made maiden speeches this evening, especially my hon. Friends the Members for Hertford and Stortford (Josh Dean) and for Stevenage (Kevin Bonavia), fellow eastern region MPs with whom I have campaigned long and hard. It is a delight to see them here in the Chamber.

It is a pleasure to speak in this important debate, and to express my full support for the Bill. I welcome the ministerial team who are taking forward one of the early Bills of a Labour Government. For too long, my constituents have paid high fares in exchange for unreliable train services and crumbling infrastructure. Having commuted throughout my working life—nearly 30 years—I have experienced at first hand the effects of three decades of a fragmented, failing privatised system. Under the Tories, fares rose almost twice as fast as wages and cancellations soared to record levels, while failing train company executives boasted of receiving "free money" from taxpayers. The privatisation experiment has failed; Britain's railways are broken.

UK Government subsidies and passenger fares have benefited not only private companies but foreign Governments. Trains on UK railways are almost entirely owned by foreign state entities. Ironically, that means that my commuting constituents are effectively subsidising rail passengers in France, Germany and Italy, as was explained so well earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough and Thornaby East (Andy McDonald). Labour's bold and progressive plan to bring rail passenger services into public ownership—a popular policy supported by 54% of voters in May—will address and rectify those failures. I might add that it is because we have left the European Union that we now have the freedom to implement this reform without being constrained by the EU's third railway package, which requires that passenger services be opened up to international market competition and the extraction of profit that entails.

Our Bill will save taxpayers tens of millions of pounds annually that are currently paid out in fees to private sector operators, as demonstrated by the now publicly run LNER, which submitted a £40 million dividend to the Department for Transport in 2022. This money will be used to introduce a best-price guarantee for ticketing, to improve timetable co-ordination, to reduce delays, and to grant automatic refunds for delays and cancellations, putting passengers back at the heart of the service. Our plan will also benefit workers across our rail system, including some of my friends, who are very loyal to our railways.

I commend both ASLEF and the RMT for their long-standing campaigns in support of the renationalising of our railways, and I stress the importance of working closely with unions to ensure fair conditions and respect for all rail workers. I, too, refer Members to my declaration of interests, and I am proud to do so. While this Bill addresses passenger services, it is only the beginning of our plans. The wider future railways Bill will deliver root-and-branch reform of the railways, and will be crucial to reviewing rolling stock and rail freight operations to ensure that environmental issues are taken into consideration, and to working towards a fully integrated railway system.

Given that we are talking about railways, I must take the opportunity to highlight, briefly, the state of Luton station. Despite the long-awaited Access for All commitment to the installation of lifts—due to start this summer—the station is not fit for purpose for the 21st century, and needs full regeneration. Having campaigned on the state of Luton station since I was first elected as an MP—with a few small wins, including ensuring that part of the station canopy was fixed and successfully keeping the ticket office open—I should like to raise the issue of its full regeneration with the new ministerial team and their officials, and I will be in touch with the new Secretary of State to raise it on behalf of my constituents.

I am very pleased that the Labour Government will provide a reliable, safe, efficient, accessible and affordable transport system that supports our five national missions by, for example, promoting greener transport options and facilitating key workers' commutes. This Bill marks a historic first step towards creating an integrated, publicly owned railway, an achievement of which Labour can be truly proud.

8.9 pm

Graham Leadbitter (Moray West, Nairn and Strathspey) (SNP): First, I will cover some of the maiden speeches that have been made by various new Members. I had the pleasure of doing mine in the King's Speech debate, and I think we have had nine so far this evening—well done to everyone. I found it quite nerve-racking, and it is a bit easier speaking a second time. I will not mention all the names of Members' constituencies—other people have done that—but the issues covered struck a chord with me. We heard from a former council leader, and I am a former council leader. National parks were mentioned, and I have a national park in my constituency. New stations were also mentioned, and I have one of them as well. Many things were covered in the maiden speeches—Bob Dylan and Knebworth particularly took my fancy, as I am a bit of a rocker.

To return to the subject at hand, two of the maiden speeches mentioned water quality. With a nationalised water company in Scotland, we have some of the best water quality in the UK and among the lowest number of leaks. It is also one of the lowest-cost water companies in the UK, which ties in neatly with rail nationalisation. I am sure that those on the Government Benches will be pleased to hear that the SNP supports that, as we are proud of introducing it in Scotland two years ago. I am pleased to see a Government in place who want to go down that route, which is very positive.

In the past two years, we have seen punctuality and reliability improve. ScotRail is now fourth out of the 24 franchises on performance, with a significant reduction in serious delays and cancellations. I do not really understand the argument that has been given by some of those on the Conservative Benches, who say that nationalisation—as opposed to privatisation and private profits—is not the answer and might not deliver lower prices. One big benefit as a result of nationalisation is that we have been able to run a pilot on removing all peak fares across Scotland, which has been so successful that it has now been extended. I hope that we will be in a position to make that a permanent feature. It has been very well received and is a demonstration of how we can drive down fares in a public ownership model.

As I have said, I certainly welcome Labour's following suit. My understanding from colleagues in the Scottish Government is that there has been really good communication between the two Governments, which is very welcome. I cannot imagine that the experience would have been perfect for colleagues in the Scottish Government—it had not been done before—but I hope that sharing what happened two years ago and in the interim will be helpful and that we can find common ground.

I hope that other proposed legislation will address one area that I have concerns about. At the moment, the Bill applies only to train operating companies, but the most profitable part of the system is the rolling stock leasing companies, which a couple of Members mentioned. They generate hundreds of millions of pounds of profit for the private sector and lead to soaring leasing costs, private investment and high prices. The rewards have been privatised but the risks have been put on the public purse. Some £1 billion was paid out in dividends during covid, with the bulk going to jurisdictions such as Luxembourg and Jersey.

That brings me to the point that the Chancellor made about tax avoidance and trying to increase the amount taken by His Majesty's Revenue and Customs. I have given an example of companies taking huge amounts of money out of the private sector and paying out those dividends in other jurisdictions. I would like to see that tackled, and I hope that the Minister will cover that in summing up.

I will say a final thing about public investment. We have managed to open up three new lines in Scotland: the Borders railway, the Levenmouth railway and the Alloa railway. We have opened numerous new stations and there is a huge amount of enthusiasm, as many Members will know. Few bodies are as enthusiastic as those involved in rail. I have two historic railways in my constituency. Many historic railways offer public services and would like to continue—or grow into—doing so in future. There is an opportunity to harness that enthusiasm and energy, but we need to shift the dial on capital investment in public infrastructure. I hope that is something the Government will tackle rapidly, because we need capital to make progress.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call Apsana Begum.

8.15 pm

Apsana Begum (Poplar and Limehouse) (Ind): I congratulate you on your election, Madam Deputy Speaker, and hon. Members on delivering their maiden speeches today. I thank you for calling me to speak in this important debate on the Bill, which is widely welcomed by rail trade unions and will ensure that train services will be brought under public ownership as private companies' existing contracts expire.

Many of us have long campaigned for the renationalisation of our railways, so today marks a hopeful turning point for our transport system. Time and again, privatisation has proven to be a failed imposition that has resulted in fare increases, falling real wages, a declining quality of service, and crisis after crisis in timetabling. At the crux of the privatisation problem has been the pursuit of profit at the expense of the taxpayer, railway workers and passengers. The negative impact of privatisation is far-reaching, as non-profitable railway lines are discounted, fares are raised above affordability or service quality is compromised. It is no wonder that distrust of the railway industry is rife, and that there has been consistent, long-term consensus for an integrated, publicly owned railway.

Compared with privatised railways, a publicly owned railway does not need to be driven to maximise profits through cuts or price hikes. Instead, a publicly owned railway enables transparent costing and sustainable funding. It means public investment in rail services, and properly staffed trains and stations. It means investing in green transport, and creating green jobs that are both socially and economically sustainable. It also means—I say this as somebody who campaigned alongside the RMT against ticket office closures—ensuring accessibility and reflecting the needs of a diversity of rail users, including disabled people. And, yes, public rail investment will aid much-needed economic growth.

People are absolutely desperate for material change. This Government promised to deliver investment, public ownership and employment rights, and the Bill before

the House today is a positive first step towards a fully integrated, publicly owned railway. Our railways exist to support us, and people, not profiteering, should be at the heart of our railways.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call Matt Turmaine to make his maiden speech.

8.18 pm

Matt Turmaine (Watford) (Lab): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and congratulations on your election. I also thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and her ministerial team for the opportunity to make my maiden speech as we debate this important Bill. I would also like to thank the hon. Member for Melksham and Devizes (Brian Mathew) for his maiden speech, which was informative and entertaining. I did once find myself in Devizes under very unfortunate circumstances—perhaps I can share that in the Tea Room at a later date.

Watford is fortunate enough to be served by three train routes into London. I have still to develop a model of which one is the right one to use, because whichever one you end up on, you should have picked the other one to go into town as a result of delays. My agent once told me that there is only one thing certain about train routes and bus services, which is that they get cut, so it is fantastic to be here with a team on the Front Bench who are going to make a massive difference and turn that state of affairs around.

I rise to make my maiden speech to the House. Watford is a town located in Hertfordshire, just within the M25. Watford skews quite young, with 69% of the population under 50 years of age. It is also much more diverse than other parts of the eastern region in which it is located, or indeed the rest of the UK. We love our diversity; it makes Watford a fantastic, culturally diverse place to live. Politically, Watford is a marginal bellwether seat, which was absolutely fantastic for me at this election. Of course, it was probably absolutely fantastic for the Conservative candidate in 2019, but we shall not dwell on that. It is also an archetypal definition of a two-horse race, and I clearly have an interest in making it much less marginal if I can.

Watford's political status goes back through time, and observing it is like watching the coming and going of political epochs. The last time the bellwether trend was confounded was over half a century ago, in 1970, when Mr Heath waltzed into Downing Street with his piano while Mr Raphael Tuck, a popular constituency MP, held on to the seat of Watford for Labour, but only by 76 votes. So the trend was clearly visible at the time. In 1951, Mr John Freeman also kept the seat for Labour while the Conservatives went into government. He had been a war hero whose wife had to deliver his candidate selection speech because he was busy in mainland Europe as part of the second world war effort.

I would like to pay tribute to my predecessor, Mr Dean Russell. Mr Russell introduced a private Member's Bill, which is due to come into law later this year. His tips Bill was not—as I, a newly elected MP, might have hoped—a set of hints and advice on how to get from one side of the parliamentary estate to the other. Nor was it a recommendation on where to go for the best cup of tea or on how to get a space on a Bench in here during a particularly busy debate, much to my disappointment. In fact, Mr Russell's private Member's Bill will ensure that people working in hospitality who may be in receipt of a tip from a paying customer are entitled to keep it, so it is actually a very good private Member's Bill indeed. It would certainly have been welcomed by me when, many years ago, I worked in hospitality, a sector in which many workers in my constituency earn their living.

Mr Russell was preceded as the Member of Parliament for Watford by Richard Harrington, who served as Minister for State for refugees, helping to set up a settlement programme for Ukrainian refugees in the UK. Prior to Lord Harrington, Ms Claire Ward was the Labour MP from 1997 to 2010, holding several roles including in the Whips Office. I should note that, having previously been content with just one parliamentary constituency, Ms Ward now has responsibility for 22 of them to keep on top of, in her role as Mayor of the East Midlands, to which she was elected in May this year.

I have mentioned Watford's cultural diversity. Watford's Interfaith Association brings people of many faiths and none together for an annual pilgrimage. Watford has many churches. There are too many of them to mention here, but I will visit them as part of my work as the town's MP. I would note the famous St Mary's church near the High Street, adjacent to the citizens advice bureau, from which the Remembrance service march to the peace memorial begins each November. The construction of St Mary's church began in the 12th century—significantly prior to the reign of Henry VIII, a monarch famous for having fewer wives than we have had Chancellors of the Exchequer under the Conservative Government since 2010.

Just beyond the constituency boundary is St James's church in Hertsmere, where the vigil was held, led by Father David, for the recent tragic events in Bushey, which is within my constituency. Those heartbreaking and appalling circumstances demonstrate why this Government's determination to tackle violence against women and girls is so important. There is also the Beechen Grove Baptist church, at which many constituency Labour party meetings have fought, fought and fought again to defend the motion amendment that they love. The odd fish and chip quiz has been held there as well to raise money. Watford has three mosques, two in the town centre and one in the north. It is home to a Sikh gurdwara, which kindly hosted the parliamentary candidates as part of the general election campaign and fed us very well. Watford also has a synagogue, which also hosted a general election hustings event during the campaign.

Watford is home to several excellent theatres. The Palace theatre has an historic tradition, and it has an excellent annual pantomime—[Hon. Members: "Oh no it doesn't!"] Oh yes it does! The Pump House theatre provides venues for smaller works, experimental theatre and festivals. The Watford Colosseum is currently undergoing a renovation project. In its new form it will not, as far as I know, offer entertainment akin to its historic namesake in Rome, although in a different guise it used to host wrestling competitions—and not even as an alternative to first past the post. The BBC symphony orchestra has office and practice space there, and I am fondly reminded of the days I spent working for the Beeb prior to working in health and social care.

[Matt Turmaine]

Watford Deaf Club, which hosted a hustings event during the election, has shown in no uncertain terms how much work we all have to do to make the public sector properly inclusive. Watford Blind Centre, Disability Watford and Watford Workshop all do amazing work.

The fortunes of Watford football club have led many a Watfordian to experience the full panoply of emotion from joy to despair. Former prominent Watford FC footballer Luther Blissett is still associated with the town, and Elton John was chairman of the club. In fact, he played some of his farewell tours there. Truly, Watford is a magical place. It should be. If you get off the train in Watford Junction, it is quite likely that you are then going to hop on to a bus to visit the Harry Potter studios in Leavesden, in neighbouring South West Hertfordshire, but the power of Potter requires whomping through Watford.

However, Watford residents have experienced the same challenges and difficulties that people across the country have. Watford's food bank has too many visitors. Watford's hospital is still in need of rebuilding, decades after it was recognised that dilapidated buildings do not help deliver the best care. New Hope does amazing work transforming the lives of people suffering homelessness, and the YMCA also has an iconic presence in Watford. Small Acts of Kindness and Hand on Heart deliver goods to those in need, and One Vision undertakes valuable charitable work and supports people's health, through engagement via faith-based organisations, who might not otherwise access those services. Impactful Governance does great work supporting the LGBT community in and around Watford, and the Watford African Caribbean Association provides help, advice and a cultural focal point to residents in the community.

The Labour Government, who have swept to power on a tide of desire for change, have core missions at their heart. This Government will make a difference to the community in which I live. They will offer it hope once more, where fear and despair currently reside. I am also confident that the Government will restore growth and wealth to the economy, liberating people from fear and timidity.

Finally, I am a part of the community that I now represent. I sprang from a maternal heritage of Welsh schoolteachers and coal miners and a paternal one of Huguenots fleeing persecution and making their home here. I want to thank the voters of Watford for sending me to this place. It is a source of wonder and amazement to me that, as a child of a hot metal printer and a dressmaker, I can be on these Benches helping to make this change happen.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call Grahame Morris.

8.27 pm

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): Congratulations on your election, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I declare an interest, as I have a long association of mutual support and respect with the transport unions, particularly Unite, the RMT and ASLEF, and with all the trade unions more generally.

I welcome my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to her new post, and I congratulate her most sincerely on prioritising the public ownership of our railways from the Government's first day in office. This is a really important Bill, which gives me and many others on the left of the party hope and faith that this Labour Government, in which we have placed our faith, will deliver for us.

I had meant to wear my British Rail tie, because when I started work 45 years ago, or thereabouts—my goodness—I worked for British Rail in York and Scarborough. The tie is my treasured possession, but it is more elusive than a Conservative Back Bencher in a public ownership debate. I just could not find it.

I have spent quite a number of years on the Transport Committee, which scrutinised the last Government's draft Rail Reform Bill. I welcome the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Bill, but it is clear to me that the franchising model has failed for three decades. It is now time to put passengers before private profits. By establishing Great British Railways, this Bill is the first step in taking back control.

A number of Members have raised points with which I agree, and I will mention them. I also take this opportunity to mention a local issue in my Easington constituency. The train stations in Horden and Seaham should provide easy access to Middlesbrough, Sunderland and Newcastle for employment, education and leisure. However, my constituents often experience unreliable and, at times, dangerously overcrowded services, with the chronic overcrowding meaning that passengers are often left on the platform or travelling in distressingly overcrowded carriages.

This could easily be solved by running four carriages instead of two, especially during peak periods when there is predictable demand, including on match days when my team, Sunderland, are at home at the Stadium of Light or when Newcastle United are at home at St James' Park. Northern Rail invariably runs only two-carriage services at peak times, which seems incredible. I hope Northern Rail will address this issue.

I believe that running rail under one public entity will save taxpayers money and allow revenue to be reinvested in improving capacity and service frequency, both in my constituency and across the country. The British public have lined the pockets of private shareholders for 30 years. Over the past seven years, private train operating companies have paid, on average, £130 million to shareholders in dividends while taking public subsidies. Under the terms of the Bill, these profits will be reinvested in our railways.

We have seen how LNER, on the east coast main line, has paid more than £40 million to the Department for Transport since it has been in public ownership under the operator of last resort, but this Bill will go still further. There will be no more hefty management fees and performance bonuses to train operating companies, with more money paid back into Great British Railways.

