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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

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House of Commons

Monday 14 October 2024

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[Mr Speaker *in the Chair*]

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

Committee of selection

Ordered,

That Stuart Anderson and Wendy Chamberlain be discharged from the Committee of Selection and Joy Morrissey and Tom Morrison be added.—*(Mark Tami.)*

Speaker's Statement

Mr Speaker: Before we come to oral questions, the House will wish to take a moment to remember our former colleague Alex Salmond, who passed away at the weekend. He served the people of Scotland for over 30 years as a Member of this House, a Member of the Scottish Parliament and, for two terms, First Minister of Scotland. He was a tireless campaigner for Scottish independence, securing the UK Government's agreement to the 2014 referendum and playing a leading role in the yes campaign. His final departure from this House was in 2017, which marked the first occasion in more than three decades that he was not serving in an elected role either here or in Holyrood. He leaves a deep and lasting legacy behind him. His sudden death at the weekend came as a complete shock. The thoughts of this whole House will be with his family and friends at this difficult time. There will be a short time for tributes following Defence questions.

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Strategic Defence Review

1. **Ian Roome** (North Devon) (LD): What progress he has made on the strategic defence review. [900586]

8. **Mr Mark Francois** (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): When he plans to announce the outcome of the strategic defence review. [900595]

The Secretary of State for Defence (John Healey): The Prime Minister commissioned the strategic defence review within two weeks of taking office. It will ensure that the UK is secure at home and strong abroad, both now and in years to come. The review is the first of its kind in the UK, and I am very grateful to Lord Robertson, General Sir Richard Barrons and Fiona Hill, our three external lead reviewers. They will make their final report to the Prime Minister, the Chancellor and me in the first half of 2025. I will report the SCR to Parliament.

Ian Roome: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that answer. I am told that all that three branches of the armed forces still have a long backlog of new recruits trying to get through medical assessments. What assurances can the Secretary of State give us that the strategic defence review will take account of that?

John Healey: I have said that the strategic defence review will place people at its heart, and we will place people at the heart of our defence plans. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right; we follow 14 years of the previous Government's recruitment targets for all forces being missed every year. We have a recruitment crisis and a retention crisis. No plan for the future can deal with that without sorting out recruitment.

Mr Francois: May I wholly concur with your tribute to the late Alex Salmond, Mr Speaker?

A critical element of the strategic defence review will be the defence of our overseas territories. The Foreign Secretary told the House last week that the deal with Mauritius over the Chagos islands has been concluded. To save us waiting until next year, will the Defence Secretary tell us today how much have we offered to pay Mauritius over 99 years for the privilege of our renting back a military facility that belongs to us in first the place? Crucially, which Department will pay that bill: the Ministry of Defence or the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office?

John Healey: The Foreign Secretary said in his statement that full details will be properly set out when the treaty comes before the House. At that point, the House can scrutinise the deal and approve it or not. Let me make it clear that we inherited a situation in which the long-standing UK-US military base was put at risk from problems to do with sovereignty and migration. We have made a historic deal that secures the UK-US base for the future, which is why my counterpart the US Defence Secretary so strongly welcomed it when we reached it.

Mr Speaker: I call the new Chair of the Defence Committee.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I fully concur with your tribute to the late Alex Salmond.

In these particularly volatile times, I fully welcome the Government's strategic defence review. I for one hope it will include serious analysis of the Indo-Pacific region, because many of us are very concerned about China's recent launch of military drills around Taiwan. Will the Secretary of State use this opportunity to condemn those highly aggressive and intimidatory manoeuvres? What are the Government doing to work with international allies to de-escalate tensions?

John Healey: I will indeed. My hon. Friend will know that our party went into the election committed to building on commitments the previous Government

made on the Indo-Pacific. I want the strategic defence review to be not just the Government's defence review, but Britain's defence review. We are consulting military veterans, industry, academic experts and all parties in this House. I trust that, like me, he will welcome that all-party approach, particularly as he now chairs the Select Committee, and will work with us.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): The SDR is welcome and needed. The previous Conservative Government left our armed forces personnel, capabilities and funding depleted. Can the Secretary of State—*[Interruption.]* Hang fire. Can the Secretary of State assure me that the experts conducting our review will have an ongoing focus on our sovereign defence industrial base, and ensure that regions such as the north-east are pivotal in that?

John Healey: They will indeed. This is the way we can reinforce the UK's security and economy. And yes, we can build, through the SDR, on the work that the hon. Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge) did when he was Minister for defence procurement. Like my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck), I am really angry about the state of defence after the last Government: there are billion-pound black holes in defence plans; service morale is at record lows; and Army numbers are set to fall below 70,000 next year. We will work night and day to make our forces more fit to fight, and to make Britain more secure at home and stronger abroad.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I associate all of us in my party with your comments about the late Alex Salmond.

The most important point about the SDR is that it must not be used as an excuse to delay increasing the defence budget to 2.5% of GDP. In September, in answers to written questions, the Department said that it would set out a path to spending 2.5% of GDP on defence "as soon as possible", but last week, at the Dispatch Box, in his middle east statement, the Prime Minister said that the Government would go to 2.5% "in due course". We all know that there is a massive difference between the two, so which is it?

John Healey: The Government are totally committed to spending 2.5% on defence to meet the increasing threat the country faces. The Prime Minister confirmed that in his first week in office, when he and I were together at the NATO summit in Washington. Of course, the last time this country spent 2.5% on defence was in 2010 under Labour, and that level was not matched in any one of the 14 years in which the hon. Gentleman's party was in power.

James Cartlidge: That is a concern. In 2010, just to remind the House, the black hole in the defence budget was bigger than the defence budget, and we were left a note saying that there was no money left. It is significant if the wording is no longer "as soon as possible" and is now "in due course". It is in the national interest to go to 2.5% because of the threats we face as a country. If the Secretary of State told us now that he was fighting hard with the Treasury to go to 2.5% in the Budget at the end of this month, he would have our full support. Is that what he is doing?

John Healey: Fourteen years, Mr Speaker, yet the Conservatives produced their unfunded plan for 2.5% on defence only four weeks before they called the election. It was the hon. Gentleman's former boss, the Defence Secretary Ben Wallace, who told the truth about their record in government when he said to the House:

"we have hollowed out and underfunded"—[*Official Report*, 30 January 2023; Vol. 727, c. 18.]

our armed forces since 2010.

Ukraine: Military Support

2. **Jo Platt** (Leigh and Atherton) (Lab/Co-op): What steps he is taking to increase military support to Ukraine. [900587]

23. **Tom Rutland** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Lab): What steps he is taking to increase military support to Ukraine. [900610]

The Secretary of State for Defence (John Healey): This is day 963 of Russia's brutal, illegal, full-scale invasion of Ukraine. On my second day in this job, I travelled to Odesa and met President Zelensky, because Ukraine is one of my first-order priorities, just as it is for the Government. Since then, we have stepped up military aid, sped up the delivery of battlefield supplies, and confirmed that we will supply £3 billion a year in military aid to Ukraine this year, next year, and every year that it takes for Ukraine to prevail.

Jo Platt: Medics4Ukraine, a UK-based humanitarian organisation, has delivered more than £3 million-worth of medical aid and training to Ukraine, and its founders, Professor Mark Hannaford and Lucia Altatti, were recently awarded medals for their contribution to that. The Government are committed to increasing military aid; does the Secretary of State agree that medical support is a strategic component, and will he meet the founders of Medics4Ukraine to discuss how the Government can further support its lifesaving work?

John Healey: I agree with my hon. Friend, and I too pay tribute to the work of Medics4Ukraine. The UK's Defence Medical Services is also at the forefront of Ukraine's efforts to develop a modern military healthcare system. We have provided training for battlefield surgical teams, we have supplied medical equipment, and, as a world leader in military rehabilitation, we are supporting the development of Ukraine's rehabilitation hospitals. A member of our defence team will be delighted to meet my hon. Friend and Medics4Ukraine to take this matter further.

Tom Rutland: It was hugely welcome to see the Prime Minister host President Zelensky and welcome the new NATO Secretary-General to London last week. What steps is my right hon. Friend taking not only to ensure that UK meets our NATO obligations, but to fundamentally strengthen UK leadership in NATO?

John Healey: My hon. Friend is right: that is the first priority. It will be the centrepiece of the Government's defence plan, and it is at the heart of the strategic defence

review. When President Zelensky was in London last week, he made it clear that for Ukraine, this is a critical period in the war. The Ukrainians are fighting with huge courage, but the Russians are putting great pressure on their frontlines. Putin shows contempt for the lives of his own soldiers: the average Russian losses in September were 1,271 per day, a record high and two and a half times the level this time last year. As Zelensky promotes his victory plan, we in the UK and our allies must do all that we can to strengthen Ukraine during the coming weeks.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that the democratic world cannot afford to lose this war, and does he recall that it is often said that the total defence expenditure of all Ukraine's democratic allies far exceeds anything that Russia could possibly deploy, so Russia will inevitably lose? When will we deploy this might to gain a decisive victory for Ukraine and secure the international global order?

John Healey: The hon. Gentleman is right on both counts. First, the defence of the UK and the rest of Europe starts in Ukraine, and it is essential that we stand with Ukraine and support it for as long as it takes. Secondly, as he says—this is a matter that the Prime Minister and I discussed with the new Secretary-General of NATO, Mark Rutte, last week when he was in London—the allies together must do more to support Ukraine now, and to produce what it needs in the future. The new Secretary-General will make that one of his priorities.

Stephen Gethins (Arbroath and Broughty Ferry) (SNP): Thank you for your kind comments about our late right hon. friend Alex Salmond, Mr Speaker.

I thank the Secretary of State for his contribution. He will be aware of the failures of analysis at the start of the full-scale invasion. Will he consider the report by Phillips O'Brien and Eliot Cohen of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies that looked at some of those failures, so that he is informed for the next process, in terms of support for Ukraine and building support internationally?

John Healey: I will indeed. If the hon. Gentleman could be so kind as to send me the executive summary, rather than the full report, I will certainly take a look at it.

Russia: Armed Forces

3. **Sir Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): What recent estimate his Department has made of the percentage of Russia's gross domestic product spent on its armed forces in each year since the invasion of Ukraine. [900588]

The Secretary of State for Defence (John Healey): Russia's declared total military expenditure was around 4.7% of GDP in 2022. In 2023 it was 5.9% of GDP, and the forecast spending this year is up to around 7% of GDP. As the right hon. Gentleman knows very well, the public figures almost certainly do not tell the full story about Russian expenditure.

Sir Julian Lewis: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for putting that on the record. Does that frightening set of figures not show the scale of the problem and the weight of attack that Russia can bring to bear against Ukraine? How are we doing with the double demand on our resources—the need to both supply Ukraine with hardware and ammunition, and replenish our stocks of hardware and ammunition in order to fulfil our NATO security requirements?

John Healey: The right hon. Gentleman describes the double challenge of continuing to support Ukraine and replenishing our stockpiles, particularly of the weapons, ammunition and systems that we have gifted to Ukraine. The Government already have £1 billion-worth of contracts for replenishing UK stockpiles across a range of systems, and I can tell him that around 60% of the contracted production will be in the UK. That is the way we strengthen Britain's security for the future, but also strengthen Britain's economic growth and prosperity.

Derek Twigg (Widnes and Halewood) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for the work he is doing to support Ukraine. It is very important that we have a united front, and that we are there for the long term to support Ukraine, as we have already heard this morning. What is his view about the determination of our allies to see this conflict through right to the end?

John Healey: I feel more confident in this job than I did when I was in my previous job. I recently attended the US-led gathering of almost 50 countries in Ramstein, where they made a long-term commitment to supporting Ukraine now and into the future. That gave me confidence that, with work, we can play a leading role in helping that coalition to hold together, and in getting NATO to do more to co-ordinate action and ensure that we get support behind Ukraine, so that it prevails and Putin loses.

AUKUS Strategic Partnership

4. **Michelle Scrogham** (Barrow and Furness) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of progress on the AUKUS strategic partnership. [900589]

19. **Chris McDonald** (Stockton North) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of progress on the AUKUS strategic partnership. [900606]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Luke Pollard): The UK is fully committed to the AUKUS partnership. On 26 September, the Secretary of State hosted the first AUKUS Defence Ministers' meeting outside the US. During that discussion, he provided direction and guidance to accelerate our taking advantage of the opportunities that this landmark partnership presents to us. I refer Members to the Defence Ministers' meeting joint communication for more details on progress.

Michelle Scrogham: The Secretary of State already knows how proud we are in Barrow and Furness to be building our Astute and Dreadnought submarines, and to be part of the AUKUS programme. I know from our discussions that this Government understand that we need a cross-departmental approach to support the delivery of the AUKUS deal in Barrow and Furness.

Will he comment on the importance of that broad approach, which aims to make Barrow an even better place in which to live, work and raise a family, and will he meet me to discuss that further?

Luke Pollard: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. Both the Secretary of State and I have visited Barrow to see not only the incredible innovation in the shipyard there, but the amazing workforce who are putting together the nuclear submarines. As my hon. Friend knows, the Government are indeed working across Departments, and with the local council and BAE Systems, to invest heavily not only in the development of the shipyard and the submarine facilities, but in the community that they need. I would be very happy to meet her and colleagues to discuss this issue further.

Chris McDonald: The most recent AUKUS Defence Ministers communiqué outlined an investment in industrial capacity, including £7 billion from this Government, and the Royal United Services Institute has said that the winner in any prolonged war will be the country with the most secure industrial base. Will the Minister expand on his answer to the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis) and describe how this investment in our defence capabilities will strengthen supply chains in places such as Billingham in my constituency?

Luke Pollard: It is certainly true that armies march on their stomach, and in the event of a larger conflict, it will be the strength of our industrial base that determines the victor. That is why we are working together with industry to deliver a new defence industrial strategy, in particular to strengthen our resilience and innovation and to harness expertise, including in my hon. Friend's constituency. I would be happy to meet him to discuss how we can make the most of those opportunities.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): The Minister will know that our AUKUS partners, the United States and Australia, have recently held bilateral discussions with South Korea, Japan, New Zealand and Canada about becoming part of the so-called pillar 2 of AUKUS, and I wonder what bilateral discussions the UK has had on this.