I understand the safeguards for open-access operators, where they add value and capacity. In east Durham, Grand Central has applied to the Office of Rail and Road for four daily calls at Seaham station in my constituency, which would provide a direct connection to London, alleviating pressure on the overcrowded routes from Seaham to Sunderland. Open-access operators can benefit the network, so I hope the ORR approves these new services at the earliest opportunity.

I congratulate the Minister on building consensus with those on the frontline who run our railways, and I note the vocal support for the Bill from the RMT and ASLEF. I have long campaigned with the RMT and ASLEF for public ownership as the first step towards creating an integrated railway that prioritises passengers and our economic wellbeing over and above shareholder dividends.

The Secretary of State is on the right track—excuse the pun—and, while she is on a roll, I urge her to go a little further by reforming how we procure rolling stock, which Members on both sides of the House have mentioned. At present, the rolling stock companies lease trains to the operating companies at exorbitant prices. In fact, £409 million was paid in profits to shareholders last year, a 41.6% increase on the previous year. When Opposition Members ask where the money is coming from and how we will wring economies out of the system, there is £409 million that we could get out of the system relatively painlessly.

One of the original ROSCOs, Eversholt, is owned by CK Hutchison Holdings Ltd, a Hong Kong company set up by the billionaire Li Ka-shing, who also has shares in Northumbrian Water, which provides water and sewerage services in my region—another company that is failing the public by making millions from taxpayers. During the pandemic, the public purse subsidised train operating companies at unprecedented levels while the ROSCOs' profits continued to soar. Yet with all operators set to be under public ownership by 2027, surely now is the time to reconsider how we procure trains for Great British Railways. Labour has a mandate for change. We can end the abuse of the British taxpayer inflating profits for privatised monopoly industries that should be publicly owned, including water, rail and energy. At least for rail we have begun the process of change.

To meet decarbonisation goals, the UK needs to upgrade up to 4,000 rolling stock units, which will cost tens of billions of pounds, so we will need a new financing model to meet those demands. With adequate planning, that could also mean ample orders to sustain our British-based train manufacturing industry and avoid the gaps in the order books we have recently seen at Alstom and Hitachi. I praise the Secretary of State and her ministerial team for the effort and energy they have expended in trying to seek a solution.

With Great British Railways, I urge the Secretary of State to ensure that ROSCOs do not continue to exploit the taxpayer and that we take back control of our rolling stock. The Great British public deserve better value for money. Public control of our train operating companies is the first step in delivering a better service. I look forward to working with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State as we set out the finer details for Great British Railways. This is a transformative Bill for our railways—one of the most transformative Bills I have seen in my lifetime—and my right hon. Friend has my full support in delivering the modern and efficient rail service our country needs and deserves.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ghani): I call Adam Jogee to make his maiden speech.

8.36 pm

Adam Jogee (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame Morris). May I say what a pleasure it is to see you in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker? You have made history with your election and you will have inspired many women and girls across our country.

It is wonderful to see a number of my neighbours here, including my hon. Friends the Members for Crewe and Nantwich (Connor Naismith), for Stafford (Leigh Ingham), for Stoke-on-Trent North (David Williams) and for Stoke-on-Trent South (Dr Gardner), as well as many hon. Friends from across the west midlands. I say a special thank you to my former boss, my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West and Islwyn (Ruth Jones), who is sitting with me here on the Government Benches, a far cry from when I sat opposite her in her office upstairs.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for High Peak (Jon Pearce), for Hertford and Stortford (Josh Dean), for Smethwick (Gurinder Josan), for Stevenage (Kevin Bonavia) and for South Ribble (Mr Foster), all of whom gave important, interesting and witty speeches, as well as to the hon. Members for Thornbury and Yate (Claire Young) and for Taunton and Wellington (Mr Amos).

It is a real honour to make my first speech in this House as the Member of Parliament for Newcastle-under-Lyme, and in such an important debate too. I pay tribute to the Secretary of State both for the Bill and for her leadership on these issues. She and I share an interest in Northern Ireland. I am very grateful for all the work she has done to get us to where we are today.

I start by acknowledging the deep responsibility I feel to the people who sent me here. I thank them for placing their trust in me and I will work every day to honour it.

My journey to this place started in the former British Empire. My maternal grandfather arrived in the United Kingdom from Jamaica, to serve King and country and to help fight fascism. He docked in Liverpool in 1941 and, after meeting my grandmother, built a life in Staffordshire, the county I am proud to represent today.

My Dad, who is here in the Gallery, moved here from the then Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, in 1979 and had the luck to meet, and the wisdom to marry, my Mum, a good Staffordshire woman, born and bred. She is also here in the Gallery. I would not be here without either of them.

I stand on the shoulders of my grandparents, Mr and Mrs Bob Owen and Mr and Mrs Adam Jogee. Their blood runs in my veins. Their life stories forged my identity and my outlook on the world. The greatest gift my parents and grandparents have given me is their example of what courage, tolerance, love and diversity mean, not as academic concepts but as a lived experience.

That I am standing here today, a Member of the House of Commons on the Government Benches, was not inevitable, but it was possible. My election—the first black man to represent anywhere in the west midlands—says so much about who we are in 2024 and what our nation means. While it is with a sense of sadness that I acknowledge that none of my grandparents are here to witness this speech, I am confident that, if they were, they would all be saying to each other what a wonderful country this is.

I am proud of my Englishness and my Britishness, and of the simple truth that, in our United Kingdom, you can be anything you want to be with the right support, a work ethic, real opportunities and a good heart. I am not defined by my colour, but I am very,

[Adam Jogee]

very proud of it, and Labour Governments are key to building the kind of enabling environment that means that success and a good life are available to all. It is that passion for sharing opportunity that drives me every day.

For those who did not make it to campaign with me in the general election—I note that my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Friern Barnet (Catherine West), who I know very well, did make several visits, for which I am grateful—Newcastle is an ancient market town in the middle of England. Its rich history dates back to medieval times, with its market charter granted in 1173, which means that last year we celebrated the borough's 850th anniversary.

The people who live, learn and work in Newcastle-under-Lyme are decent, caring, proud and honest. Indeed, when I think of their honesty, I am reminded of two particular chats that I had during the campaign. This is semi-dangerous, I suppose, when we start quoting our constituents. I met Steve and his son in Betley—in fact, in the very good Swan pub in Betley. I recommend it to anyone passing through, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Connor Naismith), who is very welcome. The first thing Steve said to me was, "You're much shorter than I thought you would be in real life." It was the final chat after a long day of door knocking, and my first reaction was, "Thank you very much, I think."

I then met Christine, a pensioner from Wolstanton. She said, "You are much younger and better looking than you look in your leaflets. You need new leaflets." I will not share the story about horse riding with my friend Carol Whitehouse in Audley, but suffice it to say, we will all do anything safe and legal to get elected. I was reminded in these conversations of the age-old adage that the voters are never wrong. That is a lesson that Conservative party Members—not that there are many here tonight—may want to heed.

In my patch, you know where you stand, and if you build trust, show that you care and listen, local people will have your back. We are blessed with very fine centres of learning: we are home to Newcastle College and the wonderful Keele University, one of the best higher education institutions in our country. My hon. Friends the Members for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell), for Stoke-on-Trent North (David Williams) and for Stoke-on-Trent South (Dr Gardner) seek to take credit for it and claim it every day, but it is ours. We have many brilliant schools with wonderful teachers, teaching assistants and special educational needs co-ordinators. I have been honoured to visit many of our schools over the past 18 months. I will stand up every day to rebuild the support for children and their families with special educational needs, because the current situation in Staffordshire, and in Newcastle-under-Lyme in particular, is unacceptable.

My constituency boasts beautiful parks and green spaces, such as Queen's Gardens and the Victorian Brampton Park, known for its museum, aviary and landscaped gardens. I am looking forward to you visiting us, Madam Deputy Speaker. We have Lyme Valley, the old Keele golf course, and much rural, productive green belt in the northern part of my constituency, centred around Audley and Madeley.

While I completely and unequivocally support our Government's plans to build more homes, we must, at the same time, do as much as we can to protect our green spaces and deliver the infrastructure that goes with any new homes. It must be a case of doing things with, not to, people.

While some might look north of the Watford Gap and see a cultural desert, I see vibrancy. I am especially proud of the New Vic Theatre, known for its innovative productions and meaningful community engagement.

We cannot talk about North Staffordshire without mentioning the old mines and pits in Chesterton, Silverdale and Crackley, nor can we avoid talking pottery and ceramics, because our region is home to the age-old pottery industry. I am looking forward to working across the A500 and the A34 with my hon. Friends the Members for Stoke-on-Trent Central, for Stoke-on-Trent South and for Stoke-on-Trent North.

My constituency boasts of being home to a Prime Minister: the sixth Prime Minister of Australia, Mr Joseph Cook—long dead, but he was born there. He was born and raised in the old mining village of Silverdale. I am proud of the fact that a Prime Minister was born in our patch. The only issue I have with Cook is that he started off in the Labour party and ended up a Tory, but nobody—or almost nobody—is beyond redemption. On that basis, Madam Deputy Speaker, you will forgive me for emphasising his passion for aiming high when I talk to the young people of Newcastle about him, rather than his moving around political parties.

Newcastle-under-Lyme could not be better placed. We are bordered by the west coast main line and the M6, between Birmingham and Manchester, not far from Derby and Nottingham and only 90 minutes or so from our capital—when Avanti chooses to work properly. Robust rail infrastructure is a strategic necessity for Newcastle-under-Lyme, for our region and for our United Kingdom. It will stimulate economic growth, bring people together and tear down barriers, and we can do that while at the same time protecting our environment and preserving our planet.

Addressing the north-south divide in transportation infrastructure is about not just fairness, but maximising the full potential of the north to contribute to a more balanced, prosperous and sustainable future for all of us. That is why I welcome the Bill before us. It shows my constituents that we meant it when we said that we would focus on getting our nation back on track. I see the Minister for buses, my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield and Rothwell (Simon Lightwood), on the Front Bench; I look forward to speaking to him about buses soon too.

Newcastle-under-Lyme was rich in coal, leading to extensive mining activities for not far off 200 years. The coal industry played a crucial part in the town's development and economy. The development of the Trent and Mersey canal in the 18th century enhanced transportation links, facilitating the movement of coal and pottery. The canal system was vital for industrial distribution before the advent of our railways.

The wonderful Apedale museum and heritage centre provides future generations with a window back to the proud history of our town. I first went when I was about 12, and it is still going strong. The Apedale Valley railway operates at the same site, adding to a great

family day out. Sadly, though, like most of the west midlands and the north, while we are proud of our past, we have not seen sufficient focus on building our future by diversifying our industries and jobs. As the historical and traditional industries declined, my constituency transitioned to a service-oriented economy based on education, healthcare and retail.

Rather than Tory soundbites and gimmicks, this new Labour Government have a plan to deliver real change, driven by a mission of national renewal. That is clear from this Bill and from the new deal for working people. Let us be clear: under the Tories, working people suffered more than a decade of falling and flatlining pay, while prices in the shops went up and energy bills soared. People across Newcastle-under-Lyme still feel the worst effects of the cost of living crisis today. The Tories broke our country and we are all still paying the price.

Labour's new deal for working people is a plan to make work pay, ensure security at work and help to provide the work-life balance that everyone deserves. This Bill and an improved rail service will bring connectivity and growth and, setting it alongside the new worker's deal to ensure that working people can prosper, we will see the power of a Labour Government.

Cleaning our air and tackling waste crime is a priority for the people who sent me to Parliament. Walleys Quarry landfill is a disgraceful example of the worst excesses of profit over people and we will not stand for it any more. It is an environmental crisis and a health one too. That is why I am grateful that my right hon. Friend the Environment Secretary today answered my calls and those of all members of Newcastle-under-Lyme borough council, and granted the council permission to proceed with legal action against Walleys Quarry Ltd. That is more done in three weeks than the last three Environment Secretaries did in three years. It requires the law to be changed, but I know that the Environment Secretary has heard me loud and clear.

I am fortunate—I am keeping an eye on the clock, Madam Deputy Speaker—to have met and to know my three immediate predecessors dating back to 1986, Aaron Bell, Paul Farrelly and the noble Baroness Golding. I am grateful to them all for their service to the people of Newcastle-under-Lyme and I wish them and their families very well. I have been lucky to have had wonderful support and advice from some brilliant people since my election and over the years. I want to make a special mention of former Prime Minister Julia Gillard, former Tánaiste Joan Burton and a former Member of this House, Lady Hermon, who made my wedding cake—our wedding cake, I should say; Alison was probably safer at cutting it.

For me, this is personal. Newcastle-under-Lyme is where my wife Alison and I will raise any family that we are blessed with. I want to say how grateful I am to my wife Alison, who has been on this journey with me over the last seven years, on foot, by plane, by bus, in the car and on our railways. I love and admire her and her work as a nurse in our national health service—work that will be strengthened by this Labour Government. I also want to acknowledge the support of my in-laws, who are watching these proceedings from Northern Ireland.

The last really important speech I gave was on my wedding day. Memories of that speech are the reason Alison and my family are very pleased indeed that I have an unofficial time limit—although I am pushing it. My speech as a new husband lasted 28 minutes—*[Interruption.]* Very short. It was timed by my closest mates and friends and they have not, to this day, let me forget it; it took that long due to the appearance of some very happy tears.

Today is a marginally shorter speech, and there are no tears, but there is emotion and determination. There is love—love of family and love of country—and a resolute determination to do my utmost to ensure, in Newcastle-under-Lyme and across our United Kingdom, that all families know that in the years ahead, their children will be able to build lives of opportunity, community, security, success and hope.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ghani): No doubt your maiden speech will have made your parents very proud. I now call, for another maiden speech, Connor Naismith.

8.50 pm

Connor Naismith (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): Thank you for the opportunity to make my maiden speech, Madam Deputy Speaker, and may I congratulate you on your election? I am particularly proud to be able to make my maiden speech in a debate on rail, as the Member of Parliament for a constituency with railways literally woven into its DNA.

The town of Crewe grew up around the railway station, and the development of Crewe and the rail network went hand in hand in the 19th century. My constituents will be delighted to have a Government committed to delivering a publicly owned and passenger-focused railway, the need for which hit home to me only too well when the former shadow Rail Minister was severely delayed on the rail network when visiting my constituency late last year.

I cannot begin to talk about the history of elected representation in Crewe and Nantwich without making reference to the towering figure that is the late Gwyneth Dunwoody. Still today, I meet people whose lives have been touched by Gwyneth's unmistakable ability to fight for her constituents' interests. She was truly fierce—an excellent parliamentarian and public servant.

I would also like to pay tribute to my immediate predecessor, Kieran Mullan, who has gone to great lengths to demonstrate his commitment to our democracy—approximately 250 miles, in fact, from Crewe to Bexhill! The now hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle did a great deal to champion the cause of the many volunteer groups across my constituency in his time as its MP. I thank him for that and congratulate him on taking up his place on the shadow Transport team.

I love the place that I have been sent here to represent, from the major towns of Crewe and Nantwich to the beautiful villages and parishes like Shavington, Haslington, Wistaston, Willaston and Rope, among others. Crewe is a fantastic town, where I am proud to live with my family. It is the gateway to the north and a key rail interchange with a proud history of train manufacturing in Crewe Works, which once employed over 20,000 people. I believe strongly that rail can be pivotal to Crewe's future, as well as its past, and I intend to be a strong advocate for improved transport infrastructure connecting the north and the midlands, with Crewe at its heart.

It is not just trains that run through my constituency; so does a belief in the importance of employment rights and trade unionism. At the tail end of the 19th century,

[Connor Naismith]

the suffragist and pioneering campaigner for the rights of women workers, Ada Nield Chew, wrote a series of letters to the *Crewe Chronicle* under the pseudonym "A Crewe Factory Girl", shining a light on poor working conditions in the factory she worked in. Many of the issues that she raised in those letters, such as insecure work, unpredictable hours, the gender pay gap, and the denial of a living wage—a phrase that she actually used all that time ago—remain all too relevant today, which is why I firmly welcome this Government's commitment to bringing forward an employment rights Bill. I am also proud to support the campaign of Kate Blakemore in my constituency to commission a statue for Ada in Crewe.

My constituency is also home to some of Britain's finest sporting exports, notably through the academy of the mighty Crewe Alexandra—a famous academy that has produced some cult heroes from our national game, from David Platt to Danny Murphy and Dean Ashton. The Alex have consistently punched above their weight, and the importance of the Railwaymen—as the club is also affectionately known—was driven home to me during the election campaign, as a result of an unexpected boost to my prospects when the now Leader of the Opposition was pictured wearing a scarf of our rivals, Port Vale, on a visit to Stoke.

Nantwich is a beautiful, historic market town that sees large numbers of tourists pass through every year. Historically, it was a centre for the production of salt and the manufacture of leather goods, from which the affectionate nickname for the town's residents, "the Dabbers", is believed to derive. Today, Nantwich is famous for a host of civic and cultural events throughout the year, including the international cheese show, the Nantwich food festival, a jazz festival and a words and music festival, among many others. These events show the best of the community in Nantwich, often driven by volunteers and supported actively by Nantwich town council. They demonstrate what can be achieved in a modern landscape for small towns while still actively respecting our heritage.

Across Crewe and Nantwich, we have a thriving business community that is home to some of Britain's most famous exports, from the luxury vehicles produced at Bentley Motors to the ice cream vans at Whitby Morrison, and I am immensely proud to represent a constituency that is already a pioneer of Labour's fantastic policy to buy, make and sell British. We have beautiful green spaces and environmental gems, too, including green-flag parks such as Queens Park; that park is lovingly supported and maintained by the Friends of Queens Park group, which is led ably by Sheila, Richard and Alan, among others. We also have the River Weaver, which flows through Nantwich, and I know that my constituents—like the local women's institute group who I joined on a demonstration recently—will rightly expect me to champion the cause of cleaning up our rivers in this Parliament. I welcome the steps that this Government have already taken to do just that.

As my colleagues will attest, it has been a long campaign during which many of us have been asked so many questions. I do not know whether to be flattered or offended that the question I was most often asked during the campaign was, "Have you finished school yet?"

Jacob Collier (Burton and Uttoxeter) (Lab): Have you?

Connor Naismith: Just about. But far and away the most common question was, "Why should we trust any of you?" That experience was reflected in many of my colleagues' experiences during the campaign. In that question lies possibly the most fundamental challenge facing this Government, because after 14 years of managed decline, people no longer believe that politics can deliver anything but decline. They believe that politicians are only in it for themselves—that their attention and focus are distant from the priorities of the ordinary families they seek to represent.

I came to this place from a career with the Independent Office for Police Conduct, whose role is to independently uphold standards and ensure that the public can have confidence in the police. No doubt there is much work to do in that space, but I believe strongly that I and my colleagues from across all parties in this House have a duty to uphold standards and restore public confidence in our politics, and aspiration and opportunity to our communities.

It is sometimes claimed by the Conservative party that my party has a problem with aspiration, but I know that not to be true. My party understands that if someone is living in fear of being evicted from their home, that is a barrier to aspiration; if someone's parents are living in in-work poverty, that is a barrier to aspiration; and if someone is unable to receive the treatment that they need if they become ill, that is a barrier to aspiration. When the Labour party is given the chance to serve the British people, it has a fine record of smashing the barriers to aspiration. It did it for a working-class kid like me, and it will do so again—I am confident of that.

For that reason, I wholeheartedly welcome the Prime Minister's belief that politics is about service, and his commitment to lead a Government who focus relentlessly on delivering for people by putting country first, party second. I promise to always do my best to serve and represent my constituents in that spirit for as long as they trust me to do so.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ghani): I call Anna Dixon for her maiden speech.

9 pm

Anna Dixon (Shipley) (Lab): I congratulate you, Madam Deputy Speaker, on your election and I welcome you to your place. I commend my many hon. Friends who have made such tremendous contributions in the House this evening, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Adam Jogee), who gave a moving tribute to his parents, and my young hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Connor Naismith), who has a few less grey hairs than me.

I also congratulate my right hon. Friend the Transport Secretary; it is wonderful to see her in her place on the Government Benches. I thank her and her team for bringing the Bill to the House so quickly.

I am honoured to have been elected by the people of Shipley constituency to represent them. I grew up on the edge of the moors in beautiful Wharfedale, and I am proud to serve the place I now call home. I am by no means the youngest Member to have represented the seat—that honour goes to Chris Leslie who, at 24,

was the baby of the House when he was elected in 1997—but I am the first woman. I am delighted to be part of the most diverse Parliament, with some 263 women MPs on both sides of the House.

On my first day, as I emerged from Westminster tube station and looked up in awe at the Palace of Westminster, I took a diversion across Parliament Square to pay homage to Millicent Fawcett, the social campaigner and suffragist whose statue stands alongside Churchill and Gandhi. She holds a banner with the motto, "Courage calls to courage everywhere". I have carried those words with me during my first few weeks in Parliament, although I feel more like the lion from "The Wizard of Oz" as I stand here to make my maiden speech—please, give me courage.

I know the people of Shipley have put their trust in me, however, which gives me heart. All around me, I see people of courage—every one of us on these Benches. First, we had the courage to stand in the hostile climate in which politics has been conducted recently. It is vital that our democracy is not undermined by those who wish to abuse, threaten and intimidate. I am grateful to the Labour Women's Network for giving me the support and encouragement to stand, as well as to my husband David, who is here today. I am proud to support 50:50 Parliament's campaign, Ask Her To Stand, and I thank the Jo Cox Foundation for its work to promote civility in politics. I will play my part in upholding standards in this place.

Secondly, we have the courage to stand up for what we believe in. Each one of us has come to this place with a passion to change things for the better and to leave our communities and the country a better place than when we arrived. I am heartened by the commitment to work across this House, put aside tribal politics where in gets in the way of progress, and bring the common good to the fore. I look forward to working with my neighbour, the right hon. Member—no, not quite—the hon. Member for Keighley and Ilkley (Robbie Moore) *[Interruption.]* Not yet. I will seek to work with colleagues who share my passion to ensure all disabled and older people get access to the care and support they need to live a full life, work I started as the chair of the archbishops' commission on reimagining care and which I hope to see delivered in the form of a national care service under this Labour Government.

Finally, we must also have the courage to speak up for those whose voices are rarely heard in the corridors of power, to tell their stories, to demand changes that will improve their lives and to show how things can be better. Many years ago, my teacher Mr Hodgson told me, "You can spend your life shouting from the outside or go and change things from the inside." I intend to use my voice in this place to speak up for the people of Shipley constituency, particularly those whose voice is too often ignored or drowned out.

So I am proud that we have a Government who are courageous and have wasted no time in pressing forward with ambitious legislation to deliver on their promises, and today my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has set out another bold plan, taking the first steps to establish Great British Railways. The people of Shipley constituency have suffered from expensive and unreliable public transport for too long. Today's Bill will begin the work of putting the "public" back into public transport, delivering better connectivity so that children from Baildon and Burley-in-Wharfedale can get to school, commuters from Cottingley, Crossflatts and Cullingworth can get to work, and pensioners from Eldwick and Gilstead can get to the shops—boosting the economy, enabling tourists to visit our wonderful heritage and beautiful countryside in Bingley and Shipley, and making it easier for people to enjoy a night out in Bradford, proudly the city of culture in 2025.

According to protocol, I am to say something about my immediate predecessor, Sir Philip Davies, who served the people of Shipley constituency for 19 years. He was always diligent about his correspondence, replying quickly to constituents. Sir Philip advocated for investment in the local area, and it is in part thanks to his efforts that the NHS has recently committed to reinvesting funds from the sale of Shipley hospital into a new health and wellbeing hub. I look forward to continuing his work to bring a hoped-for boost to Shipley town centre. I can, however, reassure the House that I do not intend to continue his tradition of filibustering on a Friday.

I also wish to pay tribute to other Members who have sat on these Benches and inspired me. There was the formidable Yorkshirewoman Betty Boothroyd, the first woman Speaker of the House. Her courage gave a teenage lass from Ilkley the idea that she might one day follow in her footsteps, so I hope I can in time make my own contribution to the work of this House.

Jo Cox was a contemporary of mine at Cambridge, and it was her life and horrific murder that spurred me on to stand. On reading her biography in 2017, I wrote in my own diary:

> "The values she sought to reflect in the MP she was are also ones I aspire to: to be brave, principled, focused, respected, grounded."

These values will be the yardstick against which I will judge my own time in this place.

It is usual to say something about the constituency I represent, and there is much to celebrate in the Shipley constituency from Wilsden to Windhill, Micklethwaite to Menston. We are home to the highest flight of locks on the canals in Britain and the original setting for TV soap "Emmerdale".

However, I am going to focus on one place, Saltaire, a model village built by Sir Titus Salt, a philanthropist and mill owner. The mill was at the forefront of innovation in the wool trade and the largest in Europe. Salt provided decent housing and amenities for the workers, a library, a school—now home to Shipley college—and a church. He was wary of the demon drink, though, so no pub, although I am pleased to say that Saltaire now boasts an excellent brewery. Salt understood that economic growth and lifting people out of poverty go hand in hand, and I am proud that the Labour Government will ensure there are high-quality jobs for local people, end the trap of low-paid work and open up opportunities for people to train for the jobs of the future.

I could tell hon. Members about other inspiring historical figures who hail from or have lived in my constituency and are immortalised in the names of local buildings and roads, or I could tell them about the many amazing volunteers who keep our communities blooming, the independent business owners whose industry powers our local economy and the local farmers whose toil puts food on our plates, but I would like to tell them about those in my own life whose courage has given me courage.

[Anna Dixon]

My great-grandfather Frederick Dixon fought and died on Flanders fields in the first world war. My grandfather Herbert, true to his Christian beliefs, refused to serve in the military during the second world war and undertook other vital work. He died in a car accident that left my grandmother Freda in a coma with brain injuries. She learned to walk again, to feed herself and to write with her left hand. She lived for another 30 years, albeit with disability and mainly housebound, but she could still beat all of us at Scrabble.

My late uncle David came to this country from Zambia on a scholarship and became the first black African to play golf for Oxford University—a golf legend 40 years before Tiger Woods hit the headlines. My niece Martha, diagnosed as autistic after struggling with mental health issues as a teenager, has had the courage to embrace her difference and find her way in the world.

My family—in particular my mum and dad, who are in the Gallery—and my church taught me the values that I bring to my politics: that everyone should be able to live free from prejudice and discrimination, and that those of us who have plenty must share what we have and take action to lift people out of poverty and tackle inequalities. I am proud to be a member of the Labour party, which is putting those values into practice.

There will be time in the coming months for me to talk about the priorities that I will deliver for the people of Shipley—getting local GP and NHS dental services back for patients in places like Wrose, stopping sewage dumping in the Wharfe and the Aire, having more neighbourhood police in villages such as Denholme and Harden, revitalising our high streets in Shipley and Bingley and supporting young people's mental health—but the final issue that I would like to highlight today is the contribution of family carers.

My mum cared for my grandma for many years, and it was her love and support that enabled my grandma to go to church, take trips up the dales, see friends and family and have a good life. There are millions of unsung heroes like her, unpaid and undervalued. Behind closed doors across this country, an estimated 5 million people—mostly women—are providing support and care to loved ones. I want to make them my priority in this place, and I will start by campaigning for a review of the carer's allowance to ensure that hard-pressed carers are not penalised for taking a part-time job to make ends meet.

I would like to end where I began: with the words of Millicent Fawcett ringing in my ears. Courage calls to courage everywhere. I will stand up for what I believe in and speak up for the people of Shipley constituency, and perhaps my courage will inspire another young Yorkshire lass to follow me into this place one day. As Betty would have said, time's up.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ghani): Jo Cox and David Amess are never far from our thoughts.

Front Benchers will be called to speak at about 9.30 pm, and we have three Back Benchers left to speak, so please be mindful of time. I call Catherine Atkinson.

9.12 pm

Catherine Atkinson (Derby North) (Lab): This is a historic and significant Bill for the country, for the rail industry and for my constituency. The date of 25 April 2024 is one that I will not forget: it was when the Labour party published "Getting Britain Moving: Labour's Plan to Fix Britain's Railways". The day after that, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister wrote a piece in the *Derby Telegraph* pledging that after

"200 years…at the heart of our railway industry…Derby will be at the heart of our rail renaissance"

with a bigger and stronger version of Great British Railways, headquartered in Derby. That came at what was an extremely difficult time for Derby, with train manufacturing in the city on the ropes. The commitment that publicly owned rail would deliver for passengers, taxpayers and rail manufacturers was huge, because it meant that when rail in Derby came together and spoke with one voice, it was listened to.

This legislation is in no way anti-private business. What is anti-private business is privatisation projects doomed to failure. Dynamic private businesses are as important to rail now as they have ever been, with everything from maintenance and testing to digital, data, and finance all part of the east midlands railway cluster, which is the largest in Europe. They will be looking for answers on how, as private businesses, they will work with the public operator. Any more that the Secretary of State can say on that would be welcomed.

Those businesses will be partners in modernising the railways. Can we set out in this Bill or the rail reform Bill the need for long-term funding for modernisation? I appreciate that, as the Chancellor set out earlier, this Government are inheriting the worst set of economic circumstances since the post-war Labour Government who last brought the railways into public ownership. One area of savings that will come from this Bill will be on management fees and dividends, which would be better used on new technologies to make our railways greener and safer. The last steam locomotive was still being repaired in Derby in 1963. That was after a man had gone into space and 15 years after the railways were brought into public ownership.

I do not want to be looking back, 15 years from now, saying that we did not invest enough in developing new locomotive technologies, losing out on the advantages. Instead, let us take inspiration from when Derby's prototype high-speed train set a diesel-powered world record of 143 mph in 1973. This Bill is the embodiment of "move fast and fix things". Once it is in place, we can start bringing services back into public ownership as they expire. I understand that the poor performance of the services could mean that happens faster. Can the Minister tell the House any more about that?

I thank the Secretary of State for Transport for her support for the rail industry in Derby. She makes a great champion for the new publicly owned railway and can draw inspiration from Nye Bevan's role when the NHS was brought into being, fighting off vested interests for the public interest. The public want to get off busy roads and they want to help the environment.

What the Government are doing, with a strong champion like the Secretary of State, can be the spark that reignites our passion for rail travel. That will be essential to its renaissance. Improvements that passengers can see and

feel are crucial and should be rolled out in tandem with the franchises being brought back into public ownership. Improvements set out in the "Getting Britain moving" document include automatic delay and cancellation refunds, a best price guarantee and better mobile connectivity. The timing of that rail Bill in relation to this one will be important. Can the Secretary of State update the House on when the next Bill will be laid? I want to get this important rail Bill moving, get passengers and goods moving and get our economy moving, so that we can move fast on our journey to a better and greener transport system.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ghani): I call Paula Barker.

9.18 pm

Paula Barker (Liverpool Wavertree) (Lab): I congratulate you on your elevation, Madam Deputy Speaker. I congratulate all hon. Members from all parts of the House who have made maiden speeches today. I refer the House to my declaration in the Register of Members' Financial Interests as a proud trade union member.

I begin by paying tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for getting us to this point. She has moved swiftly, with tenacity and vigour, in doing what is right for the country and the travelling public. I know that the Secretary of State will see this task through to the very end. I also pay tribute to the train drivers from ASLEF union who were outside today showing their support for this Bill and our rail workers in the RMT and Transport Salaried Staffs Association unions.

Railway privatisation has failed. Franchising has failed. The railways have become symbolic of rip-off Britain where the public pay more and get less, the gains are privatised and the losses are picked up by the taxpayer. Members of the Opposition will accuse us of being ideological with the Bill. It was their Government in 1994 who embarked on a ruthless privatisation of yet another natural monopoly, laying the foundations for a system where public subsidy in effect gets paid out to shareholders as dividends. Perhaps it is only the Opposition Members—and, of course, Michael Portillo—who still hold on to the belief that franchising has worked. How embarrassing is it that the Conservative party's legacy has already given my right hon. Friend a helping hand, with one in four passenger services already being run by the state owing to their failures in office?

Saving talk on infrastructure for another day, the sheer lack of capacity on the west coast main line and between our great northern cities has led my part of the world to be consistently failed. My constituents in Liverpool Wavertree and the wider city of Liverpool have come to have low expectations in respect of the service on offer from our railway operators when they decide not to plonk their car on the M62 or the M6. TransPennine Express—the main carrier between Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, Hull and Newcastle—was nothing short of a disgrace as a private entity, with as many as one in six of its services cancelled in March 2023, two months before the Government intervened. Moving on, north-west, north Wales, west midlands and many Scottish MPs will have experienced the utter chaos of Avanti West Coast. I wonder if that is why the shadow Under-Secretary of State has hotfooted it from Crewe and Nantwich to his current seat in Bexhill and Battle.

Avanti is an absolute professional in failing the public and its dedicated staff. I understand from the Secretary of State's letter to hon. Members that she has not yet decided on the timing of each transfer, but I would be surprised if Avanti was able to make it until October 2026 when its core term expires. I know that she will be keeping a close eye on that failed operator in the coming period. Avanti still had the temerity to pay out over £11 million in dividends last year alone, having had the second-worst record for cancellations across the entire UK in the last quarter. Enough is enough.

I am excited by this piece of legislation, because I know that it will make a genuine difference. Once and for all, it will be this Labour Government who end the great train robbery.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ghani): Saving the best till last, I call Chris Webb.

9.22 pm

Chris Webb (Blackpool South) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I welcome you to your place. I refer to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests as a proud trade unionist. I welcome the Bill to bring our railways back into public ownership. Swift action from this Labour Government to reform our railway service is a significant step forward that will benefit my constituency for generations to come.

The arrival of the railway in Blackpool in 1846 was the beginning of the mass tourism that gave my home town its identity. In 1911, the town's central station was the busiest in the world. By 1936, 650 trains came and went in a single day. Today, the picture is quite different. Blackpool is currently served by Avanti West Coast, which in September 2023 was handed a long-term contract for up to nine years by the former Conservative Government despite overseeing a poor record of service in recent years with ongoing delays and cancellations. Office of Rail and Road figures show that Avanti West Coast had the third-worst reliability of all operators in Britain last year with one in 15 trains cancelled. When trains do come, they are routinely delayed and overcrowded. While delivering some of the worst disruptions to passenger travel, shareholders have extracted £36 million in dividends in the last three years. Those are the conditions that passengers in my constituency have been forced to accept and come to expect.