Luke Pollard: There is an opportunity to work with many of our partners internationally on pillar 2 opportunities. Those conversations have been taking place at official level within the Ministry of Defence and at political level, and we are continuing to work to bring those forward because if we want to buy the high-end war-winning kit that we need, the best way of doing that is to work with our partners to ensure not only that we have it but that our allies are able to make the most of it as well.

Bradley Thomas (Bromsgrove) (Con): In the light of the increasing geopolitical threats that we face, can the Minister give an update on the adequacy and resilience of the computer chip supply chain that backs up the UK military?

Luke Pollard: The hon. Member is right to highlight the fragility of the international supply chain in that area. It is very important that Governments in the west, and in the NATO alliance in particular, are able to onshore production and to "friendly-shore" production—no matter how awkward that term is—to ensure that we are less exposed to threats. Colleagues in the Department for Business and Trade, as well as MOD colleagues, are looking into that. More work is needed in this area, but we are acting on it.

LGBT Veterans

5. **Chris Ward** (Brighton Kemptown and Peacehaven) (Lab): What progress he has made on implementing the recommendations of the LGBT veterans independent review. [900590]

The Minister for Veterans and People (Al Carns): If you will allow me to say so, Mr Speaker, it is with great pride that I stand behind this Dispatch Box for the first time, after 24 years of service, to represent veterans, serving personnel and their families and dependants. Be under no illusion: it is now my duty to serve them here in Government and to fight for the deal that they deserve.

I was serving when the ban was lifted in 2000 by a Labour Government. The treatment of LGBT veterans was completely and utterly unacceptable. The treatment of LGBT veterans has been dealt with by the Etherton review, which we will see out at the end of the year. We have met 32 of the 49 recommendations and we will meet those on the financial redress scheme by the end of this year, with a launch in January next year.

Chris Ward: LGBT veterans have suffered appalling injustice and ingratitude, including many in my Brighton Kemptown and Peacehaven constituency. I welcome the update from the Minister, but he will know that it is recommendation 28 on financial redress and compensation that is causing concern among veterans. Because the report caps compensation at £50 million, the average payment per veteran might be as low as £12,500. The then Prime Minister, now the Leader of the Opposition, rightly told the House that the ban was

"an appalling failure of the British state".—[*Official Report*, 19 July 2023; Vol. 736, c. 897.]

Will the Minister meet me and Fighting With Pride to discuss how we can take this forward to get fair and swift compensation?

Al Carns: I know that a significant number of my hon. Friend's constituents are affected by this completely unacceptable and highly regrettable policy. I met Fighting With Pride and Lord Etherton just last week. I will meet them again and I will meet my hon. Friend to talk through the detail. I can confirm that Defence is working with experts across Government to establish an appropriate financial redress scheme. That scheme will launch this year and I will update the House in due course.

UK Defences

6. **Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central and West) (Lab): What steps he is taking to help secure the future of the UK's defences. [900592]

17. **David Pinto-Duschinsky** (Hendon) (Lab): What steps he is taking to help secure the future of the UK's defences. [900604]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Luke Pollard): The strategic defence review will consider all aspects of defence so that the United Kingdom is both secure at home and strong abroad. It will ensure that defence is central to both the security and the economic growth and prosperity of our homeland. The SDR will set out a deliverable and affordable plan within the trajectory of spending 2.5% of GDP on defence.

Chi Onwurah: The Department's future capability innovation programme accelerates innovation in operational capability. Given its success in delivering rapidly prototyped drones to Ukraine, and in growing the UK drone sector as part of the process, how will the Minister make sure that the lessons learned from the programme are adopted across defence procurement, especially in areas such as cyber-security and artificial intelligence, to ensure that innovation is rapidly operationalised and that a higher proportion of the work goes to British small and medium-sized enterprises?

Luke Pollard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her question and for championing the country's tech sectors. She is absolutely right that the experience we are seeing in Ukraine means that we need to innovate faster, have more spiral development and bring more talent into these sectors. We have a good record of doing so, not just on drones but on AI and directed energy systems, where we have our own capabilities. We are now working with NATO, Five Eyes and AUKUS partners to ensure that we learn from that and to make sure that it is not just our big defence primes but the entire supply chain, including small businesses and start-ups, that benefits.

David Pinto-Duschinsky: It was a huge pleasure to welcome my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the Nepalese community centre in Burnt Oak this summer to talk to Gurkha veterans about the issues they face. Does the Minister agree that the Gurkha Regiment has an important role to play in the future of the UK's defence? Will he outline what steps the Ministry of Defence is taking to address the failures of the previous Government in supporting Gurkha veterans, and will he meet me to discuss these issues?

Luke Pollard: The Government greatly value the contribution that the Gurkhas continue to make in supporting the UK's security and defence, and we take our responsibility to Gurkha veterans very seriously. The Government remain committed to supporting them and their families during and after their service with the British Army. The Minister for Veterans and People is shortly to meet the ambassador of Nepal and Gurkha veteran representatives to continue that work.

Mr Gagan Mohindra (South West Hertfordshire) (Con): As the Minister will know, the Royal Fleet Auxiliary industrial dispute is putting our national security at risk. Does he think it is a betrayal of our defence that Labour puts generous settlements for their rail paymasters over the small number of seafarers who keep us safe?

Luke Pollard: I think the hon. Gentleman can do better than that, to be honest. It is important that we support not only those who serve in all our forces, but those in the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. Discussions are ongoing to try to resolve the industrial action that started under the last Government, and I want to thank all those who serve in the Royal Navy, in the Royal Fleet Auxiliary and in civilian roles. It is the whole team that matters, and they all matter to this Government.

Sarah Dyke (Glastonbury and Somerton) (LD): Many of my constituents work in the defence sector, with RNAS Yeovilton based in Glastonbury and Somerton, Thales operating from Templecombe, and Leonardo based nearby. However, the "Delivering the Defence Workforce of the Future" report revealed that 77% of key decision makers and influencers in the sector believe that a shortage of science, technology, engineering and maths skills will deteriorate the UK's defence capabilities. What steps will the Minister take to address this shortage and to secure the UK's defence?

Luke Pollard: I am grateful for the contribution of south-west defence companies to our national defence. As a south-west MP, I know it is important.

If we are to have sustainable defence, we need not only our armed forces but our supply chain to invest in skills on a sustainable, long-term basis. Short-term contracts do not contribute to that, which is one of the reasons why, as part of our defence industrial strategy and the strategic defence review, we are looking longer term at how to make sure we have the skills we need for both those who serve and those who support those who serve. There is a lot of work to do in this area.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Stuart Anderson (South Shropshire) (Con): As a rifleman, I know the importance of training for military operations; it ensures readiness, lethality and survivability. In addition to the recent announcement that there is no firm timeline for spending 2.5% of GDP, possible cuts to the training budget have been mentioned. Will the Minister confirm that there will be no cuts to the training budget in either this financial year or the next?

Luke Pollard: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his place; it is a great job being shadow Minister for the Armed Forces, as I know. If I may say so politely, the reason there is severe financial pressure on us is that this Government were left with a £22 billion financial black hole by his party. Let me be clear: supporting our armed forces to train to be the best, to deter aggression and to defeat it if necessary is a priority for this Government. Despite the economic circumstances his party passed on to mine, we are taking steps to ensure that our armed forces have what they need.

Veterans: Support

7. **Jess Asato** (Lowestoft) (Lab): What steps he is taking to support veterans. [900593]

The Minister for Veterans and People (Al Carns): This is a Government of service that will always stand up for those who serve our country. That is why the Prime Minister focused on the debt we owe our veterans in his first conference speech as Prime Minister. As a veteran myself, I stand steadfast in my commitment to deliver improved services for veterans, working closely across Government and with the devolved Governments.

Jess Asato: The Lord Kitchener Memorial Holiday Centre is an extraordinary charity in my constituency, set up more than 100 years ago after the great war to provide convalescence for returning soldiers. Today it provides much-needed short stays for veterans and their families across the country, as well as a drop-in and information centre for veterans locally, but sadly its funding situation is precarious. Does the Minister agree that investing in our locally valued veterans' charities is essential if we are to provide the best support for our brave service personnel?

Al Carns: I thank my hon. Friend for an important statement and question, and I thank the Lord Kitchener Memorial Holiday Centre for all the work it has done in supporting veterans for over a century now—it is truly deserving of applause. I would be happy to visit the centre with her to see the brilliant work that it does. The Government are looking at the best way to deliver collaboratively across the charitable sector, which includes more than 1,000 charities, to deliver the best support for veterans and deliver the deal they deserve.

Ben Obese-Jecty (Huntingdon) (Con): During his Labour conference speech, the Prime Minister made one of his key announcements:

"We will repay those who served us and house all veterans in housing need. Homes will be there for heroes."

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ben Obese-Jecty: Wait for it. Last week, the Government confirmed that that would actually be done by exempting veterans from local connection and residency tests, rather than by making dedicated housing available. Given that it was a key conference pledge, what guarantees are the Government able to offer veterans that homes really will be there for them?

Al Carns: As the hon. Gentleman will know, Op Fortitude is running and we have had more than 2,000 referrals so far, with 700 veterans put into housing. We will continue to extend the programme to ensure that every veteran has a home in due course.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): This weekend marked 40 years since one of the most appalling and audacious terrorist attacks on British soil, the attack on the Conservative party conference in Brighton in 1984. Five people died in the bombing. If you will forgive me, Mr Speaker, they were the Member of Parliament for Enfield, Southgate, Anthony Berry; Lady Jeanne Shattock; Muriel Maclean of the Scottish Conservatives; Eric Taylor; and Roberta Wakeham. All are remembered. Thirty-one people were also injured and some never recovered.

The peace that we enjoy today in Northern Ireland and across these islands was hard-won over many decades, but hard-won also was the protection afforded to our veterans, who served our country through the troubles and have since been plagued by ambulance-chasing lawyers with vexatious claims. That protection was achieved through the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023, but there is concern within the veteran community that the new Government's proposed repealing and replacement of that Act will put those men and women, many of whom are now well into retirement, at risk. Can the hon. and gallant Gentleman assure me, and them, that they will be protected and that those who served our country with distinction and valour over so many years will never be at the mercy of those seeking to distort their service or to damage their lives and reputations?

Al Carns: I thank the hon. and gallant Gentleman for his comments. Our Government recognise the important service of veterans and serving personnel and the sacrifices they made to keep us all safe in Northern Ireland during the troubles. I did not serve during the troubles, but I did serve in Northern Ireland and I understand them. He has my absolute commitment that any individual who needs to go through legal proceedings will get the correct welfare and legal support.

Ukraine: Military Support

9. **David Burton-Sampson** (Southend West and Leigh) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with his international counterparts on support for Ukraine. [900596]

13. **Cat Eccles** (Stourbridge) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with his international counterparts on support for Ukraine. [900600]

15. **Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with his international counterparts on support for Ukraine. [900602]

The Secretary of State for Defence (John Healey): I regularly discuss how best to support Ukraine with international partners. Last week, I met my Ukrainian counterpart and the new Secretary-General of NATO in London. Last month at the Ukraine defence contact group in Ramstein, I met nearly 50 other Defence Ministers who came together to commit to continued support of Ukraine, both in the immediate fight and for the long term.

David Burton-Sampson: I thank my right hon. Friend for his response. Our military support needs to be part of wider diplomatic and economic support. There is growing concern about loopholes that allow Russian oil exports to a third-party country to be developed into other petroleum products and then to be imported into the UK and other countries that have imposed sanctions on Russia. Can the Secretary of State tell me what work he and his counterparts are doing to crack down on that loophole and to stop inadvertently funding the Russian war effort?

John Healey: My hon. Friend is right: alongside military aid, economic support and diplomatic help are required to support Ukraine and put pressure on Russia. The UK has banned the import of Russian oil and oil products, in line with the steps taken by the US and the European Union. Importers must now include proof of origin and country of last dispatch as a way of tightening up on the loopholes, and we will not hesitate to take further action if Russian revenues, which fuel the war machine, are not closed off by the sanctions.

Cat Eccles: I thank the Secretary of State for his answer. On a recent visit to Ukraine, I visited the Chernihiv oblast, which is a former Russian red line. There, we saw a large military effort by communities and local government. Given that large segments of the military in Ukraine are made up differently from our own Ministry of Defence, what discussions is the Secretary of State having to ensure funds are going into community and local government efforts?

John Healey: Like my hon. Friend, I have been privileged to see some of those community efforts and local mayor-led initiatives when I have visited Ukraine. Part of the work that the Government have put in place since 2022—I am proud of the UK's leadership on Ukraine over that period—has been to commit £38 million to the Ukraine good governance fund. That has allowed communities to draw down some of that funding and the Ukrainian Government to take steps to deal with some of the corruption that has been endemic since the Soviet period. That is an extraordinary feat, given that they are fighting a war and dealing with corruption in their system at the same time.

Matt Western: With winter looming, defending the home front in Ukraine is paramount. However, Russia has intensified its attacks on energy infrastructure in Ukraine, including substations, where it has deployed cluster munitions. That is particularly alarming. Given those developments, what additional support can the UK give through de-mining equipment to get rid of those munitions from the ground?

John Healey: My hon. Friend makes an important point. It is vital to remember that these are not military targets; they are civilian targets. These are Russian actions that breach international humanitarian law and we must never lose sight of the moral outrage about what the Russians are doing. Clearly, with the onset of winter, there is a vital imperative for Britain and other countries to step up support as we can. Since the election, we have been offering specialist advice on how to protect energy generation and transmission sites, and the Foreign Secretary, when he was in Ukraine last month, committed another £20 million to support emergency energy needs.

John Cooper (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con): In the shell crisis of 1915, the Government of the day and industry came together to support our troops on the western front. We are hearing much about new contracts being placed for things such as ordnance, which is critical to the defence of Ukraine and to replenishing our own stocks. Does the Secretary of State share my concern that senior figures in the Scottish Government seem reluctant to put money into those defence companies, except for civilian use? Can he explain how Scotland can play its full part since it provides so much of the ordnance, with everything from Storm Shadow to Type 26 destroyers built in Scotland?

John Healey: The hon. Member and I share common cause in recognising the role that Scottish workers and Scottish industry play not just in the security of our own United Kingdom, but through the contribution we make to supporting Ukraine in its fight. I have been proud to visit workers in some of the Scottish sites. Our defence industrial strategy, as we develop it in the months ahead, will reinforce the essential role that Scotland plays in our security, and in the UK economy.

Richard Foord (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): Last week, President Zelensky of Ukraine met with German Chancellor Scholz. Zelensky said:

"For us, it is very important that aid does not decrease next year."

It is welcome that the Foreign Secretary will meet with EU27 Ministers later to discuss the war in Ukraine, but will the EU27 plus the UK be in a position to assure Zelensky that military aid to Ukraine will not decrease next year, regardless of what happens in the presidential election next month?

John Healey: Yes, they will.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Defence Secretary for that response. When I look at Israel's capacity to defend its citizens and its property with its dome system, it is clear to me that Ukraine needs something similar. Has he had an opportunity to talk to his NATO compatriots, and with the USA in particular, to see whether it is possible to offer Ukraine some of the protection that Israel has?

John Healey: The hon. Gentleman is right that one of the priorities that the Ukrainian President and Defence Minister have constantly stressed to us and other allies is the need for stronger air defence. It is one of the reasons we have now let a contract for short-range air defence missiles: the lightweight multirole missiles. We will produce 650 of those—some of them delivered into Ukraine before the end of the year—and we look to go further in 2025.

Global Combat Air Programme

10. **Jesse Norman** (Hereford and South Herefordshire) (Con): What progress he has made on delivering the global combat air programme. [900597]

Mr Speaker: I think you are meant to stand up when you ask a Question formally.

Hon. Members: He's new!

Mr Speaker: He's far too grand for it!

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Luke Pollard): Let me be absolutely clear that GCAP is an important programme, as the Prime Minister has stated. That is why the Defence Secretary hosted his Japanese and Italian counterparts within weeks of taking office. Progress continues, alongside the strategic defence review, with more than 3,500 people employed on future combat air.

Jesse Norman: I apologise if I was hypnotised by your gaze, Mr Speaker.

I worry about the Government's grip on strategy all together. First, they have given away the Chagos islands before the strategic defence review. Now they are putting at risk the global combat air programme by including it within the SDR. Is the Minister aware of the extreme efforts that our partners in Italy and Japan, visited by

the Defence Committee in the last Parliament, have made to discharge their side of the bargain—in Japan's case for the first time since the second world war in international procurement outside the USA? What measures is he taking to reassure them about the centrality and importance of the programme?

Luke Pollard: The Defence Secretary has clear instructions from the manifesto that Britain is to be better defended with a Labour Government. That is why within two weeks of taking office the Prime Minister had commissioned Lord Robertson to conduct the strategic defence review. The Prime Minister, the Defence Secretary and I have all made it clear that GCAP is an important programme. Not only do we have an amazing workforce working on it but I am pleased to tell the House that last month the UK ratified the GCAP convention, the international treaty that sets up the GCAP International Government Organisation. We will continue to make progress.

Chris Evans (Caerphilly) (Lab/Co-op): GCAP will contribute £37 billion to the economy, but the Minister will know that the SDR being under review has led to a number of stories appearing in the press that the programme is about to cancelled. As someone who once represented General Dynamics, which built Ajax, I know that a belief that something will not happen tends to cause problems within the local and national economies. As the SDR goes ahead, will the Minister ensure that this House and the press will be kept up to date on how GCAP is developing?

Luke Pollard: GCAP is an important programme, and there will be further updates in relation to it as the SDR reports in the first half of next year. In the meantime, we continue to progress the project; indeed, work is continuing across a range of necessary and important defence projects, because we do not want the SDR to be an excuse to slow down progress. At a time when our troops and allies are operating in difficult and contested environments, we need to ensure that we invest in the kit that we need. That is what the SDR will set out: the future shape of the UK armed forces.

Defence Research and Development: Funding

11. **David Reed** (Exmouth and Exeter East) (Con): What plans he has for future levels of spending on defence research and development. [900598]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Luke Pollard): Defence R&D is critical to maximising the operational advantage of our armed forces. In an increasingly volatile and technology-driven world, the Department remains committed to investing in cutting-edge science, technology and innovation. Just after my appointment to the Department, I was delighted to visit the commando training centre in the hon. Member's constituency to see the innovative training and capabilities of the future commando force.

David Reed: Frontier technologies such as artificial intelligence are already shaping every domain across the modern battlefield. To stay ahead of our adversaries and keep our service personnel and allies safe, it is imperative that we have the domestic ability to develop these technologies. As supercomputing is essential for the development of advanced AI systems, it was disappointing to see the Labour Government pull the plug on the University of Edinburgh's £800 million exascale supercomputing project. From listening to the Secretary of State and his team, I know that they understand the need to invest in AI for defence, so will the Minister please inform the House how the Department intends to create these technologies when his party's demand signal to academia and industry appears to be wavering?

Luke Pollard: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to the House. As a fellow Devon MP, I believe it is important that we have a strong voice on defence, so I am grateful for his question. The new Government have been very clear that we see AI playing a really important role not just in defence, but across a whole range of technologies. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology is leading on much of that work in his Department. AI and related technologies are being looked at in relation to the strategic defence review, where we need not only to upscale the innovative work that is already being done by UK technologies, but to provide the skills and the supply chain to ensure that we can continue to deliver, learning the lessons from what we are seeing in Ukraine, in particular.

Danny Kruger (East Wiltshire) (Con): Ministers repeatedly state their commitment to reaching a spending level of 2.5% of GDP on defence, but they simply will not tell the House when they will do so. It is no surprise that we are already hearing reports of potential cuts to programmes in defence R&D. Will the Minister simply rule out cuts to defence R&D and science spending in this financial year and the next?

Luke Pollard: As a Government, we are committed to spending 2.5% of GDP on defence. We have set out clearly that that will be announced at a future fiscal event. I must say that I am a wee bit disappointed, because I would have expected the Opposition Front Benchers to stand up and apologise for the mess that they have left not just the armed forces, but the wider economy. The Government are committed to spending 2.5% of GDP on defence. We are committed to investing in our armed forces, and we will continue to do so.

Helen Maguire (Epsom and Ewell) (LD): May I concur with your comments about the late Alex Salmond, Mr Speaker?

The exchange of research and development between Ukraine and the UK is vital to improve the security of both countries. What steps is the Department taking to learn from the innovative technologies from the battlefield to develop shared collaborative capabilities?

Luke Pollard: I congratulate the hon. Lady on her appointment as a shadow spokesperson. I was in Ukraine a few weeks ago leading a trade delegation of British companies looking at precisely the issue of how we can learn from the battlefield experience of Ukraine, making sure that for the new technologies needed there, we can invest in the supply chain—not only in the UK, but in Ukraine—to make it more resilient. A lot of work is

ongoing in this area, but we will need to do more. If we are to defeat Putin's illegal invasion, we will need not only to restock our own supply chain, but to accelerate the provision of innovative tech to Ukraine. That is what this Government are committed to doing.

Topical Questions

T1. [900611] **Chris McDonald** (Stockton North) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Defence (John Healey): The middle east continues to be a major focus for the Government. Last week, we passed one year since the horrifying Hamas terror attack on Israel. We marked the memory of those who were murdered, we grieved with the families of the hostages who are still held, and we share the agony of so many Palestinians over the civilians who have been killed since.

We are working on an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. In Lebanon we are working to reduce the risk of further escalation, and a ceasefire and the UN plan for a buffer zone are vital to that. In addition, last week I visited British troops in Cyprus, where contingency plans are in place to deal with further developments. On behalf of the House, I thank them for their professionalism and their dedication.

Chris McDonald: Can my right hon. Friend outline what steps the Government are taking to ensure that every veteran who has bravely served this country has access to safe and secure housing, so that they never face the injustice of homelessness?

The Minister for Veterans and People (Al Carns): As I mentioned before, Op FORTITUDE is up and running. It is doing exceptionally well, with over 2,000 referrals and 700 veterans finding housing, and we will work to continue that programme for the foreseeable future.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): Thousands of children of armed forces personnel face unaffordable increases to their school fees because of this Government's ideological decision to charge VAT on education. That could have the perverse effect of forcing experienced personnel to quit the service of their country just when we should be seeking to maximise retention. Will the Minister therefore confirm that children of armed forces families will be exempt from the new VAT rise, and furthermore that that exemption will apply from January when the new tax kicks in?

John Healey: We recognise the extraordinary strain that is sometimes placed on the family of armed forces personnel, including their children. That is why the continuity of education allowance—an important part of the package that reflects and respects the service—is in place, and it is why we are looking very closely at options to ensure we continue with that.

T2. [900612] **Emma Foody** (Cramlington and Killingworth) (Lab/Co-op): Earlier this month, a Royal Navy investigation found intolerable misogyny in the submarine service, following complaints of bullying and sexual harassment. Forward Assist, a charity based in my constituency that supports survivors, has done research and a number of reports into the prevalence and impact of military sexual trauma. Will the Secretary of State meet me and that charity to discuss its findings, and how we can support serving personnel and veterans?

Al Carns: I would love to visit that charity with my hon. Friend in due course. Any reports of misogyny or wrongdoing in any way are utterly unacceptable. That is why since entering government we have started a programme of raising our standards with a plan to enact cultural change across defence, with the aim of making defence the best place to work across Government.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Helen Maguire (Epsom and Ewell) (LD): This year, British military jets have been involved in several operations in the middle east without consulting Parliament. Allowing the Commons to debate military action wherever feasible is essential to ensuring public accountability. Will the Secretary of State set out the Government's stance on the use of a parliamentary vote to approve military action?

John Healey: It is a convention that if military action is authorised by the Prime Minister, that is reported as soon as possible to this House. It is important to any Prime Minister and any Government that if they commit UK forces to military action, they will want the support of all sides of this House.

T8. [900618] **Ruth Jones** (Newport West and Islwyn) (Lab): Under an agreement inherited from the last Government, a system remains in place allowing for the licensing of trail hunting on land owned by the Defence Infrastructure Organisation. It is welcome news that that licence issuing has been paused while the agreement is under ministerial review, but in the light of the widespread recognition that trail hunting is often a smokescreen for illegal hunting, will the Minister meet me and other concerned MPs to discuss the permanent revocation of that agreement, in line with the Government's manifesto ban on trail hunting?

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Luke Pollard): I am grateful to my hon. Friend—she and I have campaigned on many similar issues for quite some time. I would like to make it clear that no licences to trail hunt on Ministry of Defence land have been granted for the 2024-25 hunting season. The Department is considering its position alongside other Government Departments, and we hope to have an update soon, but I am very happy to meet my hon. Friend in the meantime.

T3. [900613] **Mr Joshua Reynolds** (Maidenhead) (LD): Many members of the armed forces in my constituency are living in sub-par MOD housing that is cold, damp and mould-ridden. How is the Minister ensuring that all MOD properties are fit to live in?

Al Carns: I have been utterly shocked by the state of parts of the housing estate that we have inherited. Over the last 14 years, the Government of the time failed to decisively close with this issue, instead kicking

the can down the road or continually topping up the leaking bucket. We have examples of families living in accommodation with no running water, with mould and with pest infestations; there were 53,000 complaints between 2018 and 2023. Having lived in some of that accommodation, I can tell the House that it is unacceptable. Our armed forces protect the freedoms we enjoy, and this Government will take action—including a medium to long-term review—to get after the housing and create a new armed forces commissioner to improve service life.

T10. [900620] **Luke Murphy** (Basingstoke) (Lab): I am immensely proud of the armed forces, both those serving and veterans, who live in my constituency, but I do worry for the future given the recruitment crisis that we inherited from the previous Government. What steps are this Government taking to tackle the recruitment crisis, in particular to attract diverse skills such as in cyber?

Luke Pollard: I am grateful for the question, because we know that there is a recruitment and retention crisis in the UK armed forces. It is precisely for that reason that the Defence Secretary set out at the Labour party conference a series of changes, including scrapping 100 outdated recruitment policies and creating a new direct entry route for cyber. There is a lot more work to be done in this area, and the Department will be making further announcements in due course.

T4. [900614] **Shockat Adam** (Leicester South) (Ind): The 2,000 lb bombs dropped on innocent civilians in Gaza and Lebanon led to the heinous and unimaginable scenes we saw over the weekend of newborn babies being killed and young children being burned alive. These bombs are being dropped by F-35 fighter jets, and we supply parts for F-35 fighter jets. When will we stop doing that and adhere to international conventions?

John Healey: We have made decisions on the suspension of arms sales to Israel, and we have set out the details of those to the House. We are working, as well as calling, for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza so that all hostages can get out, all the aid needed by the Palestinians can be flooded in, and the first steps can be taken towards the political solution that is ultimately the best guarantor of two states and a permanent peace in the area.

Warinder Juss (Wolverhampton West) (Lab): Our first duty as a Government is to keep the nation safe and to protect our citizens, particularly when we are going through a period of global strife and instability, with war in Europe and conflict in the middle east. Although I am aware of our unshakeable commitment to NATO, will my right hon. Friend please reassure the House that, when it comes to defence, our relationship with our European allies has not been adversely affected by Brexit?

John Healey: It is the previous Government who have to answer for the impact of Brexit. As a new Government, we have set out to rebuild relations with key European allies, especially on defence and security. Although NATO remains the cornerstone of our European security, there is an important role for the European Union. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has started discussions with the European Union, as indeed has the Prime Minister, on how we can achieve a greater level of co-operation between the EU and the UK.

T5. [900615] **Sir Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): I commend the new Veterans Minister for the contact he has already had with the chairman of the War Widows Association, who is with us today in the Special Gallery. May I request a meeting with him, her and me to try to resolve the situation for the last 49 war widows who have so far been excluded from the payment scheme that we managed to work out for those who unfairly lost their pensions on remarriage?