As a frequent, and frequently frustrated, user of the west coast main line, I do not need figures to know that passengers as well as staff are fed up. Last week, Avanti's catering staff went on strike over short-notice changes to their shift patterns, job cuts and enforced overtime, which are causing widespread stress and fatigue. This is the latest in a string of industrial action disputes that have dogged Avanti, which imposes excruciating conditions on its long-suffering staff. The last Government sat back and watched as the privatisation model failed, and staff and customers suffered the consequences.

Blackpool's tourism has recovered in recent years and we now welcome record numbers, with visitors topping the 20 million mark. Those visitors contributed £1.7 billion to our local economy and supported more than 22,000 jobs. There is no doubt that a more efficient railway service would allow those figures to grow more. Reducing visitors' dependency on cars would not only

[Chris Webb]

lower emissions but encourage more overnight stays in Blackpool, where we struggle to provide significant parking. Our new tramway between Blackpool North station and the promenade's tram network means that people arriving in the town are instantly connected to hotel accommodation right up and down our seafront.

A reliable and affordable service will also allow my constituents to access better opportunities. Too often, Blackpool loses its brightest and most talented young people to neighbouring cities, when that should be an easy commute. By improving connectivity and ending constant cancellations, we can end Blackpool's brain drain and allow people to live an affordable life by the seaside while accessing well-paid work out of town. This landmark change to our railways means that Blackpool can increase visitor numbers and boost its economy and job market. By unlocking the potential of our railways, we can also unlock the potential of our young people in Blackpool. By giving my constituents and visitors the town and the rail service that can they depend on and deserve, we can ensure that Blackpool will no longer feel abandoned at the end of the line.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ghani): I call my constituency neighbour, the shadow Minister.

9.27 pm

Dr Kieran Mullan (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and congratulations on your new role. I want to begin by paying tribute to the previous Rail Minister, my constituency predecessor Huw Merriman. I saw at first hand how hard he worked with Members across the House to deal with their transport issues, and I have since come to learn how hard he also worked as a constituency MP.

It is a pleasure to wind up this debate for the Opposition and to have sat and listened to another set of accomplished maiden speeches across the House. We heard speeches from the hon. Members for Hertford and Stortford (Josh Dean), for South Ribble (Mr Foster), for Taunton and Wellington (Mr Amos), for Stevenage (Kevin Bonavia), for High Peak (Jon Pearce), for Thornbury and Yate (Claire Young), for Smethwick (Gurinder Josan), for Birmingham Northfield (Laurence Turner), for Melksham and Devizes (Brian Mathew), for Watford (Matt Turmaine), for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Adam Jogee), for Crewe and Nantwich (Connor Naismith), for Shipley (Anna Dixon) and for Blackpool South (Chris Webb).

There were excellent speakers all round, but I will leave it to the Minister to pay detailed tribute to Members of his party. A consistent theme was the importance of family, which I strongly agree with. It was slightly surreal to hear my successor in Crewe and Nantwich pay tribute to me, and I thank him for his kind words. Sadly, I am not sure what I got wrong because no one there ever asked me if I had finished school before I asked for their vote. To continue with the rail puns, I am sure that he will be a worthy successor to me in Crewe and Nantwich, rather than just a replacement service.

On the Opposition Benches it was helpful to hear from the former Rail Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton). She has first-hand experience of the recent changes to our railways, and she explained clearly how this ideological approach is ignoring the reality on the ground, where the franchises should be the focus of the Minister's attention. She asked where this is leading, and I noted that the Secretary of State referred to the work that the Government will do on the supply chain. Other Members have related their concerns about rolling stock. This is the beginning of the end when it comes to a flourishing rail sector with all sorts of people playing their part. It is clear that we all want to secure better services for passengers alongside value for money for taxpayers. Whatever our differences, we agree on that. The question is how we do it.

The catastrophic impact of the covid-19 pandemic has forced a rethink—a necessary and important one. During the pandemic, the previous Government demonstrated clearly their commitment to the railways and to railway staff, providing large amounts of public money to keep the railways running and keep railway staff in their jobs. But that period also hastened the decline of the traditional franchise model as we know it. Passenger journeys plummeted and while there has been a significant recovery travel patterns have changed. That is why we conducted a major review of our railway services and how they operate, and suggested a change of approach as outlined by the shadow Secretary of State during her opening speech.

That change of approach, as we heard today, is one the new Government are taking forward in many areas, but what we also heard today is that they are bringing with them not a passenger-first policy, but an ideology-first policy. Their priority is to ban the private sector from operating our main train services. Of all the things they say need doing, and with 14 years of opposition to come up with a list of what needs doing first, they have nationalisation, even though, as the Secretary of State said, it will not make train tickets cheaper or end the strikes. In fact, it is worth reading out the complete non-commitment on rail fares that Labour makes in its plan. It says it wants prices

"kept, wherever possible, at a point that works for both passengers and taxpayers".

I can imagine the civil service pen of Sue Gray hovering over that particular sentence. It really is an exemplar of Labour's modus operandi: using a lot of words to say absolutely nothing. Reformed ticket prices, reformed working practices and increased reliability—that is what all our constituents want, and the consequence of their rush to implement their ideology is that they brought forward this plan without any evidence for why it will deliver any of that.

Laurence Turner: I thank the shadow Minister for giving way and I compliment him on his staying power during a very long debate. He talks about fares and affordability. Can he explain why, under the Government who have just exited office, fares increased on average by 4.7% each year, almost one and a half times higher than the rate under the previous Labour Government?

Dr Mullan: The challenge that Labour now has to face is whether they choose taxpayers or fare payers to meet the burden of the cost of the railways. In fact, in recent years we kept rail fare rises below inflation, and we have yet to hear a similar commitment from the Government.

The impact assessment on the policy is very clear about what the Government have committed to achieve: absolutely nothing. It says it in black and white, on page 3:

"specific quantified targets for each objective have not been set".

So clearly that leaves us on the Conservative Benches to hold them to account. I have a number of questions that I hope the Minister can address in his closing remarks.

First, what will be the exact timetable for renationalisation? We might assume that the Government are rushing to do this so that they can begin with Greater Anglia and West Midlands Trains in September, but all they have said is that they want all the contracts nationalised by October 2027. The Minister will understand the uncertainty that will create for the sector, so can he confirm a more detailed plan to the House for making use of the powers they are asking for?

Secondly, what will be the approach on nationalising terms and conditions? The Minister will know there are a variety of working practices across the railway network, many of them clearly not in the best interests of passengers and taxpayers—for example, the varied approach on mandatory Sunday working, where clearly passengers would be better served by that becoming standard; or annual leave, where again passengers would experience less delays and cancellations if drivers were required to give a reasonable amount of notice. Will the Government introduce a standard contract that prioritises the terms and conditions across the industry that will benefit passengers and taxpayers, or will they be letting the unions dictate a standardised contract that puts the unions first and passengers last?

Thirdly, what plans does the Minister have to secure increased passenger numbers, by how much and by when? We have seen a huge increase in passenger growth since the introduction of the train operating companies. What will take the place of contract incentives to secure that growth in future?

Fourthly, on modernisation, people up and down the country have seen the explosion of technology into our workplaces, but all across the network modernisation is blocked and frustrated, with demands for more money from the unions for the introduction of technology. What plans do the Government have, as they directly take over running the railways, to ensure that technological innovation can be implemented across the network without undue barriers or union demands getting in the way?

Fifthly, when it comes to funding, how will the Government be reallocating the theoretical money saved? They argue they will save £150 million from management fees. Reinvesting that across track and train would mean, in total, a 0.5% to 0.75% increase in the overall annual budget. They need to tell us what exactly it is they will be doing with that money that is apparently going to radically improve our railways.

Sixthly, what are the balance sheet implications? The franchising model allowed the purchase of new trains and other investments to be made with no impact on public debt. Will Labour be adding those costs to public debt in future as yet another excuse for their inevitable tax rises?

Finally, what are the Bill's implications, direct or indirect, for open-access operators? Whatever the Government may say, I am afraid that the implication of their words and actions is that they do not want the private sector running train services, so are they going to turn their sights on those operators next? If they truly believe in what they are doing—if it is not just designed to appease the left wing of their party—they will have to justify their own inconsistency.

It seems pretty clear that this, the Government's political priority, is the wrong approach at the wrong time. They should be focusing on getting their union backers to stop frustrating reform of our railways. They should be focusing on taking forward our plans for Great British Railways. They should, at the very least, be transparent with the public about the implications of this rushed plan for fares, punctuality and reliability. There is consensus in the House that a new way of working was needed, and we had begun the process of bringing that forward, but Labour Members are more concerned with re-fighting the political battles of the 1970s and 1980s. Whatever they may say, these are the same old ideas, this is the same old ideology, and this is the same old Labour party.

Grahame Morris: The hon. Gentleman is presenting an interesting proposal. He has talked of "evidence". If we look back over the past few years, we see that 70% of train operating companies running train franchises in this country were Government-owned—owned not by the UK Government, but by the Governments of Germany, the Netherlands and Italy. Was this not dogma to prevent an evidence-based build-up around the east coast main line franchise, providing profit and an income stream?

Dr Mullan: Let me point out to the hon. Gentleman that we also saw an increase of more than 89% in passenger numbers on our railways, and a record level of investment. If taxpayers in other countries want to invest in our railway services, I welcome that. As the shadow Secretary of State said in her opening remarks, we have proved our lack of adherence to ideology by running, when necessary, a number of private sector operators. The point that the Labour Government have to answer is this: if they are so concerned about Avanti and other private sector operators, they have the necessary powers and could do this tomorrow. If they are so convinced of their ability to sort all this out simply through nationalisation—if they are so convinced that Avanti's performance is one that requires them to step in—let them do it tomorrow. They are not in opposition any more, so they can take steps to do things that they criticise us for not doing.

However, I am afraid that this is the same old Labour: more government good, private sector bad; unions first, passengers last. We on this side of the House have seen it and heard it all before, and we will make sure that everyone knows what Labour has spent its time focusing on and what it has put first when legislating here, politics and ideology, instead of focusing on what will actually make a difference to passengers.

9.37 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Simon Lightwood): May I first congratulate you on your election, Madam Deputy Speaker? It is a pleasure to close the debate with you in the Chair.

[Simon Lightwood]

It may have escaped the notice of Opposition Members, but there was a general election, and there is a reason for the fact that they are sitting on that side and we are sitting on this side. However, I have enjoyed listening to the many maiden speeches that have been made today. It has been just over two years since I made my own maiden speech, and I found it extremely nerve-racking, so I am greatly impressed and, I have to say, somewhat intimidated, by the quality of the speeches made today. I am also grateful to colleagues for their considered contributions, and I will attempt to respond to as many questions and concerns as possible. Where I have not been able to do so, I will follow those up with a letter.

Let me begin by dealing with the issue of public ownership. According to the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately), we have no proof that it will improve outcomes for passengers, but that is clearly not the case. We know for a fact that this Bill will save tens of millions of pounds in fees, and if that is not a good start, I do not know what is.

Furthermore, as the Secretary of State explained earlier, this reform is based on solid evidence. In fact, the public sector has an incredibly strong record of successful delivery, including increased reliability—even when dealing with operators that were previously failing financially, or otherwise failing to deliver for passengers.

I am confident that public ownership will provide the right foundations to drive forward improvements for passengers—be it simplifying the arcane fares system, integrating rail with other transport or improving accessibility. First and foremost, it will deliver the standards of reliability that the travelling public have every right to expect. I remind the House that this is one of two Bills, and that the second will deliver the Government's wider plans for rail. As my hon. Friend the Member for Luton South and South Bedfordshire (Rachel Hopkins) says, those wider plans are absolutely designed to put passengers back at the heart of the railways and will introduce new measures to protect their interests.

Let me assure the shadow Secretary of State that the wider railways Bill is absolutely a priority for this Government, unlike the previous Government, who had years to bring forward legislation to reform the railways and only got as far as a draft Bill. We are not delaying; rather, we are taking the time to develop the much larger Bill properly, so that it delivers the benefits that we have promised. I look forward to bringing it before the House later in this Session when parliamentary time allows. Under that Bill, the Secretary of State will be the passenger-in-chief and hold Great British Railways to account for delivering for passengers and freight. We will also create a powerful passenger-focused watchdog, the Passenger Standards Authority, to independently monitor standards and champion improvement in service performance against a range of measures.

I am glad that the issue of freight has been raised today. Alongside the overall growth targets set by the Secretary of State, the wider railways Bill will include a statutory duty on Great British Rail to promote the use of rail freight, to ensure that freight remains a key priority.

My hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough and Thornaby East (Andy McDonald) is absolutely right to say that it is shameful that the previous Government's approach to industrial relations was a failure, which inflicted two years of disruption and misery on millions of passengers. By contrast, this Government will work with unions to mediate disputes. In her first weeks in office, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has met representatives of the relevant unions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Josh Dean), in an excellent maiden speech, raised a very important point about staff shortages on our railways. That is a result of the previous Government's failure to plan properly for the future, leading to skills and recruitment gaps. It is, of course, important that the right staff with the right skills are in the right place at the right time to provide the level of service that passengers expect and deserve. My ministerial colleagues and I look forward to working with train operators and trade unions on this issue. I wish my hon. Friend well in his endeavours to bring more young people into politics—something we should all be passionate about.

On ticket fares, I share the shadow Secretary of State's ambition for lower fares for all passengers. We are taking pragmatic steps towards that and are committed to reviewing the overly complicated fares system, with a view to simplifying it and introducing digital innovations. We will explore the options for expanding ticket innovations such as digital pay-as-you-go and digital season tickets across the network. We are aware that increasing passenger numbers is critical to this plan, and that is what our simplified system will aim to do.

The shadow Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Dr Mullan) raised concerns about the ideology of our approach. I can assure them that our plans are not a return to the days of British Rail and that our approach is not ideological; it is pragmatic. We will take the best lessons from the public and private operation of railways. It is about making sure that the system is right, with checks and balances, growth incentives and proper accountability. We have been clear that our approach means a relentless focus on the interests of passengers and the taxpayer above all else. The same applies to the shadow Secretary of State's claim that the Government's plans are about putting politicians in charge, which could not be further from the truth. The point of Great British Railways is to get day-to-day decisions out of the hands of politicians and into the hands of those who are best placed to make such decisions, with the needs of the passenger and the freight user at the heart of the whole system.

The shadow Secretary of State mentioned the Chancellor's statement. The Chancellor has made some very hard decisions on the basis of the dire financial situation that we have inherited from the previous Government, but this does not change the fact that providing better transport for our citizens is an absolute priority, and we will not waver in our pursuit of better rail services for all.

I also thank the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) for her comments and share her view that intervention is needed. However, let me assure her that we are well aware that this cannot come at the expense of other vital services. I assure her that our plan to fix Britain's railways is fully costed and will be delivered within our fiscal rules. It will improve services and reduce costs to the public purse.

The hon. Members for Bath and for Moray West, Nairn and Strathspey (Graham Leadbitter) and my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame Morris) also highlighted the role of the rolling stock leasing companies. This is another area where the Government's approach is pragmatic, delivering value for the taxpayer and not driven by ideology. It would not be responsible to spend billions of pounds of taxpayers' money buying up existing rolling stock, especially when, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has set out this afternoon, we face a £22 billion black hole in the public finances created by the Conservatives.

I completely agree with the right hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) on the importance of rail links to local communities, and I welcome her constructive attitude to this debate. I deeply sympathise with the points she made, and those made by the hon. Member for Didcot and Wantage (Olly Glover), my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool Wavertree (Paula Barker) and others, about the Avanti West Coast service. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set out, she has already met with Avanti to make her expectations clear. However, the right hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills will appreciate the need to bring services into public ownership as existing contracts expire, to avoid the need to pay a penny in compensation to the operators for earlier termination. That does not change the fact that the Government care deeply about performance and will hold private operating companies to account for the remainder of their contracts.

To reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Derby North (Catherine Atkinson), I will also highlight that contracts can be terminated early if the relevant contractual conditions are met, and we will not hesitate to do so if needed. She also raised the important issue of ticket office closures, as did the hon. Member for Taunton and Wellington (Mr Amos) in his excellent maiden speech. I confirm that this Government have no plans to close ticket offices.

The right hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills and the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle also asked about open access services. We have been clear that there will remain a role for open access services, with existing operators continuing to operate on the network alongside publicly owned services, where they add value and capacity to the network.

Finally, the hon. Member for Brighton Pavilion (Siân Berry) highlighted the role of Transport for London and Merseytravel. How to secure the delivery of services in those areas will remain a matter for local leaders. The wider railways Bill will give local leaders a statutory role in governing, managing, planning and developing the rail network. This, along with our plans to give local authorities more control over bus services through our better buses Bill, will make it more straightforward to integrate the railways with other forms of transport.

I would like to thank hon. Members again for an excellent and considered debate on this "Cinderella topic", as the hon. Member for Didcot and Wantage called it, and I welcome further engagement from both sides of the House as the Bill progresses. With that, Madam Deputy Speaker, I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 351, Noes 84.