Al Carns: I thank the right hon. Member for bringing that up. Given the amount of his experience, I would love to sit down with him and the chair of the War Widows Association to talk this through in more detail.

David Taylor (Hemel Hempstead) (Lab): In May, I was privileged to join a group called Help99 in driving some pick-up trucks and other military vehicles to Kyiv for the use of Ukrainian soldiers on the frontline. Will the Minister meet me to discuss how we can make it easier for such groups to deliver vehicles, which are so desperately needed?

Luke Pollard: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend and parliamentary colleagues in all parties for the work they are doing in their constituencies to support our friends in Ukraine. I would be very happy to meet him to see what we can do to support their work further, because we will support Ukraine for as long as it takes.

Mr Speaker: I call the Father of the House.

T6. [900616] **Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): In the run-up to the second world war, during an era of increasing international tensions, the Government opened up many new RAF airfields, in what was called the expansion programme. One of those airfields was RAF Scampton. Now that we are no longer to have illegal migrants there, this matter is sitting in the Home Office's in-tray: will the MOD work with the Home Office to ensure that we keep the runway open for future use? It is one of the best, longest runways in Europe. Who knows—RAF Scampton might be not just part of the history of the RAF, with the Dambusters and the Red Arrows, but part of the future of the RAF and save us once again.

John Healey: We will indeed work with the Home Office on the future of RAF Scampton.

Lillian Jones (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab): I concur with the comments regarding the late Alex Salmond.

My constituent Hannah was refused entry into the RAF due to a prior anterior cruciate ligament injury, which is now fully repaired, recovered and rehabilitated. Will my hon. Friend review his Department's policy on the rehabilitation both of armed forces personnel and applicants graded as medically unfit?

Al Carns: In August, medical standards including on ACL injuries were changed. Decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis, but I would like to discuss it in more detail in person in due course.

T7. [900617] **Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): Does the Secretary of State share my incredulity that he has not been told the cost of leasing the facilities in the Chagos?

John Healey: I do not think the right hon. Gentleman heard me; I said earlier that the Foreign Secretary had said the other day that the detail of the costs and the agreement will be set out properly before this House when it comes to consider and debate the treaty.

Fred Thomas (Plymouth Moor View) (Lab): Devonport dockyard in Plymouth is where the UK repairs and maintains our submarine fleet. In future, there will be even more submarines, and we will need even more infrastructure for that upkeep, so what conversations is the Secretary of State having with the Secretaries of State responsible for housing and transport to deliver that infrastructure to support our increased submarine programme?

John Healey: I paid tribute to the previous Government when they put in place Team Barrow, in recognition of the fact that the future of its shipyard and submarine building programme was not just a matter for the Ministry of Defence. I would say the same thing to my hon. Friend, and I would be pleased to meet him to discuss it further.

Sir Alec Shelbrooke (Wetherby and Easingwold) (Con): In light of the latest Hezbollah attack on Israel, will the Secretary of State assure the House that we will continue to supply defensive equipment to Israel to help it defend itself against Iranian proxies?

John Healey: We have an unshakeable commitment to the right of Israel to defend itself and we have demonstrated in the past a willingness to stand with Israel, particularly when it has been under direct under attack from Iran.

Mr Speaker: We now come to points of order before the urgent questions. I will deal with them in a slightly different way from normal. I call the leader of the Scottish National party.

Points of Order

3.38 pm

Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

In the wee hours of 9 June 2017, I watched on as the most talented, formidable and consequential politician of his generation—a man who had represented the people of Banff and Buchan, Aberdeenshire East and Gordon; a man who had served for two terms as the First Minister of Scotland—lost his parliamentary seat for the first time in 30 years. It is a moment I will never forget, not because of the nature of his defeat but for what happened next, because within just a few moments, Alex Salmond took to the podium and gave a speech that, despite all the despair that those of us in the SNP felt in the room that night, made us feel 10 feet tall. He gave us back the hope that things would get better, and would get better quickly.

Rabbie Burns once wrote:

"The heart ay's the part ay

That makes us right or wrang."

Alex gave all of us in the SNP the belief that what we felt in our hearts was worth fighting for—the belief that we could one day become an independent nation. Alex Salmond took us so very close to making that belief a reality.

At this time of profound shock and sorrow, I send my heartfelt personal condolences to Alex's wife Moira, his wider family, his friends and his legion of fans across the nationalist movement and within the Alba party itself. It is of great personal sorrow to me that Alex Salmond will not live to see Scotland become an independent nation. The challenge for all of us now in the nationalist movement is to make sure that we put good his legacy and deliver the future he so badly fought for throughout his distinguished parliamentary career.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Ian Murray): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I know that colleagues from across the House will join me today in expressing our shock and sadness at the sudden passing of the right honourable Alex Salmond. He was a Member of this House for 25 years and of the Scottish Parliament for 11 years, and he was of course First Minister of Scotland for seven years. His impact wherever he served was profound.

My thoughts and sympathies are first and foremost with his family and friends, and especially his wife Moira, who has already been mentioned. Members might not be aware that the Scotland Office brought Moira and Alex together; they met first as colleagues in that Department before marrying in 1981. My thoughts are also with those whose relationships with him had broken down in recent years and those who are finding this time difficult as they deal with a range of emotions.

It is no secret that some of his happiest periods as a politician were spent in this place, where he made alliances that may to some have seemed surprising. My thoughts today are particularly with the right hon. Member for Goole and Pocklington (Sir David Davis), who I know has lost a close friend, and with Alex's SNP colleagues.

In the short period during which our careers in this place overlapped, I was always impressed with Alex's formidable oratory and debating style. No Member from any part of this House was given an easy ride. He sat on the third Bench—where the leader of the SNP, the right hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn), is today—during the passage of the Scotland Act 2016, chuntering and bantering in my ear every time I stood at the Opposition Dispatch Box. His love of lively discussion extended beyond this Chamber, and I was always keen to keep the topic on our shared passion for Heart of Midlothian football club, rather than constitutional matters.

It is impossible to overstate the impact that Alex had on Scotland and our politics. After half a century of involvement, from student activist to First Minister, whether you agreed or disagreed with his political objectives, there is no denying the rigour and commitment with which he pursued his goals. That commitment saw Alex lead the Scottish National party for a total of 20 years, taking it from a small political movement to the party of government in Scotland. In doing so, he secured a referendum on Scottish independence in 2014, an achievement that would surely have been scarcely believable for a student activist who joined the SNP in the early 1970s, and perhaps even for the Alex Salmond who first led the party in the early 1990s.

As someone firmly on the opposite side of that debate, I know that the result of the referendum was a source of huge disappointment to Alex. It was testament to his conviction in the cause that he continued to campaign for Scottish independence with the same passion in Parliament, in the SNP, in the Alba party and in communities across Scotland throughout the past decade. He has left an indelible mark on Scottish politics and public life. I know that many in the independence movement and beyond will miss him. I once again send the deepest sympathies on behalf of the UK Government to all his family and friends at this difficult time.

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): Further to those points of order, Mr Speaker. On behalf of the Opposition, I would also like to pay my tribute to the right honourable Alex Salmond. As others have said, despite political differences, we were all shocked and saddened to hear the news on Saturday of Alex Salmond's sudden passing. He and I were both elected to the Scottish Parliament in 2007, and although we disagreed on many of the big issues of the day, not least the question of independence for Scotland, we all respect his dedication to public service as a Member of the Scottish Parliament, as a Member of Parliament and as First Minister of Scotland. He was passionate, formidable, impressive and hugely charismatic. Alex Salmond was undoubtedly a giant in Scottish and United Kingdom politics. My sincere sympathies go to his wife Moira and to his wider family, in particular his sister Gail, who lives in Hawick in my constituency in the Scottish Borders. My thoughts and prayers are with them all.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Further to those points of order, Mr Speaker. Alex Salmond was not just a parliamentary colleague of mine; for a number of years, when we lived in Aberdeenshire, he was also my own Member of Parliament. I confess that

I never actually voted for him, but that did allow me to see, and hear from all those who dealt with him in the north-east of Scotland, that he was genuinely a byword for energy and commitment in representing the interests of his Banff and Buchan constituents.

It was not until I was elected here in 2001 that I got to know Alex personally. He and I both represented constituencies heavily dependent on the fishing industry, which was then facing an existential crisis, as cod stocks in the North sea collapsed. At that time, we all had to be experts in the spawning stock biomass of North sea cod, and Alex, with his natural head for figures, could sometimes leave everyone in the room breathless as he interrogated the so-called experts about the statistical basis of what they were proposing to do. The survival of a Scottish whitefish industry today is in no small part a result of his efforts then.

It was also in that first Parliament that I met and got to know Alex's wife Moira. I do not think it is speaking ill to say that Alex could divide a room; Moira, on the other hand, is someone about whom I have never heard anyone say a bad word. She has always been unfailingly warm and friendly. Her devotion to Alex was total and obvious to me from the first moment I met her. So it is to Moira Salmond today that my thoughts turn. I can hardly imagine the sense of loss that she must be feeling. To Moira and the rest of Alex's family I send my condolences and those of my party as we mourn the passing of Alex Salmond—a man whose like we may never see again.

Sir David Davis (Goole and Pocklington) (Con): Further to those points of order, Mr Speaker. Very, very few people in this House change history; most of us are moved by it rather than moving it ourselves. Alex Salmond was an exception to that, as we have heard from all the people—mostly his opponents—who have spoken well of him today. He was a brilliant speaker, passionate about social justice and particularly passionate about his own country and his wish for independence and the Scottish nationalist agenda. He was fiercely brave—something that we often miss in this place. He was willing to challenge every established power structure. He was incredibly energetic, erudite, intelligent and a brilliant leader. As a result, he achieved the things we have heard about. The Scottish nationalist cause went from what was frankly a minority interest to being a central part of Scottish politics, and indeed of United Kingdom politics. He changed them all—something that very few of us will be able to do.

It was a tragedy that at the end of Alex's career his own party and Government turned on him. I am not going to elaborate on that today; this is not the right place for that. But I will put on the record the comment made today by his lawyer, David McKie, who represented him through those really difficult times of his life. Mr McKie said:

> "Alex's courage and strength of character over the three-year period, from the Scottish Government launching an unlawful process against him, throughout his criminal trial in which he was cleared of all charges by a jury of his peers, to his unimpeachable evidence to the parliamentary inquiry, was absolutely incredible.
>
> What he endured—the apparatus of the state turning against him—would have broken many people, but not Alex… I will always remember a truly incredible human being, with remarkable insight, strength of personality and a stoic restraint which many others could not contemplate."

Alex was a very proud son of Scotland, but he was also a son of this House, of whom we ourselves should be proud. I finish by offering my condolences and heartfelt wishes to Moira, the rest of his family and all his wide circle of friends.

Pete Wishart (Perth and Kinross-shire) (SNP): Further to those points of order, Mr Speaker. It was with a sense of disbelief that we heard the news on Saturday afternoon; we all had to double-check that people were referring to the Alec Salmond whom we have all got to know so well. In 50 years, he has become a colossus—a huge political figure in Scotland. It is almost impossible to think of Scottish politics without Alec Salmond.

Alec recruited me to the Scottish National party in the 1990s; he was a fan of a band I played with. I was able to return the favour some time later when I recorded him; another passion Alec had was singing. Let us just say that it was not exactly a huge hit and that it did not bother the charts. Alec was a man of many talents—there were many facets that made up Alec Salmond. Watching Alec conduct political debate and work a room was to watch a political masterclass in engagement and communication. He could do that with a charm that was so effective and beguiling that people naturally felt that they wanted to contribute and be with Alec Salmond.

Scotland will miss Alec. We will all miss Alec in the Scottish National party. We must always remember that he came close to delivering what many people thought was almost impossible—Scotland becoming an independent nation; a nation of our own. He took the Scottish National party from a fringe interest—when I was first elected it had five MPs and we had 18% of the vote in Scotland—and we came so close to securing an independent nation of our own, which would never have been possible without the energy, charisma and dynamism of Alec Salmond.

We are all hurting in the Scottish National party today. We have lost one of the giants of our political movement. I hope that everyone extends their sympathies to Moira and the rest of the family, to his colleagues in the Alba party, and to everyone who worked with him throughout all these years in a mission that Alec helped to shape and design.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Further to those points of order, Mr Speaker. It is difficult to overstate the influence that Alex Salmond has had on the national movements, not just in Scotland but in Wales. He has always been a true friend of my party, Plaid Cymru. He is respected, and will be respected in future, for his extraordinary resilience and optimism. He made the campaign for Scotland's independence a political reality, and he changed the course of his nation—that is undeniable.

As I said, Alex was a friend to Wales, and the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross-shire (Pete Wishart) has already mentioned his many facets. Our former leader, Dafydd Wigley, was going to invite Alex Salmond to speak at a conference on the Welsh poet, R. S. Thomas—I do not know how many people would expect that—as R. S. Thomas and Welsh poetry were one of Alex's enthusiasms. I extend every sympathy from my party, Plaid Cymru, to Moira, to Alex's friends and family, and to our colleagues in our sister party, the SNP. I am sure that everyone here sends them our deepest commiserations.

David Mundell (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con): Further to those points of order, Mr Speaker. The phrase "end of an era" is often bandied about, but Alex's parting really does feel like the end of an era.

We were not friends; we had a professional relationship, I would say. Sometimes it was cordial, sometimes it was less so, because we disagreed on some pretty fundamental issues. I always respected Alex as one of the most formidable and, indeed, ruthless political operators of our generation—I think he would welcome that epitaph. Alex's greatest political triumph was to be both establishment and anti-establishment at the same time, which is a pretty difficult trick to pull off. While he was at one moment First Minister of Scotland, he was also agitating to break up the United Kingdom. While at one minute he was highly critical of the Conservatives, he was also relying on Conservative MSPs in the Scottish Parliament to sustain his minority Administration.

One of my jobs when I was first elected in 2005 was to keep an eye on Alex in the Lobby, because he had a habit of encouraging chats with new Conservative MPs. His line was that if Scotland were independent, that would be great for them because there would be a perpetual Conservative Government in England. We have recently seen that that argument is slightly flawed, but I had to ensure that colleagues were not tempted by it. Alex was a skilled debater, and that was very often demonstrated in this Chamber, despite his expressed wish to leave it. He had an authenticity and a common touch that are so often absent from modern politics. That was always very evident when one saw him with his constituents.

I absolutely share the view of the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) on Moira Salmond. In my dealings with her, she was always a very charming and supportive spouse, and my heart goes out to her and to Alex's friends and family at this very difficult time.

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

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow West) (Lab): Further to those points of order, Mr Speaker. Like my colleagues the right hon. Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell) and the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone), I served with Alec Salmond in the Scottish Parliament from 1999. Alec did not always stay when we did; sometimes he came back here, but he inevitably came back to Scotland, and he became Scotland's First Minister. Of course, even before that, as a Scot interested in politics, I was aware of Alec and of his great strength and courage. I seem to remember that at one point he was not a member of the SNP, and it is always difficult to rebel against your own party, so all credit to him for doing so then over a point of principle.

I was interested in the point made by the right hon. Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale about the Lobby. I have heard stories from new Labour MPs who were encouraged to think about the way Scotland would be after independence— but for a different reason. It was suggested to them that Scotland would always vote in a Labour Government if we were to be independent, which just goes to show how astute—and, I suppose, pragmatic—Alec was as a politician. He was a great performer in whichever Chamber he was in, and he was always worth listening to. Obviously, my politics and his were very different, but I shared platforms with him on a number of occasions, and it was always interesting and an education to listen to what he had to say. My thoughts and prayers go to Moira, of course, and to Gail and the wider family, as well as to all those who knew and loved him.

Richard Tice (Boston and Skegness) (Reform): Further to those points of order, Mr Speaker. I share on behalf of all those at Reform our deepest condolences to Moira and to Alex's wider family. I met Alex Salmond just over two years ago in the world of media. I had a radio show every Sunday for about two years. It was all going fine until I took a holiday and Alex Salmond kindly stepped in. In over 100 shows, I survived the challenges of investigations and things, but Alex's enthusiasm, energy and determination in that three-hour show meant that it was the only show of mine that triggered an Ofcom investigation. Although we differed politically, Alex sort of sought me out in the media, and I think he took pity on me, in a strange way, because he understood the challenges—the mad challenge of trying to set up, run and fund a small political party. He was so generous with his words of advice, wisdom and encouragement, and I will never, ever forget that.

None of us likes losing, but I was with the right hon. Member for Goole and Pocklington (Sir David Davis) last year at the Edinburgh fringe, and we had a hearty, inspired debate—I will not tell the House the topic—hosted by Alex Salmond, and I have to say, it was like the right hon. Gentleman and I were in the lion's den. It was one of those rare moments when we enjoyed losing, because we lost to a truly great man.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Further to those points of order, Mr Speaker. It may come as a surprise to Members to learn that I have a photograph of Alex Salmond in my back hall. That is because a long time ago, he, the right hon. Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) and I were all members of the Students' Representative Council of St Andrews University. It was a sleepy organisation in which we debated this and that. Then, with a flash and a bang, like Mephistopheles appearing in "Doctor Faustus", he was there from nowhere—a fully equipped, fully armed, formidable young politician, still in his late teens. That came as a shock to us all.

Having debated with him in student debates, I can tell the House that if he turned that laser eye on you and fired a verbal sally, it went straight through you, and then straight through the wall behind. He was a superb debater—I have never seen his like. What was fascinating about him was that he was a fully developed politician so early in life. He knew exactly what he was about and was determined to achieve his end.

I was also briefly in the Scottish Parliament, as the hon. Member for Glasgow West (Patricia Ferguson) alluded to. In 2007, at a reception at the Signet library in Edinburgh, he said, "Jamie, I want a word with you." He cornered me in one of those half-moon-shaped alcoves and told me very forcibly how supporting the SNP Government in 2007 would lead to a revival of the Liberal party in the Scottish Parliament.

Mention has rightly been made of his widow, Moira, whom I found to be a very nice person indeed. She once stopped me on the Royal Mile, shortly after Alex had become First Minister, to say that she had got that dreadful upright piano out of the drawing room at Bute House. She just wanted me to know that. My thoughts are not only with Alex's family but with his circle of friends, to whom he meant a very great deal. Our condolences should go to his family and to his friends as well.

Charles Stewart Parnell made his name in history, and I believe that Alex Salmond will do so in exactly the same way, for many years to come.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll, Bute and South Lochaber) (SNP): Further to those points of order, Mr Speaker. I associate myself with so many of the comments from Members across the House. I first encountered Alex Salmond as a star-struck teenager, and a member of the 79 group attending a particularly fractious SNP conference in Ayr in 1982. So fractious was the conference that Alex was subsequently expelled from the party, albeit briefly. At the meetings that followed, even though he was less than 10 years older than me, I listened to the spellbinding oratory of this young man. He was destined for greatness then.

Alec and I became close allies in the late 1980s. I was part of the campaign team that saw him elected as SNP leader in 1990. Our paths took wildly different trajectories, clearly, but we kept in touch on and off over the decades. I would not be here today were it not for Alec having arranged for me to go through to Edinburgh so that he could persuade me to put my hat in the ring for the SNP in Argyll and Bute in the 2015 election. I am far from alone in being an SNP politician who owes a huge debt to Alec Salmond. He was a titan of our movement, an irreplaceable force without whom our independence, when it does come—which it surely will—would never have been achieved.

My thoughts are with Moira, as are those of so many in this House. My experience of Moira is that she is a very quiet but absolutely formidable force. I learned very quickly that if we wanted to get Alec to change his mind, we should go not to him but to Moira. She is an incredible force in herself. My deepest condolences and sympathies are with Moira and Alec's immediate family. I do wonder when we will see his like again.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): Further to those points of order, Mr Speaker. I am grateful to you for allowing this time to pay tribute to Alex Salmond; he absolutely deserves it and it is great that we are doing it.

The leader of the SNP, the right hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn), spoke very well and very movingly about Alex's contribution to life, which I think is very generous. The SNP clearly treats its former leaders with great respect, and I think that is a good idea. *[Laughter.]* I also thank the right hon. Member for Goole and Pocklington (Sir David Davis) for what he said. Alex did go through the most appalling stress and personal pressure, and no doubt he had moments of self-doubt and real concern about the whole thing. The fact that the right hon. Member spoke so well about that really is a testament to what Alex was made of.

During his time here, Alex was a good friend to lots of us. He always opposed wars, and he always stood up for civil liberties and justice. His strength of character, in Scotland and in the wider world, made the SNP the party it is and the formidable force it became. He made the arguments for Scottish independence cogent, realistic and understandable.

We should remember that Alex Salmond lived life to the full and spoke to the full. He was totally involved in absolutely everything he did, and was an amazing and very friendly force around this place. I, for one, will miss him. I send my condolences to Moira, his wider family, and all his colleagues in both Alba and the SNP in Scotland.

Stephen Gethins (Arbroath and Broughty Ferry) (SNP): Further to those points of order, Mr Speaker. "Consequential" and "impactful" are words that we have heard about Alec over the past few days, from across the political spectrum and beyond. Which of us would not want such an epitaph, regardless of our politics?

Alec was also impactful on so many of us on an individual basis. I got dragged back into politics on more than one occasion, having unwisely tried to pursue a career elsewhere. Obviously, his desire for independence and to remove, as he would see it, this unnecessary layer of government was at the heart of his politics, but he was a profoundly impactful MP in this place. He knew the Standing Orders inside out, which could make it tricky for Ministers, opponents and Speakers from time to time. That hard work meant that he was—frustratingly, from my experience—always one step ahead. It was impossible to spend time with Alec and not learn something—absolutely impossible.

My hon. Friend the Member for Argyll, Bute and South Lochaber (Brendan O'Hara) was right to talk about Moira Salmond as being formidable. She was also wonderful. I can remember on more than one occasion being passed to Moira for a chat after a very robust exchange with Alec. She was always there so we could figure things out and smooth things over.

Finally, the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) mentioned Parnell. Alec mentioned Parnell as well. Parnell was somebody who laid the groundwork for independence and for whom—to paraphrase Alec, when it came to independence—"the dream shall never die."

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Further to those points of order, Mr Speaker. Alex Salmond was a great friend at university and also in this House. Despite political differences, I speak from personal experience when I say that he was a man capable of very great kindness. I shall certainly miss him, and Moira certainly has my condolences.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Further to those points of order, Mr Speaker. On behalf of the Democratic Unionist party, I would like to join right hon. and hon. Members in expressing our sincere condolences on the death of Alex Salmond. I would like to begin by assuring Alex's family, his wife Moira and all those who loved him that our thoughts and prayers are with them all at this time, after the sudden shock of losing Alex. We are all the poorer for his passing.

[Jim Shannon]

Over the years, I did a number of interviews with him in the job that he had for a certain station. Interviews with him were always enjoyable. He always had a chat beforehand about the questions he was going to ask, so that I was able to prepare the answers. He always did it with humour and it was always a delight.

I sat behind him on these Benches during the time that he and I were in this place at the same time. I had seen him only on TV and was not quite sure what sort of a person he was, so it was a pleasure to get to know him—he was most disarming. He was a colossus of nationalism, but he always asked me about the colossus of Unionism, Dr Ian Paisley—they were diametrically opposed in their politics, but in many ways they were similar. Alex's questions were always about those he had served with and those he had the pleasure to be with. That made him much more human, perhaps, and brought the person to life more than the TV did.

As has been said, Alex was a man of great passion and a wonderful speaker. We were diametrically opposed in terms of our Unionist and nationalist views, but Alex's passion was the stuff of Scottish folklore, and reminiscent of the rich culture of Scots in the past who gave their all for their ideal. This was a quality that I could admire, although I could never agree—but that was OK, because Alex was enough of a politician to give respect to my firmly held views on Unionism.

Alex was a man of sincere beliefs and a consummate politician, and he was also a man of great pride: he was proud of his culture, proud of his roots, and proud of what he believed Scotland had the potential to be. Today in the House, with his passing, we recognise and respect the memory of a proud, passionate politician who opposed, who led, and who inspired us all in turn.

Torcuil Crichton (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab): Further to those points of order, Mr Speaker. May I pass on my condolences to Alex Salmond's family, friends and former colleagues, and may I also do so on behalf of many of my constituents who would have known him and supported his cause?

As a journalist, I landed very few blows—very few journalists landed any blows—on Alex Salmond. As the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) mentioned, there was one quarrel about fishing in 1992, which was forgiven eventually in, I think, 2006, by which time Alex Salmond had transformed himself and his movement; he had stopped being thrown out of his party and thrown out of this place, and had replaced that complaint with a message of optimism, hope and self-confidence, often based on his own hope, self-confidence and optimism, and nothing more. But that great communication skill, and that ability to forgive, if not forget, and to have political opponents but not political enemies, was one of his great legacies to his party, to all of us in this Chamber and to Scotland.

Reporting Ministerial Gifts and Hospitality

4.11 pm

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con) *(Urgent Question):* To ask the Minister to make a statement on the reporting and acceptance of ministerial gifts and hospitality.

The Minister without Portfolio (Ellie Reeves): I wish to update the House on the action that the Government will take to enhance transparency in relation to ministerial gifts and hospitality.

Transparency is a critical part of restoring public faith in politics, and the Government recognise that changes are needed. Under the last Government, the rules for Ministers declaring hospitality were less transparent than those for other Members of Parliament. Lists of hospitality received by Ministers were published by Whitehall Departments only once a quarter and did not include the value. In contrast, MPs' and shadow Ministers' interests must be declared within 28 days, and must include the cost of the hospitality. Tory Ministers used this loophole even when events appeared to have had little connection with their Government roles. Both the House of Commons Committee on Standards and the Committee on Standards in Public Life have called for that disparity to be removed.

Under the last Government, Labour Front Benchers who attended events could end up sitting next to their Tory counterparts. Labour MPs had to declare details in the Register of Members' Financial Interests—importantly, including value—while Tory Ministers did not, under the equivalent ministerial process. The Government will correct this imbalance: the Tory freebies loophole will be closed. In the future, the Government will publish a register of Ministers' gifts and hospitality on a basis broadly equivalent to that which is published in the registers of Members' and Lords' interests. This will bring the publication of ministerial transparency data more closely into line with the parliamentary regime for gifts and hospitality. The Government intend that these arrangements should be in place as soon as possible and will set out further details in due course.

The Prime Minister intends shortly to issue and publish an updated version of the ministerial code, in which he will set out his expectations for the conduct of all who serve in Government as Ministers. As well as confirming these new reporting arrangements, this will include additional guidance for Ministers on the principles that they should apply when considering whether to accept gifts of offers of hospitality, as part of the Government's work to restore public faith in politics as a force for good.

John Glen: I thank the hon. Lady for her response. On the steps of Downing Street on 5 July, the Prime Minister pledged to put

"country first and party second".

Labour Ministers have been beset by a series of scandals involving freebies. The Prime Minister has claimed that this was all a "perfectly sensible arrangement". Does the right hon. Lady still believe that?

What gifts and hospitality can Ministers now accept? Can Cabinet Ministers continue to party in DJ booths in Ibiza? Will Ministers be banned from Oasis 2025 tour junkets, or was it just Taylor Swift that was a handout

too far? What role did Downing Street play in the VIP escort for Taylor Swift, further to the free Taylor Swift tickets from Universal Music? Have all the political staff in the Prime Minister's parliamentary office correctly declared their financial interests and hospitality received? The new chief of staff's entry seems very empty. Have all ministerial donations in kind been declared at their full market value? Why do Ministers refuse to say, in answer to parliamentary questions, when the new ministerial transparency platform will go live? Is the sheer scale on which the Prime Minister benefits from others' largesse now a conflict of interest? Will the hon. Lady confirm that the Prime Minister is taking a donation in kind of £100,000 a year from Arsenal football club, and will he now recuse himself from involvement in the football governance Bill?