Division No. 6] **[9.48 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Jack
Abrahams, Debbie
Ahmed, Dr Zubir
Akehurst, Luke
Alaba, Mr Bayo
Aldridge, Dan
Alexander, Mr Douglas
Alexander, Heidi
Al-Hassan, Sadik
Ali, Tahir
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Amesbury, Mike
Anderson, Callum
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Arthur, Dr Scott
Asato, Jess
Asser, James
Athwal, Jas
Atkinson, Catherine
Atkinson, Lewis
Bailey, Mr Calvin
Bailey, Olivia
Baines, David
Baker, Alex
Baker, Richard
Ballinger, Alex
Barker, Paula
Barron, Lee
Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
Baxter, Johanna
Beales, Danny
Beavers, Lorraine
Begum, Apsana
Bell, Torsten
Benn, rh Hilary
Berry, Siân
Betts, Mr Clive
Billington, Ms Polly
Bishop, Matt
Blake, Olivia
Blake, Rachel
Bloore, Chris
Bonavia, Kevin
Botterill, Jade
Brackenridge, Sureena
Brash, Mr Jonathan
Brickell, Phil
Buckley, Julia
Burgon, Richard
Burke, Maureen
Burton-Sampson, David
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, Ian
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Campbell, Irene
Campbell, Juliet
Campbell-Savours, Markus
Carling, Sam
Carns, Al
Charalambous, Bambos
Charters, Mr Luke
Chowns, Ellie
Clark, Feryal
Coleman, Ben
Collier, Jacob
Collinge, Lizzi
Collins, Tom
Conlon, Liam
Coombes, Sarah
Cooper, Andrew
Cooper, Dr Beccy
Costigan, Deirdre
Cox, Pam
Coyle, Neil
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Ms Stella
Crichton, Torcuil
Curtis, Chris
Daby, Janet
Dakin, Sir Nicholas
Darlington, Emily
Davies, Jonathan
Davies, Paul
Davies, Shaun
Davies-Jones, Alex
De Cordova, Marsha
Dean, Josh
Dearden, Kate
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Dickson, Jim
Dixon, Anna
Dixon, Samantha
Dodds, rh Anneliese
Dollimore, Helena
Doughty, Stephen
Downie, Graeme
Duncan-Jordan, Neil
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, rh Maria
Eastwood, Colum
Eccles, Cat
Edwards, Lauren
Edwards, Sarah
Egan, Damien
Ellis, Maya
Elmore, Chris
Entwistle, Kirith
Eshalomi, Florence
Esterson, Bill
Fahnbulleh, Miatta
Falconer, Hamish
Farnsworth, Linsey
Fenton-Glynn, Josh
Ferguson, Mark
Ferguson, Patricia
Fleet, Natalie
Foody, Emma
Foster, Mr Paul
Francis, Daniel
Gardiner, Barry
Gardner, Dr Allison
Gelderd, Anna
Gemmell, Alan
German, Gill
Gilbert, Tracy
Gill, Preet Kaur
Gittins, Becky
Glindon, Mary
Goldsborough, Ben
Gosling, Jodie
Gould, Georgia
Grady, John

Greenwood, Lilian
Griffith, Dame Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Hack, Amanda
Haigh, rh Louise
Hall, Sarah
Hamilton, Paulette
Hardy, Emma
Harris, Carolyn
Hatton, Lloyd
Hayes, Helen
Hayes, Tom
Hazelgrove, Claire
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hillier, Dame Meg
Hinchliff, Chris
Hinder, Jonathan
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hopkins, Rachel
Hughes, Claire
Hume, Alison
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Mr Adnan
Hussain, Imran
Ingham, Leigh
Irons, Natasha
Jameson, Sally
Jarvis, Dan
Jogee, Adam
Johnson, rh Dame Diana
Johnson, Kim
Jones, rh Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Lillian
Jones, Louise
Jones, Ruth
Jones, Sarah
Josan, Gurinder
Joseph, Sojan
Juss, Warinder
Kane, Chris
Kane, Mike
Kendall, rh Liz
Khan, Afzal
Khan, Naushabah
Kirkham, Jayne
Kitchen, Gen
Kumar, Sonia
Kumaran, Uma
Kyle, rh Peter
Kyrke-Smith, Laura
Lamb, Peter
Lavery, Ian
Law, Noah
Leadbeater, Kim
Leishman, Brian
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewin, Andrew
Lewis, Clive
Lightwood, Simon
Long Bailey, Rebecca
MacAlister, Josh
Macdonald, Alice
MacNae, Andy
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, rh Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Martin, Amanda
Maskell, Rachael
Mather, Keir
Mayer, Alex
McAllister, Douglas
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Dame Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Chris
McDonnell, rh John
McDougall, Blair
McFadden, rh Pat
McGovern, Alison
McIntyre, Alex
McKee, Gordon
McKenna, Kevin
McKinnell, Catherine
McMahon, Jim
McNally, Frank
McNeill, Kirsty
Midgley, Anneliese
Miliband, rh Ed
Mohamed, Abtisam
Moon, Perran
Morden, Jessica
Morris, Grahame
Morris, Joe
Mullane, Margaret
Murphy, Luke
Murray, Chris
Murray, rh Ian
Murray, James
Myer, Luke
Naish, James
Naismith, Connor
Nandy, rh Lisa
Narayan, Kanishka
Nash, Pamela
Newbury, Josh
Niblett, Samantha
Nichols, Charlotte
Norris, Alex
Onn, Melanie
Opher, Dr Simon
Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
Osamor, Kate
Osborne, Kate
Osborne, Tristan
Owatemi, Taiwo
Owen, Sarah
Paffey, Darren
Pakes, Andrew
Patrick, Matthew
Payne, Michael
Pearce, Jon
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Mr Toby
Phillipson, rh Bridget
Pinto-Duschinsky, David
Pitcher, Lee
Platt, Jo
Pollard, Luke
Powell, Joe
Powell, rh Lucy
Poynton, Gregor
Prinsley, Peter
Quigley, Mr Richard
Qureshi, Yasmin
Race, Steve
Ramsay, Adrian
Ranger, Andrew
Reader, Mike
Reed, rh Steve
Reid, Joani
Reynolds, Emma
Rhodes, Martin
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Richards, Jake
Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
Rigby, Lucy
Robertson, Dave
Roca, Tim
Rodda, Matt
Rushworth, Sam
Russell, Mrs Sarah
Rutland, Tom
Ryan, Oliver
Sackman, Sarah
Sandher, Dr Jeevun
Scrogham, Michelle
Sewards, Mr Mark *(Proxy vote cast by Keir Mather)*
Shanker, Baggy
Shanks, Michael
Siddiq, Tulip
Simons, Josh
Slinger, John
Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Sobel, Alex
Stainbank, Euan
Stevens, rh Jo
Stevenson, Kenneth
Stewart, Elaine
Stone, Will
Strathern, Alistair
Strickland, Alan
Stringer, Graham
Sullivan, Kirsteen
Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Sultana, Zarah
Swallow, Peter
Tami, rh Mark
Tapp, Mike
Taylor, Alison
Taylor, David
Thomas, Fred
Thompson, Adam
Timms, rh Sir Stephen
Toale, Jessica
Tomlinson, Dan
Trickett, Jon
Tufnell, Henry
Turmaine, Matt
Turner, Laurence
Twigg, Derek
Twist, Liz
Uppal, Harpreet
Vaughan, Tony
Vaz, rh Valerie
Vince, Chris
Wakeford, Christian
Walker, Imogen
Ward, Melanie
Waugh, Paul
Webb, Chris
Welsh, Michelle
West, Catherine
Western, Andrew
Western, Matt
Wheeler, Michael
Whitby, John
White, Jo
White, Katie
Whittome, Nadia
Williams, David
Witherden, Steve
Woodcock, Sean
Wrighting, Rosie
Yang, Yuan
Yasin, Mohammad
Yemm, Steve

Tellers for the Ayes:
Anna McMorrin and Martin McCluskey

NOES

Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Argar, rh Edward
Atkins, rh Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Badenoch, rh Mrs Kemi
Baldwin, Dame Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve
Bedford, Mr Peter
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Bool, Sarah
Bowie, Andrew
Brandreth, Aphra
Cleverly, rh Mr James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Cocking, Lewis
Cooper, John
Costa, Alberto
Coutinho, rh Claire
Cross, Harriet
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh Sir David
Dewhirst, Charlie
Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Fortune, Peter
Fox, Sir Ashley
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Freeman, George
French, Mr Louie
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Glen, rh John
Grant, Helen
Griffith, Andrew
Griffiths, Alison
Harris, Rebecca
Hayes, rh Sir John
Holden, rh Mr Richard
Holmes, Paul
Hudson, Dr Neil
Jenrick, rh Robert
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Jopp, Lincoln
Kearns, Alicia
Kruger, Danny
Lam, Katie
Lamont, John
Lewis, rh Sir Julian
Lopez, Julia
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, rh Kit
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Robbie
Morton, rh Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mundell, rh David

Obese-Jecty, Ben
Paul, Rebecca
Raja, Shivani
Rankin, Jack
Reed, David
Robertson, Joe
Rosindell, Andrew
Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
Simmonds, David
Smith, Greg
Smith, Rebecca
Snowden, Mr Andrew
Spencer, Patrick
Stafford, Gregory
Stephenson, Blake
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, rh Graham
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Thomas, Bradley
Timothy, Nick
Tugendhat, rh Tom
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
Whately, Helen
Whittingdale, rh Sir John

Tellers for the Noes:
Mike Wood and Joy Morrissey

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

PASSENGER RAILWAY SERVICES (PUBLIC OWNERSHIP) BILL: PROGRAMME

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

That the following provisions shall apply to the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Bill.

Committal

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Committee of the whole House.

Proceedings in Committee, on Consideration and on Third Reading

(2) Proceedings in Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion four hours after their commencement.

(3) Any proceedings on Consideration and proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion five hours after the commencement of proceedings in Committee of the whole House.

(4) Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings in Committee of the whole House, to any proceedings on Consideration or to proceedings on Third Reading.

Other proceedings

(5) Any other proceedings on the Bill may be programmed.—*(Gen Kitchen.)*

Question agreed to.

PASSENGER RAILWAY SERVICES (PUBLIC OWNERSHIP) BILL: MONEY

King's recommendation signified.

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

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under any other Act out of money so provided.—*(Gen Kitchen.)*

Question agreed to.

Road Safety on the A1

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*(Gen Kitchen.)*

10.5 pm

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Stamford) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for granting this important debate on the A1. *[Interruption.]* Apparently other Members of the House do not have the courtesy to allow us to debate the importance of this road, but I hope they will clear the Chamber with the decency that this important topic deserves.

The A1 is known more commonly as simply the Great North Road. It is one of Britain's oldest roads, tracing its history back to 43 AD and the Roman occupation. Romans, Saxons, Vikings, English and Scottish Kings, Cavaliers and Roundheads have all marched its length. Even the notorious highwayman Dick Turpin plied his trade along the road, taking shelter at inns in Rutland. Stilton, still a culinary staple in our little part of the world, was sold to hungry travellers as they travelled up and down the road. We would struggle to write a history of Britain without the Great North Road, and it remains as significant today as ever, albeit with a less evocative name, thanks to the Department for Transport.

The A1 runs 410 miles from London to Edinburgh. It is the longest road in our country and a vital link for commerce, freight and of course people. Each day an average of 40,000 vehicles passes along it. Thousands rely on it. It connects us with Felixstowe, Grimsby and even Dover via the M25. At the northern end of the corridor, we have the Humber ports, handling £75 billion-worth of goods per annum, forming a vital part of British and international supply chains. Heavy goods vehicles make up 25% of all vehicles going along the corridor—more than double the national average.

All that leaves us in no doubt that the A1 is the beating heart of our transport network. It is also a vital connection for the rural communities of Rutland, Leicestershire and Lincolnshire that I serve. It is on their behalf that I have secured this debate, as we see a worrying proliferation in road accidents—all too often fatal—along our stretch of this ancient road.

The Department for Transport's data unfortunately demonstrates that proliferation. In 2022, there were 500 crashes on the A1, 26% more than the A5 and 16% more than the A2. In the last five years there have been 201 closures, the majority due to accidents. That averages out as an accident every two weeks, but unfortunately, in the few weeks leading up to this debate, we have seen four serious accidents, including one tragic death and three people seriously injured.

Each accident normally results in a closure of up to 10 hours, with HGVs being diverted through our very small and picturesque villages. While some areas of the A1 rank highly on the safety index, the dual carriageway between Peterborough and Blyth, which passes through Rutland and Stamford, has serious issues, characterised by substandard central reservation crossings, substandard junctions and dangerously short slip lanes, which see drivers such as me stop on the slip road almost every single day. We have roads that are little more than dirt tracks that join the A1, high HGV numbers and a lack of signs, technology, SOS telephones, variable messaging signs and even CCTV.

Ben Obese-Jecty (Huntingdon) (Con): The A1 runs through my constituency, but the same issues also apply to the new A14, with similar dangerous junctions. The 12-mile section that includes the stretch between Keyston and Ellington has both crossovers and ungraded junctions. Does my hon. Friend agree that on those stretches, Highways England should introduce a reduced speed limit of 50 mph where there are dangerous junctions, as there is on the A1, as an immediate measure prior to upgrading the junctions and improving signage?

Alicia Kearns: As my hon. Friend says, that is something we have on the A1 already. I caution him, because I know that, while our constituents call for safety measures, they are often not the biggest fans of slowing speeds. However, as a short-term, interim step until we can get those long-term safety issues resolved, he is absolutely right to stand up for them on behalf of his constituents.

When it comes to my constituents, Transport for the East Midlands did a survey of more than 1,000 local residents. Some 60% reported feeling actively unsafe while driving on the A1, and more than 50% reported having either been in an accident or seen one. That is half the 1,000 people surveyed in my constituency; it is an extraordinary number, and it speaks for itself about the urgent safety upgrades needed. That was only enhanced when I did my own survey of residents on the A1. Of the hundreds and hundreds who responded, more than 90% said that closing the central reservation gaps was key, and over 300 separately mentioned the slip roads being a serious concern for them.

I have been asking National Highways for urgent action for several years. I am glad that its representatives have agreed to come and drive the A1 with me. They may soon regret that decision, but they have agreed to do so. I am also pleased that, a few weeks before the election, they agreed to and announced a review of central reservation crossings on the A1. It was my No. 1 request to them, so I am delighted to have secured it.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Alicia Kearns: Absolutely—in fact, it might mean that I finally make Twitter this evening.

Jim Shannon: I commend the hon. Lady for bringing this forward; she always brings important issues to this Chamber, as she does to Westminster Hall. I understand that this morning, a BBC camera crew filmed a collision between two cars while preparing a news report about road safety on the road that she refers to. That illustrates that rural roads need more attention. The news report reminded me of my Strangford constituency, where Ballyatwood is very similar to the Lincolnshire road. This is about new, improved road signage, warning posts and better lines in the road. Does she agree that, often, rural roads fall behind urban roads and that there is a need to prioritise funding for rural roads?

Alicia Kearns: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I will turn to a potential solution that I plan to put to the Government on that exact point, but is it not horrifying that my local BBC went out to film on the A1 and, within minutes, they filmed an accident?

I want to see the review of central reservations conducted quickly and a commitment from the Government to invest in whatever recommendations are brought forward. I was pleased that, last year, I secured five safety upgrades to the A1 in my stretch, that we have seen those put in place and that they have made a difference, but I wrote again to the new Secretary of State requesting a meeting to discuss the A1 on the first day back. I am still awaiting her response, but I hope that the Government will, in turn, get used to replying to Back Benchers when we write to them.

I appreciate that the Government are in their infancy. Therefore, I have some complex but in some ways straightforward recommendations to make to them on the road networks. The first relates to the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Strangford made about population indexes. The communities I represent are overwhelmingly rural—I represent hundreds and hundreds of villages. Currently, the National Highways criteria for safety upgrades are based on the total number of fatalities that occur in the area, which results in these awful statements from residents such as "How many people have to die before something happens?", or "Does someone have to die before there is action?"

The problem with that system is that it ignores the lower population densities of rural communities, such as yours, Madam Deputy Speaker. If an area has a dangerous junction or a junction where there is a high number of accidents, in a highly populated area, the number of accidents will be higher. Therefore, we need to take into account lower population densities, so that when we understand the number of fatalities and accidents that take place, the rurality does not play against the area and reduce the amount of support received. We need a new funding formula. I would like to ask for a rural population road index, where, essentially, the fatalities are considered per head of population, taking rurality into account, to allow a fairness to come into systems, rather than urban areas always getting investment because they have a higher overall number of fatalities.

We also need improvements to specific junctions in the long term. Colsterworth, Great Ponton and the many Stamford junctions all need remedial works, but I know that that is difficult. National Highways has said that if the A1 were built now, the slip roads we have in our area would never be given permission to go ahead because they are that short.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate and on the excellent work she has been doing in her constituency to successfully get modifications made on her stretch of the A1. She has referred rightly to the importance of physical changes to make these roads safe, and there are more people killed and seriously injured on rural roads than in urban areas such as my constituency. Does she not agree that the work that some local authorities have been doing over the years to address driver behaviour has also been important in addressing dangerous driving and changing driving behaviours, particularly at night and among young people? That is another way of addressing some of these issues, as well as looking at physical changes to the road layout.

Alicia Kearns: Yes, there is no doubt that unfortunately, driver behaviour is normally at the heart of accidents. It is very difficult to identify a genuinely dangerous road. I have sat down and looked at the data with the police, and unfortunately, even though we have some genuinely

dangerous roads—my team will not drive on bits of the A1 because they believe them to be that dangerous—the majority of accidents in my constituency involve someone on their phone, eating food, doing their make-up or being distracted in some other way. We absolutely need to continue addressing driver behaviour.