Amid scandals such as "cash for croissants", "free-gear Keir" and "passes for glasses", where is Labour's new ethics and integrity commission, and what have Labour donors got in return for their generosity? What discussions did the Prime Minister's former chief of staff and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster have with Lord Alli on ministerial and public appointments? Will Ministers place in the Library all the documents relating to Lord Alli's "Operation Integrity"? Finally, can the Minister explain to this House why the millionaire Prime Minister cannot clothe himself without gifts from others?

Ellie Reeves: As I said to the right hon. Gentleman in my first response, this Government are committed to rebuilding trust in politics. The Prime Minister has commissioned a new set of principles on gifts and hospitality, which will be published shortly. That will outlaw the Tory freebie loophole, because this Government are committed to being more up front and open than our predecessors.

We will take no lectures from the Conservative party on gifts and hospitality, standards in public life or trust in politics. Let me tell the right hon. Gentleman what shattered trust in politics: the behaviour of the Conservatives in their 14 years in power. They partied in Downing Street while the whole country sacrificed its freedom. They handed lucrative covid contracts to friends and donors, and failed to expel MPs who were caught breaking the rules. That is the difference between this Government and the last one.

We are strengthening the rules. When Owen Paterson was found to have broken the rules, the Conservatives tried to rip them up, and now they want us to believe that they care about trust in politics. This is utterly shameless. Of course, it was not just Tory sleaze and scandal that eroded trust; just as corrosive has been the complete and utter failure of Conservative politicians to keep the promises they made to the British people. Now the work of change begins. As I have already set out, it starts with rebuilding trust in our politics, which we are committed to doing. The cynical and confected outrage that we have heard from the right hon. Gentleman today is fooling no one. If Conservative Members really want to help repair the damage they caused to trust in politics, they would do well to back the changes we are making, and to say sorry for the sleaze and scandal that plagued their 14 years in power.

Clive Efford (Eltham and Chislehurst) (Lab): The Conservatives have some brass neck criticising the Government on this subject when it was the Conservatives who set up the VIP lane for contracts during covid, and who accepted many gifts that they did not have to declare. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to close the loophole. I point out to the right hon. Member for Salisbury (John Glen) that he refused to vote for the Committee of Privileges report on Boris Johnson, who lied to this House. How is that improving standards in political life? What a performance!

Ellie Reeves: My hon. Friend is right to point out the VIP lanes for covid contracts. The fact is that Conservative Members had the opportunity to take a stand when Owen Paterson broke the rules, and they voted instead to rip up those very rules.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson, Sarah Olney.

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): I must say that I am startled to see Conservative MPs acting as though they were defenders of standards in public life. Under the last Government, Ministers were subject to less transparency than Back-Bench MPs. We will never know the interests of some of the Ministers who served under Liz Truss, because their ministerial interests were never published. However, I say to the new Government that if Ministers do not treat the need to restore standards with the urgency that it deserves, there will be no sympathy for them from the public, either. The independent adviser on ministerial interests has made it clear that the current system produces a list of interests, not a full register. Will the Minister guarantee that we will now see a full register published, just as there is for MPs, and set out the timescale? Will the Government rectify the fact that we went months under the previous Government without a list of interests being published by retrospectively publishing those interests? Will the Government enshrine the ministerial code in law, and include in that law timescales for regularly publishing a register of interests, so that we can have confidence that it will be published? Finally, will the Government make the role of the ethics adviser truly independent by empowering the adviser to begin their investigations and publish their own reports?

Ellie Reeves: The hon. Member makes a number of important points. In relation to value, yes, this is about a closer alignment of the two schemes. MPs need to declare value at the moment, but value does not need to be declared under the ministerial scheme. That is the loophole that we are looking to close, and we will do so as soon as possible.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): Will this Government's ethics and integrity commission end the grotesque situation that arose under the endemic corruption of the Conservative Government, which saw a relative of someone who extended lavish hospitality to disgraced former Prime Minister Boris Johnson put in the House of Lords against the advice of our security services?

Ellie Reeves: My hon. Friend will know that, as well as dealing with these issues, we are seeking to reform the House of Lords and improve the transparency of the appointment process.

Sir Gavin Williamson (Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge) (Con): On the tickets that were given away for free, there is a lot of concern among constituents

[Sir Gavin Williamson]

about the way that the Government seem to have been involved in compromising the operational independence of the police. I appreciate that the Minister cannot set out the Attorney General's advice, but can she explain to the House why the Attorney General was asked to give advice, and what question the Attorney General was asked to answer?

Ellie Reeves: Policing is an operational matter for the police, and so not something that I can comment on directly.

Rachel Blake (Cities of London and Westminster) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Minister agree that if the Opposition really wanted to make progress with standards in public life, they would reflect on their own record, including the VIP lane, partygate and their determination to lose by-elections as a result of the conduct of Members of Parliament from their party? Does she also agree that we are making progress on this issue through our plans?

Ellie Reeves: I thank my hon. Friend for those important points. The actions of the Conservative party have led to the erosion of trust in politics, and that is the issue that Labour Members now seek to clear up.

Mr Richard Holden (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Thank you to Opposition Members for their support for those on the Government Front Bench today. [Hon. Members: "We're the Government now."] The Government have been totally tone deaf in their response to the situation, which was revealed not as a result of the Government's transparency—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I do not need any help from Labour Members. Hand signals do not impress me in the slightest.

Mr Holden: The situation was revealed not because of the Government's transparency but through our popular press. The amounts of money declared in the register seem to be at odds with true market value, particularly for the short-term lease of flats. Will the Minister provide clarity on how we can ensure that the true figures are represented in the register?

Ellie Reeves: I am not sure about the right hon. Gentleman's specific point, but at the heart of this is our aim to increase transparency in the reporting process. There is a disparity between what MPs declare and what Ministers declare. The Tories did nothing to fix that in 14 years in government, and that is what we now seek to change.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): I must have missed a trick, because it seems like just a couple of years ago, there was this sort of behaviour from Conservative Members on an industrial scale. Prime Minister Johnson received a £58,000 donation to turn his flat into some sort of crack den or party central, and then he was offered £150,000 by the same person to build a treehouse for his son. I welcome what the Minister says. Does she agree that the approach and the principles that she is setting out are totally different from what went before?

Ellie Reeves: I repeat that we want to make the rules more transparent. We have clearly set out how we intend to get transparency on gifts and hospitality, which has been lacking for too long.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Government guidelines for the self-employed are very clear:

"You cannot claim for everyday clothing (even if you wear it for work)."

Yet we have heard that Cabinet Ministers declared clothing donations as donations in kind for undertaking parliamentary duties and, further,

"to support the Shadow Chancellor's office".

Does the Minister think that these were transparent donations, or were they designed to deceive?

Ellie Reeves: No Member sets out to deceive the House, and donations have been made in the right way. There is no suggestion that donations have not been declared properly or transparently. We are seeking to align the rules for Ministers with the rules for MPs, but I do not think there has been any suggestion that declarations have not been properly made.

Josh Simons (Makerfield) (Lab): If the newspapers are to be believed, several Members on the sparsely populated Conservative Benches are considering standing down if the Government's reforms to clamp down on second jobs are delivered. Will the Minister confirm her commitment to delivering these reforms to restore standards in public life, despite the sad possible loss of Conservative Members?

Ellie Reeves: Of course the Modernisation Committee will look incredibly closely at the issue of second jobs.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll, Bute and South Lochaber) (SNP): In June 2022, the now Deputy Prime Minister said:

"Honesty matters, integrity matters and decency matters. We should be ambitious for high standards, and we should all be accountable".—[*Official Report*, 7 June 2022; Vol. 715, c. 680.]

Labour promised change, but the truth is that this is not that different from the sleaze that went before. What the public see is the Labour party saying, "It is our turn now." The parties are acting like peas in a pod. Can the Minister tell us why, having showered an assortment of gifts on the Prime Minister and other Cabinet colleagues, Lord Alli was given a triple-A pass to Downing Street? Who requested that the pass be given, and exactly what was the pass used for?

Ellie Reeves: I agree with those words from the Deputy Prime Minister. What I do not accept is the suggestion of equivalence with those on the Conservative Benches, when the former Prime Minister was fined for breaking lockdown rules. While people up and down the country were sticking to the rules, often at great personal sacrifice, those in No. 10 were partying and breaking the rules, and at the same time their friends and donors were given fast-track routes for their covid contracts, so I do not accept that there is equivalence. Everything has been properly declared and we want to make the rules around transparency even greater.

Mark Ferguson (Gateshead Central and Whickham) (Lab): Will the Minister remind Members of this House which Prime Minister was rewarded with a holiday to Mustique? As hon. Members may remember, there was a lot of mystique about Mustique at the time. I will give the Conservatives a hint: it was not a Member on the Labour side of the House.

Ellie Reeves: As I recall, it was former Prime Minister Boris Johnson who benefited from that holiday to Mustique.

Dr Luke Evans (Hinckley and Bosworth) (Con): The Prime Minister has said he has been transparent, broken no rules and followed all ordinances, yet he has paid back £6,000 out of that £100,000. Can the Minister tell us why he has chosen to do that, which rules he was following, which guidance he means and which other member of the Cabinet will also be paying back money for tickets?

Ellie Reeves: That is a personal matter for the Prime Minister, but we have made it clear, and the Prime Minister has made it clear, that we are going to make the rules around transparency more aligned with those for MPs and reform the code, with a clear set of guidance in relation to the receipt of gifts and hospitality. In the meantime, the Prime Minister has paid back a number of items while the new code is being finalised.

David Pinto-Duschinsky (Hendon) (Lab): If brass neck were an Olympic sport, the Conservatives would all be gold medallists. They presided over a carnival of corruption. Does the Minister agree that it was their partying in Downing Street, their contracts for their mates and their constant failure to deliver that undermined trust in government, and will she join me in calling on them to apologise for their years of mismanagement?

Ellie Reeves: Of course, the Conservatives created and presided over this loophole in the rules. They broke the rules during covid lockdown and gave fast-track passes to their friends and donors for covid contracts, so we will not take lectures from them on this.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Does the Minister agree that the use of police outriders, whistles and sirens to facilitate the ferrying of the favoured few around capital cities characterises the capital cities of less enlightened realms and not—until this point—our own? Does she also agree that the special escort group needs to be used sparingly, and not to ferry entertainers around, regardless of the number of free tickets dispensed to senior members of the Government?

Ellie Reeves: As I said in a previous answer, that is an operational matter for the police and not something I can comment on further.

Lewis Atkinson (Sunderland Central) (Lab): On the Prime Minister's first day in office, he prioritised meeting the independent adviser on ministerial standards. Does the Minister agree that that stands in stark contrast to the approach of the previous Government, which saw two independent advisers on ministerial standards resigning and the post sitting vacant for six months?

Ellie Reeves: The Prime Minister has it made clear, both in those meetings and in what he has said, that cleaning up and restoring trust in politics is incredibly important. I know that the Modernisation Committee is looking at a number of measures. We have also set out how we intend the ministerial code of conduct to strengthen things. I think that is incredibly important, particularly in restoring the trust that has been eroded so much over these past 14 years.

Mr Joshua Reynolds (Maidenhead) (LD): After years of Conservative sleaze and scandal, we need to reset MPs' and Ministers' relationship with standards in public life. Therefore, will the Minister commit to enshrining the ministerial code in law?

Ellie Reeves: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. There are no plans to do that at this stage.

Alistair Strathern (Hitchin) (Lab): I am sure that many Members will share my disbelief and that of my constituents at reports in *The Times* today that as many as one in 10 Conservative Members are considering standing down early because of the closing down of loopholes on second jobs. Regardless of political affiliation, one of our most important responsibilities is making sure we build and maintain our constituents' trust in politics. Whether it is by tightening up the rules on second jobs or making sure we clamp down on some of the loopholes on Ministers' declarations that we had under the last Government, will the Government remain resolute in ensuring that when we come to this House, we do so to serve our constituents and not ourselves?

Ellie Reeves: As I said in answer to a previous question, the Modernisation Committee is looking at the matter very closely. Being a Member of Parliament is a huge privilege and an honour. It is a full-time job, and then some. It is important, and it is also important that we look closely at the appropriateness of second jobs for Members of Parliament.

Bradley Thomas (Bromsgrove) (Con): Why has the Prime Minister paid back some gifts that he has received since he became Prime Minister but not those he received as Leader of the Opposition? Is there a different standard for Government Ministers and for the Opposition?

Ellie Reeves: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my previous answer.

Shaun Davies (Telford) (Lab): Is this not another example of this Labour Government having to clear up the Conservatives' mess? They voted against suspending Owen Paterson from this House when wrongdoing was demonstrated. Does the Minister agree that both candidates for the leadership of the Conservative party should declare their full hospitality over the past 12 months or more?

Ellie Reeves: I thank my hon. Friend for that interesting suggestion. It is right that we look at all those things. He referred to Owen Paterson. After that, it felt like lessons had not been learned, because soon afterwards Scott Benton had to stand down from Parliament for breaching lobbying rules as well. It seems like there was something of a pattern.

Gregory Stafford (Farnham and Bordon) (Con): Does the Minister not agree that this is about not just transparency but hypocrisy? When my constituents, because of Labour's scrapping of the winter fuel payments, have to choose between heating their homes and clothing themselves, they can see the hypocrisy of the Prime Minister in getting tens of thousands of pounds for clothing and glasses. When they have to decide whether to send their children to an independent school for special educational needs and disabilities because the Labour party is going to add VAT to school fees, while the Prime Minister can rent out a flat costing tens of thousands of pounds for his children, they smell hypocrisy. When will the Prime Minister come and apologise for that and when will he return all of that money?

Ellie Reeves: Let me say something about hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is when people in Downing Street, including the former Prime Minister, were partying during lockdown as my constituents and people up and down the country were making the greatest sacrifices, with fathers not being at the birth of their children and people not being able to say goodbye to their loved ones. I will not take lectures on hypocrisy from the Conservatives.

Phil Brickell (Bolton West) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that it is shameful that the Conservatives left the role of the Prime Minister's UK anti-corruption champion vacant for two years?