One of the simpler measures that I ask the Government to bring forward would be low-cost and immediate, and would benefit our communities across the country. There is currently no bespoke sign to warn of short slip roads ahead anywhere in our country, and it would be transformational for communities such as mine if we were to introduce a new dedicated sign. While doing the school run with my son, I have to stop on slip roads every single day—it is not possible to continue driving because of the heavy goods vehicles and because of how short those slip roads are—so I ask the Minister to consider creating such a sign. Of course, I would ask for it to be trialled in Rutland and Stamford, but I think that trial would prove that such a sign would make a big difference.

I hope the Minister can understand my frustration that when I put in a written question on improvements to the A1, the Department for Transport responded that

> "National Highways has completed a number of safety improvements to the A1…in recent years".

Obviously I was aware of those upgrades, having secured them. The question was more about what was planned for the years to come, but I know that new Governments need time to get into place and come up with those plans. While those safety improvements have made a difference, we need more plans for what we could do going forward, because the A1 is such a key route between London and Edinburgh—a conduit for commerce, freight and people. Short slip roads, dangerous central reservations and poorly designed junctions put my communities at risk every single day. Therefore, I will briefly reiterate my requests, and sincerely hope the Minister will work with me to achieve them.

As I mentioned, the first is a new road sign to warn of short slip roads ahead and encourage traffic to move briefly into the right-hand lane. I also ask the Government to commit to deliver the conclusions of National Highways' central reservation review when that work is completed, which will benefit hundreds of constituencies up and down the country. In the long term, I ask them to commit to safety upgrades to junctions of particular concern along the A1, and to change the formula for how National Highways directs safety investments to consider fatalities per capita, rather than in total, to reflect lower population density areas. Of course, the Minister is very welcome—although, having heard all of this, I doubt she will take up this offer—to come and drive the slip roads and central reservation crossings with me herself. Great Ponton is really quite something.

Not a week goes by when I do not receive a news alert about a serious accident on the A1. Every time, my heart pauses, and I have to hope it is not a fatality—that is how severe the accidents are. With my son's school there, of course, I also first question who it is and whether I know the person involved. I genuinely believe the measures I have described could make a big difference to saving lives. Solving the problems of the A1 is the No. 1 ask of my residents. I hope I have given a mix of low-cost, immediate solutions that could be brought in—of course, the long-term solutions would make a tangible difference, but those immediate solutions would also make a difference. They would save lives, and I would be very grateful if the Minister would consider working with me on this issue over the long term.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ghani): That was a very powerful contribution on behalf of Rutland and Stamford. I call the Minister.

10.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Lilian Greenwood): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I add my congratulations on your election. It is a pleasure to respond to the important points raised by the hon. Member for Rutland and Stamford (Alicia Kearns) during this evening's debate. I congratulate her on securing the debate, and thank her for the opportunity to discuss the safety of road users on the A1. As a fellow east midlands MP, I have driven on many occasions on the section of the A1 she refers to, and I have some understanding and appreciation of the issues she raises.

Safety on our roads is of the utmost importance, which is why the Government have announced that they intend to publish a new road safety strategy, the first in over a decade. That work is already under way, and I look forward to sharing further details with the House in due course and engaging with Members from across the House as we develop that strategy. This is the second debate that the hon. Member has secured on this subject; she is undoubtedly a strong advocate for her constituents and for road users, campaigning extensively for improvements to this vital section of national infrastructure and to protect the safety of everyone who uses it.

Our strategic road network is the backbone of the country's economy, with 4,500 miles of motorways and major A roads. It connects people, builds communities, creates opportunities and is a catalyst for the UK economy. Although it makes up only 2.4% of England's overall road network, it is the most heavily used and carries one third of all traffic and two thirds of all freight.

Investment in our strategic road network is through the road investment strategy process, which has led to £17.6 billion being invested between 2015 and 2020 and more than £23 billion being invested between 2020 and 2025. The road investment strategy focuses on creating a road network that is safe, accessible and reliable for all road users, and that addresses its impact on all those who use it. We are committed to putting transport at the heart of mission-driven Government by transforming infrastructure to work for the whole country to unlock growth, promote social mobility, tackle regional inequality and support the transition to a net zero economy.

As the hon. Member for Rutland and Stamford set out, at 410 miles, the A1 is the longest trunk road in the UK. It connects the two capitals of London and Edinburgh and all the communities along its length. It is one of the most recognisable routes on the network and plays a vital role in supporting our nation's economy. With that integral role for businesses and motorists comes the challenge of balancing the strategic role of the road with local journeys and the impact of the road on local communities such as those that she represents.

[Lilian Greenwood]

The 72-mile section of the A1 between Peterborough and Blyth carries 20,000 to 25,000 vehicles every single day, as the hon. Member said, and nearly a quarter of those are heavy goods vehicles, which is well above the average for a similar-sized road. Much has already been done to improve performance, including modernising junctions and improving road alignment, but I recognise that the route still has its challenges. The number of collisions, particularly fatal collisions, is higher than the national average for an equivalent road, as she said, which demands examination and action.

That is why National Highways continues to invest significant sums into that section of the A1 to improve its safety performance. That investment has seen a number of immediate safety-focused improvements at key sections and junctions, such as enhanced lighting and improved road markings and signage at specific locations along the route.

I was pleased to hear that the hon. Member recently met representatives from National Highways to discuss the key issues on this route. I am aware they will be arranging a visit soon to discuss the issues in more detail. I will ensure that my officials are informed of the specific outcomes of that meeting, and I look forward to receiving that feedback.

Ruth Cadbury: I congratulate the Minister on her appointment; it is a great pleasure to see her at the Dispatch Box. She talked about bringing in the road safety strategy—I am not sure whether that is the same as the long-awaited strategic framework for road safety that I was asking about previously.

National Highways had a commitment to think about active travel—people walking and cycling—for new junctions, particularly across junctions but also along some stretches. Given the way that the hon. Member for Rutland and Stamford (Alicia Kearns) described the A1, I can see that nobody would want to cycle along it, but I ask the Minister to consider incorporating active travel into the thinking for the new road safety strategy on major highways.

Lilian Greenwood: My hon. Friend is an absolutely marvellous advocate for the benefits of active travel and the things we need to do to make it safer for pedestrians and cyclists. I recognise her point completely. I recently had to make a hasty dash, while out walking, across a major trunk road, and the point she makes is really important. We do need to look at how we ensure that pedestrians, cyclists and, indeed, horse riders are able to cross our major trunk road network safely.

I will also seek further information on the potential for signage relating to short slip roads, as the hon. Member for Rutland and Stamford asked. Improving the safety of all road users will always be one of my highest priorities. As I have said, this Government are committed to reducing the number of deaths and serious injuries on our roads. They ruin the lives of too many people and their wider families, but as road users, we all have a vital role to play.

I would like to take this opportunity at the Dispatch Box to remind everyone who is watching or listening of the fatal four. Tragically, most deaths and serious injuries on our roads are not the result of accidents. The causes are well known: speeding, using a mobile phone behind the wheel, not wearing a seatbelt, and driving under the influence of drink or drugs. Everyone taking to our roads should remember this before getting behind the wheel.

England's motorways and major A roads are some of the safest in the world, but the longer-term ambition of National Highways remains that no one should be harmed while travelling or working on its network. Road safety is a shared responsibility, and it is important that we all recognise the part we can play as our aims cannot be achieved in isolation. National Highways is continuing its work with key partners, organisations and road users to help us collectively reduce the number of deaths and serious injuries on our strategic roads.

I want to thank the hon. Lady once again not only for securing this debate and for the important points she raises, which I look forward to discussing further, but for her extensive work to bring together regional partners to push for improvements. I want to reassure her that I take this matter seriously and intend to continue this conversation to see what we can achieve to provide a positive outcome for road users in the short and long term.

Question put and agreed to.

10.27 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 29 July 2024

BUSINESS AND TRADE

Free Trade Agreement Negotiations Programme

The Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Jonathan Reynolds): The UK is the world's fourth largest exporter, with exports worth £855 billion. British businesses have unique strengths which are admired around the world.

This Government are committed to developing a trade strategy that will drive economic growth. Our approach will be underpinned by rigorous economic and geopolitical analysis, and will align with our industrial strategy, support our net zero ambitions and enhance our economic security. The strategy will be critical to forging a new partnership between an active state and dynamic open markets, both in the UK and overseas. It will also reflect our ambition to improve the UK's trade and investment relationship with the EU.

In developing our trade strategy, we are clear FTAs—while not the only tool—are an important lever for driving growth.

That's why today I am announcing our intention to deliver the UK's Free Trade Agreement Negotiations Programme, starting with the Gulf Co-operation Council, India, Israel, Republic of Korea, Switzerland and Turkey. The Government are also committed to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, ensuring UK businesses can take full advantage of the deal when it enters into force. I will be working with my officials to ensure our FTA programme delivers this Government's wider international trade and investment priorities, and puts our growth mission at its heart. We are committed to using every lever available to deliver growth.

We are now working across Government to get negotiators back into the room with counterparts as soon as possible. In line with this, I have written to international partners signalling our intentions and I expect the first discussions to take place during the autumn.

We will keep Parliament fully updated as the trade strategy and trade negotiations progress.

[HCWS28]

CABINET OFFICE

Senior Civil Service Pay

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Georgia Gould): I am today announcing the Government's decision to accept the recommendations of the Senior Salaries Review Body (SSRB) on pay for the senior civil service (SCS) for 2024-25.

The Government received the SSRB's 2024 report on 17 June 2024. This is being laid in Parliament today and published on gov.uk.

I am grateful to the interim chair and members for their report. The Government greatly value the independent expertise and insight of the SSRB and are accepting in full its recommendations on SCS headline pay for the 2024-25 pay round.

This year, the SSRB has recommended:

That all members of the senior civil service should receive a 5% consolidated increase to base pay from 1 April 2024; and

Setting the following pay ranges from 1 April 2024, based on increases to the minima of £1,000 for SCS1 to SCS3, and retaining the existing maxima:

SCS pay band 1: £76,000 to £117,800.
SCS pay band 2: £98,000 to £162,500.
SCS pay band 3: £128,000 to £208,100.

In reaching this decision, the Government have very carefully considered the advice and justifications provided by the independent SSRB. This year's award will help us to continue to attract, retain and develop the very best senior talent for government and strikes fairness with an average 5% pay award for delegated grades below the SCS.

[HCWS33]

TREASURY

Tax Measures: Next Steps

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (James Murray): The Government are committed to addressing unfairness in the tax system and raising revenue for public services by closing loopholes and tackling tax avoidance.

The Government are setting out next steps on their priority tax commitments to allow for technical consultation and provide taxpayers with certainty ahead of their final confirmation at Budget.

The Government are also publishing draft legislation on certain measures ahead of potential inclusion in the next Finance Bill to seek stakeholder views at this stage.

TAX ANNOUNCEMENTS AND ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

VAT and business rates on private schools: The Government are publishing a technical note setting out their plan to introduce 20% VAT on education and boarding services provided for a charge by private schools across the UK, from 1 January 2025. 20% VAT will also apply to prepayments of fees for terms starting on or after 1 January 2025, made on or after 29 July 2024. These changes will not impact pupils with the most acute special educational needs, where their needs can only be met in private schools.

In addition, the technical note confirms that the Government will remove private schools' eligibility for charitable rates relief under business rates in England. However, the Government will consider how to address the potential impact of these changes in cases where private school provision has been specified for pupils through an education, health and care plan. The Government will engage with schools before setting out a final proposal in due course. This is intended to take effect from April 2025, subject to parliamentary passage.

The Government are also publishing draft VAT legislation. The legislation will be accompanied by an explanatory note (EN). A technical consultation on the legislation and technical note will run from 29 July 2024 until 15 September 2024.

Abolishing the tax regime for non-UK domiciled individuals: The Government are publishing a policy note setting out their plan to remove the concept of domicile status from the tax system, and to implement a new residence-based regime. This reform will end the use of offshore trusts to keep assets outside the scope of inheritance tax and scrap the 50% foreign income discount in the first year of the new regime. Full details of this reform will be provided at the Budget.

Taking action against the carried interest loophole: The Government are publishing a call for evidence confirming their intention to take action against the carried interest loophole, and to form the basis for detailed engagement with expert stakeholders.

Energy Profits Levy reform: The Government are publishing a policy document that confirms their intention to increase the rate of the energy profits levy (EPL) to 38% from 1 November 2024, and extend that levy from March 2029 to March 2030. The energy security investment mechanism will remain, helping to provide operators and their investors with confidence the levy will no longer apply if prices fall to, or below, historically normal levels for a sustained period.

The Government will also remove unjustifiably generous investment allowances from the EPL, including by abolishing the levy's core investment allowance. Further details on the Government's approach to all allowances in the EPL will be set out at the Budget.

The Government recognise the importance of providing the oil and gas industry with long-term certainty on taxation after a period of change. The Government will therefore set out a way of working with the industry and others to develop an approach for responding to price shocks after the EPL ceases.

Tackling the tax gap: The Government will take a comprehensive approach to tackling the tax gap and making sure more of the tax revenues that are owed are correctly paid.

The Government will invest in HMRC's compliance work, hiring around 5,000 additional staff to recover more tax revenues. HMRC has already started the process of recruiting additional staff into compliance roles. The Government will also invest in HMRC's technology infrastructure, helping to make HMRC more efficient and improve taxpayers' experience of interacting with HMRC.

The Government will reform the tax system by making policy changes to simplify tax, close loopholes and reduce non-compliance, designing out non-compliance before it happens. At the Budget, the Government will provide an update on the implementation and development of measures that form their plan to close the tax gap.

Abolishing the Furnished Holiday Lettings tax regime: The Government are publishing draft legislation to abolish the furnished holiday lettings tax regime from April 2025. This will remove the tax advantages that landlords offering short-term holiday lets have over those providing standard residential properties. The legislation also contains information about the transitional arrangements that will apply.

OECD Pillar 2: The Government are publishing draft legislation to translate an internationally agreed anti-avoidance rule into UK legislation. The draft legislation stops attempts by multinational enterprises to avoid pillar 2 top-up tax by exploiting a temporary simplification in the rules. The legislation will apply from 14 March 2024 and will prevent multinational enterprises that enter into certain avoidance transactions from accessing the simplification.

In addition, to provide certainty for affected businesses, the Government are confirming that the UK will introduce the undertaxed profits rule (UTPR) of pillar 2 for accounting periods beginning on or after 31 December 2024, and will continue efforts to ensure the UK rules are effective and up to date.

The draft legislation on abolishing the furnished holiday lettings tax regime and OECD pillar 2 legislation is accompanied by a tax information and impact note (TIIN) and an explanatory note.

All publications can be found on the gov.uk website. https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/finance-bill-2024-25-draft-legislation-and-technical-tax-documents

[HCWS32]

DEFENCE

Armed Forces Pay 2024-25

The Secretary of State for Defence (John Healey): I am today announcing the Government decision on pay for the armed forces for 2024-25.

Our armed forces are vital to protecting the nation, supporting our allies and meeting operational commitments. The Government recognise that our service personnel make extraordinary sacrifices as they continue to work tirelessly at home and abroad; and we are proud of their professionalism and bravery.

These are serious times, with war in Europe, conflict in the middle east, growing Russian aggression, increasing global threats. It is more important than ever that we deliver an attractive and affordable offer to our armed forces. But this Government have inherited significant budget and workforce challenges while a crisis in recruitment, and cost of living pressures continue to impact service personnel and their families.

This Government are committed to renewing the nation's contract with our service men and women. That's why it is even more important than ever that we are investing in our people.

We have already taken steps to support our armed forces personnel. The Prime Minister launched a strategic defence review to place people at the heart of future defence plans, affirming the Government's commitment to making

"sure our hollowed out armed forces are bolstered and respected".

In the recent King's Speech, the Government also announced an armed forces commissioner Bill to establish an independent champion to improve service life for personnel and their families.

Along with various forms of support, accommodation, and pensions, pay plays a vital role in rewarding our people for the work they do. To recognise the commitment and service of our armed forces personnel, we are announcing today that we will be accepting in full the 2024 pay award recommendations made by the independent Armed Forces' Pay Review Body and Senior Salaries Review Body. This year's award provides a targeted and significant pay uplift for new recruits alongside a large headline increase of 6%.

This Government have prioritised our service men and women, despite the significant affordability challenges and scale of fiscal inheritance we have inherited, as outlined by the Chancellor.

We continue to appreciate and value the AFPRB's and SSRB's expert advice and insight and the contribution they make on behalf of service personnel. The AFPRB report has been laid before the House today and published on gov.uk. The SSRB 2024 report, which considers pay for our senior military of two-star rank and above, has been laid today by my colleagues in the Cabinet Office.

Today's award, which will benefit the whole of the armed forces, will help to ensure that we recruit and retain the high calibre of people that we need to keep our country safe. It is an important step in making Britain more secure at home and strong abroad.

The recommendations:

The SSRB has recommended that all members of the senior military, two-star rank and above, should receive a 5% consolidated increase to base pay. They have also recommended no change to the current pay differential arrangements for senior medical and dental officers. The Government are accepting these recommendations in full.

The AFPRB's main pay recommendation was for a 6% pay award to members of their remit group at pay point OR2-04 and above from 1 April 2024; that the rates of base pay at pay points OR2-02 and OR2-03 increase to £25,864 from 1 April 2024, which equates to a 6% uplift on 1 April 2023 rates; that the rates of base pay at pay point OR2-01 remain at £25,200 as implemented from 1 April 2024, a 7.25% increase on 1 April 2023 rates; and that the rate of initial pay be increased to £25,200 from 1 April 2024. The Government are accepting these recommendations in full.

The AFPRB has also recommended rises and changes to other targeted forms of remuneration, and increases to accommodation charges, which have all been accepted. Where applicable, these rate changes will also be backdated to 1 April 2024.

Accepting these recommendations, represents an annual increase of c.£2,800 in the nominal "average" salary in the armed forces as well as an annual increase of c.£1,880 in the starting salary for an officer. It also ensures that our most junior sailors, soldiers and aviators continue to receive a living wage and brings the starting salary in our armed forces into line with the national living wage for the first time, making it more attractive to a wider range of potential recruits to help address recruitment challenges:

> The starting rate of pay for Other Ranks after initial training increased to £25,200 on 1 April 2024 to ensure that they received national living wage increases at the same time as other public sector workforces and provided a pay rise of c.£1,700 or 7.25% for around 6,700 personnel.
>
> New recruits are currently paid a new entry rate for the six months or so they spend in initial training. As a result of this award, this rate will also increase to £25,200 from 1 April 2024.

The cost of this pay award will be funded through reprioritisation and savings measures, including savings generated by reducing spend on consultancy. HM Treasury has been clear that the Government fiscal plans will be set out at the Budget.

The complete recommendations of the AFPRB for pay round 2024 are as follows:

Main pay award

Recommendation 1: That rates of base pay increase by 6% for members of their remit group at pay point OR2-04 and above from 1 April 2024.

Recommendation 2: That rates of base pay for members of their remit group at pay point OR2-01 remain at £25,200, as already implemented from 1 April 2024, a 7.25% increase on 1 April 2023 rates.

Recommendation 3: That rates of base pay for members of their remit group at pay points OR2-02 and OR2-03 increase to £25,864 from 1 April 2024. This equates to a 6% uplift on 1 April 2023 rates.

Recommendation 4: That the rate of initial pay be increased to £25,200 from 1 April 2024.

Medical and dental officers

Recommendation 5: The accredited medical and dental officer pay scales be increased by an additional three levels, up to increment level 35.

Recommendation 6: The removal of the policy bar to incremental progression at level ten on the non-accredited pay scale for OF3 medical and dental officers.

Recommendation 7: That rates of base pay should increase by 6% for all ranks within the medical and dental officer cadre from 1 April 2024.

Recommendation 8: That the value of defence clinical impact awards should increase by 6% from 1 April 2024.

Recommendation 9: Rates of trainer pay should increase by 6% from 1 April 2024.

UK special forces

Recommendation 10: Agreed in principle to the replacement of specified special forces' recruitment and retention payments with special forces supplement pay effective from 1 April 2026.

Submarine remuneration review

Recommendation 11: That "Submarine Pay" should replace recruitment and retention pay (submarine) and the submarine golden hello with transition commencing from 1 April 2026.

Recommendation 12: That "Nuclear Skills Pay" should replace recruitment and retention pay (nuclear propulsion), recruitment and retention pay (weapon engineer submarine) and recruitment and retention pay (engineer officers supplement) with transition commencing from 1 April 2025.

Recommendation 13: That a submarine environmental allowance should replace recruitment and retention pay (submarine supplement) with transition commencing 1 July 2024.

Recommendation 14: That a retention payment of £25,000 should be payable between eight and twelve years' qualification as a Submariner with effect from 1 April 2025.

Defence aircrew remuneration review

Recommendation 15: Agreed to the implementation of the Ministry of Defence's pay proposals for aircrew with effect from 1 April 2025. These proposals comprise: Three aircrew professional pay spines; Aircrew supplements; Specialist skill recognition; and the "Box Option".

Unified career management special intelligence

Recommendation 16: The introduction of a new special intelligence skills-based payment for unified career management special intelligence cadre personnel.

Recruitment and retention payments

Recommendation 17: That all rates of recruitment and retention payments, except Special Intelligence, should increase by 6% from 1 April 2024. The rates of recruitment and retention payment (special intelligence) remain unchanged.

Volunteer reserves training bounty

Recommendation 18: That rates of the volunteer reserves training bounty should increase by 6% from 1 April 2024.

Compensatory allowances

Recommendation 19: That all rates of compensatory allowances should increase by 6% from 1 April 2024.

Accommodation charges

Recommendation 20: That service families accommodation combined accommodation assessment band A charges should increase by 6% from 1 April 2024. This will affect the rents of lower bands differently, as they are set in descending increments of 10% of the band A rate.

Recommendation 21: That furniture charges (for all service families accommodation types) should increase by 2.4%, in line with the consumer price index furniture and furnishing element as at November 2023, from 1 April 2024.

Recommendation 22: That single living accommodation rental charges for Grade 1 should increase by 6% from 1 April 2024, and increases of 4% to Grade 2, 2% to Grade 3 and no increase to Grade 4 accommodation.

Recommendation 23: That, from 1 April 2024, charges for standard garages and carports should increase by 6%, with no increase for substandard garages and substandard carports.

[HCWS37]

EDUCATION

Teacher Pay Award

The Secretary of State for Education (Bridget Phillipson): This Government are committed to delivering the best life chances for all children and young people, but we can only achieve our goal by working in partnership with our wonderful teachers. They have guided learners through turbulent times, and I value their expertise, dedication and experience. I am pleased to be able to share an update about teachers and leaders in our schools.

I am today announcing that we are accepting in full the independent School Teachers' Review Body's recommendations for 2024-25, implementing a substantial pay award for school teachers and leaders of 5.5% from September. This award will apply to maintained schools across all pay points and allowances, and in practice will also be implemented in many academies at their discretion. I thank the STRB members for their careful consideration of the evidence presented to them.

I am also pleased to confirm that this award will be fully funded at a national level. We are providing schools with almost £1.1 billion in additional funding in financial year 2024-25 to support them with overall costs. This matches what we have calculated is needed to fully fund, at a national level, the teacher pay award and the support staff pay offer in financial year 2024-25, over and above the available headroom in schools' existing budgets. We recognise that the picture will be different for individual schools. We are also providing an additional £97 million forschools delivering post-16 education (£63 million) and early years provision (£34 million). Taken together, this is an increase of almost £1.2 billion. The wider fiscal context means that this was not an easy decision, but it is the right one, and will be another important step in resetting the relationship between the Government and teaching profession.

We will deliver the almost £1.1 billion for schools through the new core schools budget grant, providing £945 million for mainstream schools, £140 million for high needs, and £11 million for centrally employed teachers. This means that the core schools budget, which includes the core revenue funding for schools and high needs, will total over £61.8 billion in 2024-25.

To help schools understand how much funding they can expect through the CSBG, we have published mainstream and high needs rates. We have also provided a calculator tool at the core schools budget grant pages on gov.uk so that mainstream schools can estimate their grant funding.

We are aware that the full impact of the teacher pay award hits across financial years 2024-25 and 2025-26. The CSBG for 2024-25, announced today, covers the financial year 2024-25 portion of the award. We want to reassure schools that we will take into account the impact of the full year's costs of the teacher pay award on schools when considering 2025-26 budgets.

We are also taking some early steps to improve the experience of being a teacher in our schools. In addition to the pay award, we will be making some changes to school teachers' terms and conditions to address some immediate issues, as part of our broader ambition to make work pay and ensure a more productive workforce. This includes removing the requirement for schools to use performance-related pay to reduce the workload burdens that this can have on some schools. We will be publishing updated guidance on appraisals, capability and pay today to support those schools that choose not to use performance-related pay to inform their pay progression decisions. We will also clarify the position on planning, preparation and assessment time, so schools are clear that teachers can use this time at home to provide greater flexibility for teachers.

Following delays caused by the general election, we have moved swiftly to respond to the STRB's recommendation and give schools the clarity they need, including over their budgets, which we have done by fully funding the pay award for teachers and support staff at a national level, despite the challenging state of public finances. We understand the timings of the pay round have caused significant issues for schools in recent years. We will prioritise ensuring that the pay round works better for schools under our Government—working across Government, the STRB, unions and the wider sector, including establishing the new School Support Staff Negotiating Body.

Looking forward, this Government will work with the sector to deliver our pledge to recruit 6,500 additional teachers across schools and colleges to raise standards for children and young people, and to deliver our mission to break down the barriers to opportunity at every stage.

Unions, employers, and teachers have made clear in my first weeks in office the importance of a fair and fully funded award for school teachers, leaders and support staff. I hope that this year's pay award, funding position and accompanying announcements will start to build that positive and productive partnership, resetting the relationship between Government and the teaching profession.

We should not take for granted the substantial financial challenges that this Government have faced to be able to find this new funding. As the Chancellor has said, the fiscal context means that this has been a tough process, but this decision will help schools facing recruitment and retention challenges. However, this pay award is the right thing to do to improve competitiveness of teacher pay, including against the private sector. This is the start of the process of reform and renewal of our public services.

STRB Process

The 34th report of the School Teachers' Review Body is being published today. Its recommendations cover the remit issued in December 2023 by the Conservative Government regarding the pay award for teachers for the next academic year that is due to be implemented from September 2024. The report will be presented to Parliament and published on gov.uk. I will place a copy of this report in the Libraries of both Houses.

The STRB was asked to make recommendations that assessed the adjustments that should be made to the salaries and allowances of classroom teachers, unqualified teachers and school leaders in 2024-25. The previous Government asked the STRB to consider the exceptional nature of previous pay awards, the restrained fiscal context, and the concept of targeted remuneration.

The Department for Education will now write to all statutory consultees of the STRB to invite them to contribute to a consultation on the Government's response to these recommendations and on a revised school teachers' pay and conditions document and pay order. The consultation will last for 10 weeks, and the pay award will be backdated to September.

Recommendations and Response

For 2024-25, the STRB recommended increases to teachers' pay of 5.5% at all grades, and a 5.5% increase to all allowance ranges. The Government have announced that they are accepting these recommendations in full.

The STRB also gave its observations on broader structural issues relating to teachers' pay and conditions. Department for Education officials will now consider these observations in due course.

Scope

This pay award applies to all teachers and leaders in maintained schools.Non-maintained schools, including free schools and academies, as usual, have the freedom to set their own pay policies. Such schools are therefore not obliged to follow the statutory arrangements set out in the school teachers' pay and conditions document although they may still choose to do so if they wish.

[HCWS35]

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

Official Development Assistance Target 2023

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Anneliese Dodds): The FCDO's Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24, published today, reports that in 2023, on a provisional basis, the United Kingdom did not meet its target to spend the equivalent of 0.7 per cent of gross national income on official development assistance.

The International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act 2015 (the 2015 Act) envisages situations in which a departure from meeting the target of spending 0.7 per cent of GNI on ODA may be necessary: for example, in response to "fiscal circumstances and, in particular, the likely impact of meeting the target on taxation, public spending and public borrowing". The previous Government reduced the ODA budget to around 0.5 per cent of GNI from 2021.

This Government are committed to restoring ODA spending at the level of 0.7 per cent of GNI as soon as fiscal circumstances allow. The Government will set out their approach to the House in due course.

As required by section 2 of the 2015 Act, an unnumbered Act paper has been laid before Parliament and is in the same terms as this statement.

[HCWS39]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Death Certification Reform: Medical Examiners

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Andrew Gwynne): The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care, my noble Friend Baroness Merron, has made the following written statement:

> I wish to inform the House of the Government's plan to continue with the reform to death certification and introduce a statutory medical examiner system on 9 September 2024. By law, all deaths will become subject to either a medical examiner's scrutiny or a coroner's investigation. The changes will put the existing medical examiner system's obligations, duties and responsibilities on a statutory footing. Regulations were laid on 15 April 2024 including the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death Regulations, the Medical Examiners Regulations and the National Medical Examiner (Additional Functions) Regulations, and will come into force on 9 September 2024.
>
> The changes will put the bereaved at the centre by providing an opportunity for them to raisequestions or concerns with a senior doctor not involved in the care of the deceased. This will improve practice and communication, support the right deaths being referred to coroners for further investigation and help deter poor practice and criminal activity.
>
> The introduction of medical examiners is part of a broader set of reforms to death certification, coronial and registration processes. We are working closely across Government to ensure we are supporting the professions involved with relevant communications and guidance. This will be published on 9 September when the reforms come into force.

[HCWS31]

NHS Pay Review Recommendations: England

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Wes Streeting): Today I am accepting the recommendations of the NHS Pay Review Body, the Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration and the Senior Salaries Review Body. This means that 1.5 million NHS staff in England will receive a significant pay rise backdated to 1 April 2024. For staff directly employed by NHS providers, this will be funded by NHS England through system allocations.

I am grateful to all the chairs and members of the NHSPRB, the DDRB and the SSRB for their reports that recognise the vital contribution that NHS staff and leadership make to our country. I am accepting their pay recommendations in full, re-committing to financial prudence and fair uplifts for public servants.

The NHSPRB recommended a 5.5% increase to all Agenda for Change staff, alongside other recommendations for a funded envelope for structural reform. In accepting these recommendations, we have committed to:

> Uplifting all pay points for AfC staff (c.1.3m staff) by 5.5% on a consolidated basis, taking effect from 1 April 2024.

Adding intermediate pay points at AfC Bands 8a and above.

Working with the NHS Staff Council to take forward the PRB's recommendations on AfC pay structures.

Recognising the role of the NHS Staff Council, we are accepting the second recommendation regarding the addition of intermediate pay points to bands 8a and above in principle but are asking the NHS Staff Council to ratify it before it is implemented. We want to work with the NHS Staff Council on issues with the AfC pay structure, so we will work with stakeholders on the third recommendation.

The DDRB recommended a 6% increase to salary scales, pay ranges and the pay elements of contracts from 1 April 2024. It also recommended that an extra £1,000 be added to the pay points for doctors and dentists in training. In accepting these recommendations, we have committed to:

uplifting pay points for doctors and dentists in training (c. 73,000 doctors) by 6% plus £1,000 on a consolidated basis (an average of around 8.2% increase in pay);

uplifting the salaries of consultants (c.61,000 doctors) by 6% on a consolidated basis;

uplifting the pay range for salaried General Medical Practitioners (c.15,000 doctors) by 6% and uplifting the pay element of the GP contract by 6% on a consolidated basis (an increase of 4% on top of the 2% interim uplift in April);

uplifting the pay element of the General Dental Practitioners contract (c.24,000 dentists) and the minimum and maximum pay scale for salaried dentists by 6% on a consolidated basis;

uplifting the pay scales of specialist and associate specialist (SAS) doctors on all contracts by 6% on a consolidated basis.

The SSRB recommended an increase of 5% for all executive and senior managers and all very senior managers in the NHS in England from 1 April 2024, which we have accepted. The Government are still considering its approach to the recommendation to have a four-week turnaround on pay cases for VSMs and ESMs and so cannot confirm acceptance at this time.

These recommended uplifts are broadly in line with private sector earnings growth.

The previous Government neglected public sector pay for 14 years, and now we are resetting our relationship with public sector workforces. We will take further steps to restore confidence in the pay-setting process. We are accepting those recommendations, and will reform those public services, to deliver our missions.

The reports of the DDRB, the NHSPRB and the SSRB will be presented to Parliament and published on gov.uk.

[HCWS40]

Doctors and Dentists in Training: Pay Offer

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Wes Streeting): I am pleased to be able to inform the House that today I have made a formal offer on pay for the 2023-24 and 2024-25 financial years to the British Medical Association's Junior Doctors Committee for doctors and dentists in training in England. The BMA, which represents these staff and other unions in negotiations, will recommend the offer to their members.

I am pleased to have been able to make this offer fewer than four weeks after becoming the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. I said during the general election campaign that I would get around the table with unions and find a way to resolve industrial action. This is a promise made, and a promise kept.

Under the offer, doctors and dentists in foundation and specialty training will receive:

an average investment of 4.05% into 2023-24 pay scales effective from 1 April 2023, with a payment to reflect backpay; and

a further consolidated uplift of 6% + £1,000 in 2024-25, in line with the recommendations of the Review Body on Doctors and Dentists Remuneration (DDRB).

If accepted this will mean an average pay uplift of 22.3% in basic pay for doctors and dentists in training over the past two years.

The Government will instruct the DDRB to change the approach they take when considering pay for doctors and dentists in training from 2025-26.

The Government have also committed to improving the current exception reporting process and to working in partnership with the BMA and other health organisations to reform the current system of training and rotational placements.

This offer would increase the base salary for a full-time doctor starting foundation training in the NHS to over £36,600 compared to around £32,400 before this offer was made. A full-time doctor entering specialty training would see their basic pay rise to over £49,900 from around £43,900 before this offer was made.

If this offer is accepted, the BMA will withdraw the rate card for doctors and dentists in training in England with immediate effect, and the current trade dispute with doctors and dentists in training will end.

The BMA will now begin the process of consulting their members on the offer. The BMA JDC and its officers will recommend that members accept this deal, and I strongly encourage members to do so. I will update the House on this matter in due course.

From September, I will refer to this group of doctors as resident doctors. This is the preferred nomenclature of the BMA, and an important sign of a new collaborative relationship between the medical profession and the Government based on a firm foundation of mutual respect.