Ellie Reeves: Is it any wonder, given the sort of things that went on over the past 14 years? The former Prime Minister Boris Johnson had to apologise to the Commons for failing to declare more than £50,000 in outside income. There was also that £15,000 trip to a luxury villa on Mustique. No wonder they could not keep their ethics advisers in place when that sort of behaviour was going on at the heart of Government.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): There is a duty on all Members and Ministers to ensure transparency regarding gifts received. Does the Minister agree that more work needs to be done to clarify the rules around the declaration of hospitality and gifts to ensure that the rules are equal and fair for all, regardless of parliamentary status?

Ellie Reeves: I thank the hon. Member for his helpful contribution. That is exactly what we seek to do through these changes.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the conversion of the Conservative party to transparency and ethics. Whether it was wallpaper or weddings, or Pincher, Paterson or Benton, Conservative Members were sadly silent when they thought that one of their own should get away with things. May I suggest that my hon. Friend retrospectively apply the new rules to the last 12 months of every serving Member who was a Minister? They should have to declare every piece of hospitality and gift that they received as Ministers, so that we can see exactly what their own record was compared with our cleanliness.

Ellie Reeves: I thank my hon. Friend for his observations. That is certainly something that I can take back to be looked at.

Andrew Lewin (Welwyn Hatfield) (Lab): I listened with interest to the shadow Minister, the right hon. Member for Salisbury (John Glen), talk about integrity in politics. My mind went back to a defining image from the last Parliament: Her late Majesty saying goodbye to the Duke of Edinburgh in April 2021, abiding by every single rule, as she always did. We found out later that the previous night there had been parties in Downing Street. Does my hon. Friend agree that there is absolutely no comparison between this Government, who are clearing up the mess, and the one that went before us?

Ellie Reeves: I thank my hon. Friend for his important comments. I do not think that the public will forget that image of the Queen sitting on her own. The idea that there is any equivalence between the rule breaking during covid, and the fast track for VIPs, and us now trying to sort things out by making the process more transparent is frankly indefensible from Conservative Members.

Joe Powell (Kensington and Bayswater) (Lab): The shadow Minister may remember that he failed personally to support the suspension of Owen Paterson after he was found guilty of lobbying and being paid thousands of pounds to raise questions in Parliament. Does the Minister agree that today's conversion to standards and integrity rings completely hollow?

Ellie Reeves: I thank my hon. Friend for his contribution. I had a look recently at the record of Conservative MPs in that vote to rip up the rules on standards, in effect, to get Owen Paterson off the hook. Overwhelmingly, those on the Opposition Front Bench voted to rip up the rules on standards.

Tom Hayes (Bournemouth East) (Lab): Later today, we will debate a Bill to protect entertainment events from terrorism. It comes in the aftermath of the terrible terrorist attack on an Ariana Grande concert in Manchester. In more recent months, Taylor Swift has had to cancel a concert, owing to the risk to her life and the lives of concert-goers. Does the Minister agree that when we debate the Bill, it is important that we take the politics out of the debate, recognise the real risk to life, proceed with due caution, properly talk about the loss of life in Manchester, and aim to avoid any future loss of life at entertainment events?

Ellie Reeves: I thank my hon. Friend for that incredibly important point. The Bill will put Martyn's law on the statute book, for which victims of the awful Manchester Arena terror attack have campaigned long and hard, and I hope that it will be debated in the tone and spirit that my hon. Friend set out.

Gibraltar-Spain Border Checks

4.45 pm

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con) *(Urgent Question):* To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs if he will make a statement on the decision by the Spanish authorities to implement border and passport checks at the frontier with Gibraltar on 10 October.

The Minister for Development (Anneliese Dodds): Before I begin, I would like to associate myself with the remarks made across the House a few moments ago, after the passing of Alex Salmond. My thoughts and sympathies are with his family.

I thank the hon. Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) for his question. I am responding because my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty)—the Minister for Europe, North America and Overseas Territories—is in Germany on Government business.

The Government are aware that late on Thursday 10 October, Spanish border officers increased checks on permanent residents of Gibraltar crossing into Spain from Gibraltar. The change in process involved stamping the passports of all non-EU nationals crossing the border. It went against the informal bridging measures in place since EU exit and was made without warning. The increased checks were briefly reciprocated the following morning by His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar, who have full responsibility for immigration matters. That led to some disruption on the Spanish side of the border.

My hon. Friend the Minister contacted his Spanish counterpart, Fernando Sampedro, State Secretary for the EU, in relation to this change in process. In parallel, the UK's ambassador to Spain engaged with the Spanish Ministry of the Interior. We understand that the change in process was instigated locally by a Spanish border official. The matter was dealt with swiftly by Spain and usual border arrangements resumed. We are grateful to the Government of Spain for the continued implementation of the informal bridging measures. We are in close touch with the Government of Gibraltar, including Chief Minister Fabian Picardo, and we will continue to monitor the situation. It is in all our interests that the border between Gibraltar and Spain operates smoothly.

The Government, working with the Government of Gibraltar, are committed to finalising a UK-EU agreement in respect of Gibraltar as soon as possible. That would bring certainty for the people of the region and secure future prosperity. We remain steadfast in our support for Gibraltar, and we will only agree to terms that the Government of Gibraltar are content with. Schengen border checks at the start of the EU entry-exit system were always expected, and that is one reason why we are working so hard to achieve a deal. The Government continue to work with the Government of Gibraltar on how best to mitigate the impacts of border disruption should an agreement with the EU not be possible.

Finally, I understand that today is Gibraltar Day, when the Government of Gibraltar celebrate the links between Gibraltar and the UK. I wish them every success with their various events.

Andrew Rosindell: I thank the Minister for her response, but the people of Gibraltar have long memories. When Labour was last in power, the Blair Government attempted to agree a joint sovereignty deal with Spain behind the backs of the Gibraltarians and without their consent. It was all about appeasing Spain and the European Union, and some of us fear that the same thing could happen this time. Even if Spain's decision to effectively impose a hard border on the frontier on 10 October was not made centrally, the fact that this extreme measure was taken at all is incredibly concerning, and it is a warning of what is to come if a solid bilateral agreement is not reached in the coming weeks.

If a hard border is implemented, there are no winners: the people of Spain and Gibraltar both suffer. The fact that, despite this, Spain continues to weaponise the frontier with the aim of exercising authority over sovereign British territory is morally and constitutionally reprehensible. There can be no Spanish boots on the Rock—that must be non-negotiable. The people of Gibraltar have been bullied by the Spanish authorities over many decades, and this latest infraction comes at a critical time in the negotiations over the future of the frontier, with the new Schengen area entry-exit control system on the horizon. As such, does the Minister agree that any agreement must fully acknowledge that Gibraltar is 100% British?

The people of Gibraltar have made it abundantly clear that they reject any suggestion of Spanish sovereignty by voting to remain British. His Majesty's Government have a duty to stand by the loyal people of Gibraltar, whatever it takes: there can be no weakening of British sovereignty, and the Gibraltarians' right to self-determination must be upheld. With that in mind, and following the Government's betrayal of the British Chagossian people only last week, will the Minister raise this incident with her counterpart in Madrid as a matter of urgency; confirm that she will never capitulate in any negotiation to Spain's demands to allow Spanish boots on Gibraltarian soil; and guarantee the Government's steadfast loyalty to the sovereign British overseas territory of Gibraltar and its people?

Anneliese Dodds: I have to say that I regret the tone adopted by the hon. Gentleman. Many of us in this House are friends of our overseas territories and very much respect their right to sovereignty. In that context, it is critical that we always focus on the facts of the matter and do not seek to obtain party political advantage from them. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have seen the comments of the Chief Minister of Gibraltar, which could not have been clearer on this matter. It is inappropriate to politicise such matters.

The UK Government could not have been clearer that we are confident of British sovereignty over the whole of Gibraltar, including British Gibraltar territorial waters. We are steadfast in our support for Gibraltar, and the UK Government will never enter into arrangements under which the people of Gibraltar would pass under the sovereignty of another state against their freely and democratically expressed wishes. We will never enter into a process of sovereignty negotiations with which Gibraltar is not content; that double lock is safe with this Government, and we are fully committed to it.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow West) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that we will always support the people of Gibraltar and, indeed, the interests of the Government of Gibraltar?

Anneliese Dodds: Absolutely, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for being so clear about this matter. It is very important for the UK Government to underline that commitment to sovereignty; indeed, it is my understanding that the Foreign Secretary was discussing this matter with his Spanish counterparts this very morning. We will continue to focus on ensuring sovereignty and, above all, the interests of everyone in the region who needs to see, for example, the deal that we have been working so hard towards.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call the shadow Minister.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): May I join the right hon. Lady in her remarks about Alex Salmond, who was a personal friend and a long-standing colleague. I mourn his loss.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) for bringing this important urgent question before the House today, and I thank the right hon. Lady for her response. Let me be crystal clear: there should be no need for checks at the border between Spain and Gibraltar. Last Friday's reports that Spanish police were insisting on checks are alarming, and we need to get to the bottom of what happened. Those checks cause misery in people's daily lives, undermine Gibraltar's trade and economy, and inconvenience Spanish people who depend on their work in Gibraltar for their income. The House needs to understand what support the Government have provided to Gibraltar and, crucially, what discussions the Foreign Secretary has had with his Spanish counterpart about why checks by Spanish police were carried out with no warning. I hope the right hon. Lady can reassure the House that she has made plain to her Spanish counterpart that this simply must not happen again.

We must reject any attempt to ratchet up the pressure on the important negotiations that are taking place to secure Gibraltar's future. It is alleged that Spain has taken note of the British Government's ill-advised decision to give away the British Indian Ocean Territory. The Government have claimed that their commitment to our other overseas territories is unchanged despite the agreement with Mauritius, so now is an opportunity for them to show that they mean what they say.

On the negotiations with Spain and the EU, we want to see a deal as swiftly as possible, but it needs to be the right deal, and one that both the Government and the people of Gibraltar can get behind—in other words, the deal that we were negotiating before we left government. The last Conservative Government were unequivocally clear, in public and in private, that Gibraltar's sovereignty was never up for negotiation.

Gibraltar is British. Having myself visited Gibraltar to take part in a literary festival, I know, as many others in this House know, that Gibraltar is as British as bacon and eggs. The people of Gibraltar emphatically affirmed this in a referendum when 99% voted to remain British, and we are counting on the Government to stand squarely behind that commitment.

Anneliese Dodds: That commitment is one that we share within this House. We cannot be clearer on that.

The right hon. Gentleman specifically asked about the details of recent events. Just to provide a little more information on that for the House, on the evening of 10 October the UK Government were notified that Spanish officials had increased checks on UK nationals crossing into Spain, including permanent residents of Gibraltar. We understand, as I mentioned at the beginning, that this change process was instigated by a local border officer, not by the Spanish authorities centrally. The Chief Minister of His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar released a press release with further information on the situation at the time. The UK Government raised the issue with the Spanish authorities, including at ministerial level. We are in close touch with the Government of Gibraltar and continue to monitor the situation. It is in all our interests that the border between Gibraltar and Spain operates smoothly. That has been made crystal clear by the UK Government.

Although I appreciated many of the comments made by the right hon. Gentleman, I did regret the tone of the claims he made in relation to BIOT. The situation of BIOT is not comparable. That is a unique agreement that has absolutely no bearing on wider UK Government policy regarding our overseas territories. It is a very different issue with a very different history. The UK remains committed to our overseas territories family. If there is any question about that, I would again refer the right hon. Gentleman to the comments from the Chief Minister of Gibraltar himself, who could not be clearer about his disappointment at those who seek to party-politicise these matters.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to the work towards the treaty. The UK Government are working with the Government of Gibraltar to progress a treaty that protects sovereignty and UK military autonomy, and that secures future prosperity for Gibraltar and the region. We remain steadfast in that process and in our support for Gibraltar, and we will only agree to terms with which the Government of Gibraltar are content.

Tim Roca (Macclesfield) (Lab): It seems that we are to be treated to another bout of recklessness on foreign policy by the Conservative party this week. Can the Minister confirm that British sovereignty over Gibraltar is not up for negotiation, and that to suggest otherwise is both wrong and irresponsible?

Anneliese Dodds: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. I absolutely can make that confirmation. The UK Government are committed to the double lock. We will never enter into arrangements under which the people of Gibraltar pass under the sovereignty of another state against their freely and democratically expressed wishes, and we will never enter into a process of sovereignty negotiations with which Gibraltar is not content.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

James MacCleary (Lewes) (LD): First, I associate myself with the comments in the Chamber about the untimely passing of Alex Salmond. My thoughts are with his family at this terrible time.

The Liberal Democrats believe in the right of self-determination for the people of Gibraltar. Nothing should happen to diminish that. It was over 20 years ago, as previously mentioned, that Gibraltarians overwhelmingly rejected the idea that Spain should have joint sovereignty. Another idea that Gibraltarians overwhelmingly rejected was, of course, leaving the European Union. They have had to live with the consequences of the decisions that were imposed upon them and the botched Brexit deal negotiated by the previous Government.

I commend the Government of Gibraltar for their principled and pragmatic approach to the future border arrangements with Spain. Does the Minister agree that nothing should be decided for the people of Gibraltar without the consent of the people of Gibraltar? Given the extension of the talks, it is important that they conclude in a spirit of co-operation, so has he received any assurances from Spain that while the Gibraltar treaty negotiations continue, there will be no repeat of the actions last week?

Anneliese Dodds: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for those points, and I absolutely agree with his characterisation of the position of the people of Gibraltar and the UK Government's commitment to them. He asked about the deal that is currently being negotiated. I think all sides agree on the importance of concluding an EU-UK treaty as soon as possible. That will bring certainty for the people of the region and will secure future prosperity. We are absolutely determined to make progress on this issue, but above all, that double lock will always stay in place.

Kevin Bonavia (Stevenage) (Lab): I was very sorry to hear the hon. Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) use such militaristic undertones about what was a very unfortunate incident for the Gibraltarians. I was also disappointed to hear once again the confected outrage over the future sovereignty of Gibraltar. Today, Gibraltarians want to know that they can go about their daily lives, and I would like the Minister to reassure the House that she is doing everything she can to calm the tensions that have arisen from this incident.