Separately, I want to inform the House that this Government will also honour the offer made by the previous Government to the BMA Specialists, Associate Specialists, and Specialty Committee for SAS doctors. The BMA's SAS members voted to accept the offer during the pre-election period.

These commitments come alongside the publication of the pay review body reports, on which I have updated the House separately.

[HCWS41]

HOME DEPARTMENT

National Crime Agency Workforce Update

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Yvette Cooper): I am today announcing the Government's decision on pay for the National Crime Agency for 2024-25.

The Government received the NCA Remuneration Review Body's 10th report on pay for NCA officers designated with operational powers at grades lower than deputy director for the NCA on 20 June 2024. This will be laid before Parliament today and published on gov.uk.

I would like to thank the chair and members of the review body for their work gathering evidence from the NCA, the Home Office, HM Treasury, and the trade unions, resulting in their detailed, comprehensive report. The Government value the independent expertise and insight of NCARRB and take on board the useful advice and principles set out in response to my predecessor's remit letter of 20 December 2023.

This Government are committed to supporting the NCA in its fight against serious and organised crime. As leader of the SOC law enforcement system, disrupting and dismantling the most harmful organised crime groups, a strengthened NCA needs to be able to set clear strategic and operational direction, and to develop shared capabilities to drive efficiencies. A strong pay framework is vital to the NCA being able to deliver this role and maintaining its operational performance.

The transformation of the NCA is vital to the agency's ability to tackle the rapidly evolving and complex SOC threats currently faced. Part of this transformation includes empowering the agency's ability to attract, recruit and retain the skilled workforce it needs, particularly those with technological and specialist skills, such as forensic scientists and cyber-security experts.

The recommendations for 2024-25 are as follows:

A redesign of the agency's job architecture and an evaluation of all roles to consider which grades and posts are comparable to police officers and which are comparable to the civil service, police staff or the private sector.

A consolidated pay award of 5% for all NCA officers in grades 1 to 6. The spot rates for grades 1 to 5, and the minima and maxima of the standard pay ranges for grades 1 to 6, should be raised by 5%.

A 5% increase to the London and south-east weighting allowance.

A review of the allowances of NCA officers in Northern Ireland, with a view to those NCA officers who are subject to similar risks to Police Service of Northern Ireland officers receiving the same allowance as PSNI officers.

After careful consideration, I have decided to take the following approach:

Fully accept recommendations two and three: This headline 5% award and associated location allowance uplift will support and underpin the NCA's ambition to recruit and retain the skilled workforce it requires.

Partially accept recommendations one and four: While I am supportive of the central premise of these recommendations, namely reform of the existing pay structure within the NCA, measures are already under way to develop a set of comprehensive proposals, which the Government will seek to implement in a timely fashion.

In reaching these decisions, I have given due consideration to a number of factors, including the value NCA officers give to the public by protecting them against the threat of serious and organised crime; affordability; and delivering value for the taxpaying public.

The Government endeavour to balance the need to ensure fair pay for public sector workers with protecting funding for frontline services and ensuring affordability for taxpayers. This award represents a significant increase, with this year's 5% boost building on last year's increase of 7%. The award will be funded within the NCA's existing budget, and I am confident it will greatly support the agency's efforts to eradicate the most dangerous organised crime groups operating within and against the UK.

[HCWS34]

Police Remuneration

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Yvette Cooper): The tenth report of the Police Remuneration Review Body (PRRB) was published today. The body considered the pay and allowances for police officers up to and including the chief superintending ranks in England and Wales. The 46th report of Senior Salaries Review Body (SSRB) was also published and made recommendations on the pay and allowances for the chief police officer ranks in England and Wales. I am grateful to the chairs and members for their reports and recommendations.

This Government value the vital contribution of police officers across the country who work tirelessly to keep us safe every single day.

Both the PRRB and SSRB recommended a consolidated increase of 4.75% to all police officer ranks and pay points with effect from 1 September 2024. The Government are accepting the recommendation in full. The Home Office will provide £175 million additional funding in 2024-25 to forces to help with the cost of the pay increase.

While the recommendation for a consolidated award of 4.75% is significantly above what had been budgeted for in the 2021 spending review, it is right that we accept it in full. Police officers have a crucial role to play in delivering the Government's manifesto commitments to make Britain's streets safe and increase public visibility through neighbourhood policing.

The PRRB also recommended that London weighting should increase by 4.75%; that the on-call allowance should be increased from £20 to £25; and that the dog handlers' allowance should be uprated by 4.75% and the additional rate for officers with more than one dog be raised from 25% to 50% of the rate for the first dog. The SSRB recommended that the power of police and crime commissioners (PCCs) to vary a chief constable's starting pay should be withdrawn. The Government are accepting these recommendations in full and they will take effect on 1 September 2024.

The PRRB recommended that the chief officer of police in each force should be given the discretion to set the starting salary for new constables at either pay point 1 or pay point 2 on the constables' pay scale. This recommendation has been accepted, but implementation will be subject to detailed proposals from the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) and Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC) on the circumstances in which this discretion should be used, along with transition arrangements for those constables on pay point 1, to inform amendments to the Police Regulations 2003.

The PRRB also recommended the commissioners of the Metropolitan Police Service and City of London police be given further discretion to set the starting salaries of new constables at pay point 3 on the constables' pay scale; and that this additional flexibility should be limited to a period of two years and be reviewed after one year. This recommendation has not been accepted. Instead, London allowance for officers appointed on or after 1 September 1994 will be increased by £1,250. Implementation of this increase will be synchronised alongside the wider changes to constable starting salaries.

The PRRB considered annual leave entitlements for officers in the federated ranks and recommended the time it takes to reach the maximum entitlement of

30 days should be reduced from 20 to 10 years, with effect from 1 April 2025 and phased in over three years. This recommendation has been accepted, subject to the submission of a satisfactory equality impact assessment by the NPCC to the Home Office. The PRRB further recommended that from September 2024, annual leave entitlement for new entrants should be increased from 22 to 25 days. This recommendation has been accepted but with implementation taking effect on 1 April 2025.

The Government welcome the PRRB's recommendations that the Home Office, NPCC and APCC work together to undertake a comprehensive review of police remuneration, in order to produce a costed plan in preparation for the next spending review; and that as part of this, allowances in the NPCC's schedule for review should be reviewed in their entirety in 2024-25. These recommendations will be subject to further discussions but must be aligned to a police workforce strategy.

[HCWS36]

European Entry/Exit System

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Seema Malhotra): I want to update the House on the work by the UK Government to maintain border fluidity with the European Union throughout the implementation of the new Entry/Exit System, ensuring UK nationals and residents can continue to access European destinations effectively and efficiently.

The European Union is implementing a new border security system, the European Entry/Exit System (EES). EU member states are responsible for implementation of the system at Schengen area border crossings, with oversight from the European Commission.

EES will remove the requirement to manually stamp passports at the EU's external border—so called "wet-ink stamps"—and improve physical security by creating a digital file that links a travel document to a person's identity using biometrics. It will require non-EU citizens, excluding EU residents, long stay visa holders, and those protected by the withdrawal agreement, arriving in a Schengen destination to register their fingerprints, provide a facial scan and answer questions about their stay. On departure, travellers' details will be checked against the EES database to confirm compliance with existing rules on time limits, maximum 90 day stay in a 180-day period, and register departure.

While the UK Government are supportive of the aims of EES, which complement our shared objectives on migration and secure borders, we are not content with the level of preparations put in place by the previous Administration. The system will increase processing times at Schengen area border crossing points, and insufficient progress has been made on ensuring that these impacts, as well as other potential impacts, are minimised, with disruption likely when the scheme is introduced.

This is particularly true for journeys involving travel through the UK's three ports with juxtaposed frontier controls: London St Pancras, Eurotunnel in Folkestone, and the Port of Dover, where EES registration will be required on departure from the UK.

On those routes, work has been required to accommodate new equipment and infrastructure in ports and terminals in the UK ahead of the launch date, as well as minimising any disruption caused by queues at the border as much as possible.

As the European Commission plans to implement the new system in late autumn this year, I wanted to update the House on the immediate steps that we are now taking to improve preparations and levels of readiness. These include:

Close working with the French Government, Port of Dover, Eurotunnel, Eurostar and High Speed 1 on implementation plans at Dover, Folkestone and St Pancras, where France conducts frontier controls prior to departure from the UK.

Preparing communications to raise awareness amongst the travelling public, especially UK nationals and third country nationals resident in the UK, who will be required to undertake EES registration when travelling to the EU. It is critical British citizens are aware of the new requirements and prepared for the additional time these will take with sufficient time to plan ahead.

Engaging with the European Commission and member states to lobby for a more pragmatic approach to the application of precautionary measures—these are reactive measures proposed by the EU for the first six months of EES implementation to be used as a safeguard in the case of excessive waiting times e.g. collecting the biometric data of a reduced number of travellers. We believe that extending these beyond six months would improve throughput at the EU's external border if queues form during peak periods in early 2025 due to the additional processing time required for EES.

The introduction of an amendment to UK legislation to ensure that an additional French control zone within the Port of Dover's Western Docks can be operationalised by French border officers in the same way as they currently work in the Eastern Docks and create additional capacity. This has been laid before the House today and there will be an opportunity for further discussion on its contents separately.

Securing access to European Commission trial and testing programs for EES implementation to help inform the work and planning UK juxtaposed port operators are doing to prepare for EES.

It is in both the UK's and European Union's interest to work together on our shared objectives to ensure we maintain secure borders, while also minimising any disruption caused by EES.

[HCWS29]

JUSTICE

Prison Workforce and Judiciary Pay Awards

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Shabana Mahmood): I am today confirming the Government's decision on pay awards for both prison staff and the judiciary.

Prison Service Pay Award 2024-25

Having carefully considered the 14 recommendations made by the Prison Service Pay Review Body for the 2024-25 pay award, I can announce that we are accepting in full the recommendations made by the PSPRB for all staff within its remit.

All Prison Service staff play a vital role in helping to rehabilitate prisoners and keep the public safe. I am grateful for their hard work and dedication. Acceptance of these recommendations reflects our priorities in ensuring the recruitment and retention of Prison Service staff to deliver this essential frontline service, and recognises the valuable service they deliver every day.

The award will deliver a pay rise of at least a 5% base pay increase for all prison staff between operational support grade and governors (bands 2-11), with a targeted focus on the lowest paid.

The award delivers headline pay increases of:

5% for prison officer grades (bands 3-5)

5% for managerial and prison governor grades (bands 7-12)

5% increase for operational support grades (band 2), in addition to the national living wage increase that band 2 staff received from 1 April 2024.

This pay award will be paid this autumn and will be backdated to 1 April 2024.

This Government value the vital contribution the almost 6 million public sector workers make across the UK, delivering the public services we all rely upon. Making this pay award will help to stabilise our Prison Service and ensure it can recruit and retain the staff it needs. It recognises the unwavering dedication of our prison staff, who have continued to protect the public amid the current prison capacity crisis.

I would like to thank the PSPRB for its valuable advice and response to the Government's evidence.

The report has been laid before Parliament today. I am grateful to the chair and members of the review body for their report.

Judicial Pay Award 2024-25

I am today announcing my decision on pay for the judiciary.

The Government received the Senior Salaries Review Body report on 17 June 2024. This will be presented to Parliament and published on gov.uk.

The SSRB's expertise and independent advice is invaluable in reaching a fair judicial pay award which reflects the judiciary's crucial role at the heart of the justice system. However, the Government must take a balanced view, giving adequate consideration to fiscal responsibility. I have carefully considered the SSRB's advice in making my decision.

The SSRB recommended a pay award of 6% for all judicial office holders within the remit group for 2024-25. I have decided to accept this recommendation in full. It will be applied equally to all judicial office holders for whom I have responsibility and will be backdated to April 2024.

I recognise the SSRB's concerns regarding persistent recruitment and retention issues affecting parts of the judiciary. I look forward to working alongside the judiciary to understand how we can start to address these shortfalls through system-wide reforms.

I hope this increase demonstrates the value that I and the Government place on our independent judiciary and their unwavering commitment to the delivery of justice and the rule of law.

[HCWS38]

NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Hilary Benn): I wish to provide an update to the House on the Government's approach to the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023 (the Act).

The Government have today written to the Northern Ireland Court of Appeal to formally abandon all their grounds of appeal against the section 4 Human Rights Act declarations of incompatibility made by the Northern Ireland High Court in relation to the Act. The declarations of incompatibility that the Government are no longer challenging include those relating to the conditional immunity provisions, which could— had they not been struck out by the High Court—have seen individuals being granted immunity from prosecution for providing information about troubles-related deaths and serious injuries.

This is the first step in fulfilling the Government manifesto commitment to repeal and replace the Act. Victims and survivors have felt ignored by the previous Government's approach to legacy, which has been clearly rejected across communities in Northern Ireland. The conditional immunity provisions, in particular, have been opposed by all of the Northern Ireland political parties and by many victims and survivors, as well as being found by the court to be unlawful.

The action taken today to abandon the grounds of appeal against the section 4 Human Rights Act declarations of incompatibility demonstrates that this Government will take a different approach. It underlines the Government's absolute commitment to the Human Rights Act, and to establishing legacy mechanisms that are capable of commanding the confidence of communities and of victims and survivors.

The Government will now begin preparations to address the incompatibility findings of the High Court, which will include laying a draft remedial order under section 10 of the Human Rights Act 1998 to remove offending provisions from the statute book. The Northern Ireland Office has begun work on this, with a view to laying the draft order in Parliament as soon as parliamentary time allows.

The Government have also been clear that it would be irresponsible to repeal the Act in its entirety without anything to replace it. The High Court found the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery to be independent and capable of conducting human rights compliant investigations. The success of the ICRIR will, ultimately, be determined by its ability to deliver justice, accountability, and information to victims and survivors of the troubles. Under the leadership of Sir Declan Morgan as Chief Commissioner, the Government have confidence in its ability to do so. It is also clear, however, that to achieve these objectives, the ICRIR will need to gain the confidence of victims and survivors in its work. The Government will consult on measures to strengthen the ICRIR's independence from Government and its powers.

The Government have also committed to reverse the current prohibition on bringing new civil proceedings, and to propose measures to allow inquests previously halted to proceed. Both mechanisms, while not without their own challenges, have helped to provide many victims and survivors with information, and a sense of justice or accountability that they might not otherwise have obtained. The Government are acutely aware of the distress that the cessation of live inquests in particular has caused those families, and will consider all possible options to ensure those cases can conclude satisfactorily. We will also consider the best way forward for those

inquests involving a significant amount of sensitive information which were unable to conclude within the coronial system.

Effectively addressing the legacy of the past is hugely important, not just for those victims and survivors who continue to pursue answers, but for society in Northern Ireland to be able to move forward. The Government recognise that achieving absolute consensus on these issues is immensely difficult. That is demonstrated by the series of failed attempts since 1998 to implement effective legacy mechanisms. Indeed, even the Good Friday agreement, which brought peace to Northern Ireland after decades of violence, was opposed by some due to the very challenging policy of releasing early from prison those individuals convicted for serious troubles-related offences.

The Government will therefore now undertake a period of consultation with interested parties, including victims and survivors, to seek their views. This will, of course, include engagement with the Northern Ireland political parties and with the Irish Government, with whom the UK Government are committed to working in partnership in seeking a practical way forward that can command support across communities in Northern Ireland and beyond. This will include veterans, recognising the dedicated service of the vast majority of police officers, members of the armed forces, and the security services who did so much to keep people in Northern Ireland safe during the troubles.

The Government recognise that this process will involve difficult conversations, and that many stakeholders will hold different views regarding the best way forward. It is also clear that a resolution to addressing the legacy of Northern Ireland's past will not be reached without a willingness, by all, to listen, to understand the perspectives of others, and to compromise. The Government welcome the opportunity to have these conversations in the months ahead.

Article 2(1) of the Windsor Framework

In the course of its judgment, the High Court also found that, in relation to article 2(1) of the Windsor framework, primary legislation can be disapplied by the courts where the court considers that legislation engages provisions of EU law which no longer apply in Northern Ireland. Whilst the Government are unwavering in its commitment to the obligations under article 2(1) of the Windsor framework, this judgment has potentially wide-ranging implications for other UK legislation which extends to Northern Ireland. Therefore, we have asked the court to continue with its consideration of the interpretation and effect of article 2(1) given the profound constitutional and legal questions that have arisen from the ruling. This is a technical point of law which we hope will be clarified by an onward appeal, for the benefit of ensuring legal certainty and in maintaining a clear human rights framework in Northern Ireland.

Annex: List of declarations of incompatibility

A declaration that the immunity from prosecution provisions are incompatible with articles 2 and 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights ("ECHR").

A declaration that section 43(1) (Troubles-related civil actions brought on or after 17 May 2022 may not be continued on or after 18 November 2023) is incompatible with article 6 ECHR.

A declaration that section 8 of the Act (exclusion of evidence in civil proceedings) is incompatible with articles 2, 3 and 6 ECHR.

A declaration that section 41 of the Act (prohibition of criminal enforcement action for non- serious/connected Troubles-related offences) is incompatible with articles 2 and 3 ECHR.

A declaration that parts of sections 46 and 47 (interim custody orders) are incompatible with article 6 and article 1, protocol 1 ECHR.

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