Anneliese Dodds: What is really important is that the daily lives of Gibraltarians are as smooth as possible and that their interests and sovereignty are always at the forefront of these issues, not party politics.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): History shows again and again that appeasement does not work. It was inevitable after the abject surrender of the Chagos islands, for that is what it is, that the Spanish would try to exert pressure on Gibraltar. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members shake their heads, but the Government are so embarrassed by the Chagos deal that they will not even tell the House of Commons what we will have to pay to rent our own base.

Coming back to Gibraltar, my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) is right that under Blair, Labour tried to sell out the Gibraltarians for joint sovereignty and a referendum killed it. We could not trust Labour on Gibraltar before, so why on earth, after what it has done to Chagos and the Chagossians, should we trust Labour now?

Anneliese Dodds: I really regret this playground-style characterisation of issues that are so fundamental, particularly for those who live in Gibraltar. I mentioned the comments of the Chief Minister of the Falklands, and the right hon. Member has now forced me to quote them, given the nature of what he has just said. The Chief Minister said some of these claims are

"more about party politics, blame-gaming and Tory Party leadership issues…than"

they are actually about the sovereignty of people who live in the overseas territories. He could not have been clearer.[1]

Gregor Poynton (Livingston) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that the actions we have seen over the last few days risk damaging the regional economy in Spain as much as they do in Gibraltar, and therefore all sides must work together to avoid a recurrence of that?

Anneliese Dodds: I strongly agree. There is of course substantial and regular traffic of goods and people across the border. That is fundamental not only for the economy of Gibraltar, but of course for Andalusia, Spain and the entire region more broadly, so it is really important that that is borne in mind as well as the sovereignty issues.

Stephen Gethins (Arbroath and Broughty Ferry) (SNP): The Minister will agree that the people of Scotland do not come second on much, but they did come second to the people of Gibraltar in their overwhelming rejection of Brexit when they saw through that disastrous Tory deal, which has led to many of the problems we see today. Does she think the people of Gibraltar are better off with this Tory Brexit deal, or did they see some value in our EU membership in ways that the Tories do not?

Anneliese Dodds: I would not seek to speak for the people of Gibraltar; that would not be appropriate. What is most important is that we ensure progress on the UK-EU deal on these matters. The Foreign Secretary, my hon. Friend the Minister of State and the Chief Minister of Gibraltar met Executive Vice-President Šefčovič of the European Commission and Spanish Foreign Minister Albares in Brussels in September to have discussions. Those discussions were focused on the issues that many people in Gibraltar are concerned about—in particular, the movement of people and goods—and this Government are determined to make progress.

Adam Jogee (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): My constituents are proud to be British, just as the people of Gibraltar are, and I join the Minister in acknowledging Gibraltar Day. I am afraid, though, that some in this House have not listened to her responses. Will she be as clear as possible, in answering my point, that this Government will only ever stand with the people of Gibraltar for as long as they want us to stand with them?

Anneliese Dodds: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question, and the clearest answer that I can give is yes, yes and yes.

Jess Brown-Fuller (Chichester) (LD): Last week, my mother was desperately trying to get out of Gibraltar and back to the UK to be with my grandmother, who had suddenly turned very ill and was receiving end-of-life

1.[*Official Report*, 31 October 2024; Vol. 755, c. 12WC.] (Correction)

[Jess Brown-Fuller]

care. The plane she was due to get on diverted to Malaga due to adverse weather conditions, but the border was closed to the passengers, stranding British citizens in Gibraltar, with no rescheduled flight and no offer of accommodation. I put on record my sincere thanks to the Minister of State responsible for Europe, North America and the overseas territories, the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), and the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Alan Gemmell) for their advice and guidance during that very distressing period last week. Will the right hon. Lady advise, taking into account the challenges that Gibraltar airport faces, what steps she is taking to ensure that British passport holders facing emergencies can cross the border into Spain and return home swiftly?

Anneliese Dodds: I know the whole House would want to send our very best wishes to the hon. Member's grandmother and that it regrets the really difficult situation that her family was placed in. The Government absolutely recognise the challenges, and have been working hard on them, and I am grateful for her kind recognition of that. There have been two challenges: the disruption caused by bad weather, for example, to Malaga, as otherwise there would have been planes landing on Gibraltar; and the issues she mentioned with the airport, which were caused by the ingress of water. I pay tribute to the RAF staff who have been working around the clock to try to set that right. We recognise the disruption and will continue to make many representations to ensure that those who should be able to smoothly exit and enter Gibraltar can do so in the future.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): There is no doubt about it: last week, the Spanish authorities sought to hold the British people of Gibraltar hostage by putting in border controls and disrupting their travel. One should not be surprised by that. I know that Government Members try to deny it, but there is a connection between what happened with the Chagos islands last week and the aggressiveness of the Spanish authorities and the EU this week. The EU has learned a lesson, not just from this Government, but from the last Government —when it comes to wanting to put its footprint on British territory, successive British Governments have shown, whether with Northern Ireland or now with Gibraltar, that they are willing to concede. Can the Minister give us an assurance that she will not be giving in to the bullying, bribery or attempts by the Spanish Government and the EU to once again put their imprint on British territory?

Anneliese Dodds: I am afraid I have to wholly reject the claims made by the right hon. Member. The agreement on the British Indian Ocean Territory is unique, and based on the unique history and circumstances of BIOT. It has absolutely no bearing on the wider UK Government policy regarding our other overseas territories. It is not just the Government who are stating that, but the people living in those overseas territories; they are clear about the party politicking around this issue. The United Kingdom will never enter arrangements under which the people of Gibraltar would pass under the sovereignty of another state against their freely and democratically expressed wishes. We could not be clearer about that.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): The unforced surrender of the Chagos islands casts a long shadow, does it not? Are we seriously to believe that the timing of the Government of Spain's action in respect of Gibraltar has nothing to do with the unforced error that the Government have committed in recent days? Is it not the case that this Government will always put ideology, virtue signalling and post-colonial guilt ahead of the defence and security of this country?

Anneliese Dodds: I am disappointed by the tone of the right hon. Gentleman's claims, particularly given his interest in historical and particularly military matters. I hope that he is aware, although perhaps he is not, that Gibraltar was ceded by the Crown of Spain to the Crown of Great Britain under article 10 of the treaty of Utrecht in 1713. That is in contrast to the history of BIOT, which is completely different. BIOT was established by the UK's initiative as a colonial power, and the modalities of that establishment have long been contested. The United Kingdom is steadfast in its commitment to Gibraltar, its people and its economy. The right hon. Gentleman should surely be aware of that.

Dr Al Pinkerton (Surrey Heath) (LD): Negotiations on Gibraltar's post-Brexit status are well advanced but are not without their hurdles. One such hurdle relates to the stationing of armed and uniformed Spanish border officers at Gibraltar's air and seaports—a proposal that Gibraltarians understandably cannot tolerate. Can the Minister assure the House on Gibraltar Day that the wishes of Gibraltarians will always be paramount in the ongoing negotiations; that the Government have taken the opportunity to remind all parties that the lives and livelihoods of Gibraltarians and others should never be used as leverage in the negotiations, however inadvertently or locally applied they may be; and that, for the sake of the people and communities of Gibraltar and La Línea, this will never be allowed to happen again?

Anneliese Dodds: I am grateful to the hon. Member for his question. First, he asked about whether the interests and concerns of Gibraltarians will be paramount. They absolutely will be. We remain steadfast in our support for Gibraltar and will agree only to terms that the Government of Gibraltar are content with in a deal. Furthermore, the kind of leverage that he discussed would never be accepted by the UK Government. One of the objectives of having a treaty is precisely to remove border checks between Spain and Gibraltar.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): The right hon. Lady talks about the negotiations, but the problem is that the Government do not have a great track record on negotiations. What did they get from the train driver negotiations but a lot of very cold pensioners? What did they get from the negotiations on the Chagos islands? They appear to have given away sovereign territory and paid for the privilege. How can we trust this Government with the safety of Gibraltar?

Anneliese Dodds: The peculiar and unfounded analogy that those on the Conservative Benches appear to be attempting to draw has been rejected by those living in those overseas territories, who can see this for what it is—party politicking, when we should instead be focused on the interests of those living in the overseas territories and our obligations to them.

Jim Allister (North Antrim) (TUV): The Minister said that the Spanish authorities had assured the Government that the aggressive actions taken at the border were not centrally approved. Do the Government accept that? Never mind the Chagos islands: when the Spanish authorities attempt to insert themselves into Gibraltar, might they not be drawing more succour from the fact that the British Government allowed the EU to insert itself into the United Kingdom, put a border in the Irish sea and pass the laws that govern much of the economy of part of the United Kingdom? Might the Spanish authorities not be concluding in consequence that the UK Government are a soft touch when it comes to sovereignty?

Anneliese Dodds: I believe that the UK Government could not have been clearer in our representations on this matter, including to the Spanish Government. On 11 October, the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), contacted, as I have mentioned, Minister Fernando Sampedro, his Spanish counterpart. The UK ambassador to Spain called on the Spanish Ministry of the Interior as well to inquire about this change in approach. We have made it clear that His Majesty's Government will continue to work closely with HM Government of Gibraltar, including on border disruption planning, and we will do all that we can to ensure that, above all, the interests of Gibraltarians are front and centre. That is what is driving the Government response.

Gregory Stafford (Farnham and Bordon) (Con): Does the Minister not agree that the reality is that a low-level border guard at the Gibraltarian-Spanish border would not implement this without at least knowledge and tacit consent from Madrid. Given that, how can she continue to negotiate with Spain if it continues this low-level aggression at the border?

Anneliese Dodds: It is important that we ensure that we negotiate to obtain the treaty that is needed. It is that treaty—the EU-UK treaty—that will ultimately ensure that the interests of the people of Gibraltar are front and centre. The Government have made progress on those negotiations, and we will continue them in earnest, because it is only through them that, as I have said, ultimately the interests of Gibraltarians can be put first. Surely, that is what the House should be supporting.

Edward Morello (West Dorset) (LD): The Minister has told us that a local border official unilaterally imposed the restrictions. If that is the case, can the Minister outline exactly what guarantees the Government have received from the Spanish Government that such powers will not be localised and that local officials cannot impose powerful restrictions on Gibraltarians and Spanish people seeking to work in Gibraltar?

Anneliese Dodds: Ensuring the fluid movement of people across the Gibraltar-Spain land border is a top priority for the UK Government. Border fluidity is important for shared prosperity and for the security of citizens and businesses in the region. The UK Government and the Government of Gibraltar are committed to ensuring that this continues, and it will continue to be critical for the representations that we will continue to make to the Government of Span.

Afghan Special Forces Relocation Review

5.18 pm

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Luke Pollard): I would like to update the House on the ongoing review of Afghan relocations and assistance policy scheme applications from former members of Afghan specialist units, including former members of Commando Force 333 and Afghan Task Force 444, commonly known as the Triples. These Afghans worked alongside UK armed forces in Afghanistan, fighting valiantly, with some dying alongside our troops. It is for this reason I know that former Triples have the support of veterans of the conflict and the British public, as well as Members on both sides of the House.

When we were in opposition, the Defence Secretary and I, along with my hon. Friend the Minister for Security, as well as many sitting and former Members of the House—again, on a cross-party basis—advocated a review of decisions made on ARAP applications from the Triples. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, and those former and sitting Members of Parliament. I am keenly aware that an update on the Triples review is long overdue, so I thank colleagues for their patience. Although the review, which should not have been necessary in the first place, has taken longer than initially intended, I can confirm today that key issues have been identified and resolved, and the Government are now making important progress, with eligible former Triples and their families now being invited to relocate to the UK.

The Triples review was announced by the previous Government on 1 February in response to my urgent question, after they accepted that inconsistencies existed in how decisions on ARAP applications from members of the Triples were being made. For clarity, officials are currently reviewing a cohort of ineligible decisions taken on applications that contain credible evidence of links to former Afghan specialist units and in which Ministry of Defence caseworkers previously referred cases to officers in other parts of the MOD, to other Departments and to governmental bodies under category 4 of the ARAP scheme, and which may have been affected by that inconsistent approach. The review is being carried out by staff who have not previously worked on those applications, including independent caseworkers. Approximately 2,000 such applications are within scope of the review, and I can report that more than three quarters have so far been reassessed.

The previous Government committed to conclude the review within 12 weeks of launch, which was at the end of March. The review should have reported before the general election, but clearly it did not. Given the perilous situation in which many former Triples still find themselves, that is a source of deep regret and concern for me that I know many Members will share. I have investigated the reasons for the delay, which include the emergence in Government archives of additional information that officials undertaking the review discovered and which required careful consideration.

The nature of the relationship between the UK Government and the Triples evolved over the almost 20 years of UK military involvement in Afghanistan. That has led to a complex set of historical records held by different Departments. It has taken time to piece that information together to give a fuller and more accurate

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picture. I am now able to provide a provisional update on what we have learned from the review. Officials have now confirmed that there is evidence of payments from the UK Government to members of Afghan specialist units, including CF333 and ATF444, and that, for some individuals, that demonstrates a direct employment relationship. That evidence goes beyond previously identified top-up payments and reimbursements for operational expenses, which do not in themselves demonstrate such an employment relationship. That, of course, runs contrary to the position reported to Parliament by the previous Government that no evidence of direct employment existed.

My officials have advised that some record analysis, which is to be carried out, should give us a more confident picture of the task at hand. I am satisfied, however, that what has come to light is sufficient to move forward with decision-making without delay under ARAP categories 1 and 2, as well as under category 4 where appropriate for the Triples. The review is still progressing, and each application is considered on its own merits, but given the information that is available at the moment, we are expecting an overturn rate of approximately 25%.

For the benefit of the House, those categories permit ARAP eligibility to persons including those who were directly employed in Afghanistan by a UK Government Department, or those who worked in Afghanistan alongside a UK Government Department—in partnership with or closely supporting and assisting that Department—and who are at risk because of that work. Like me, Members will be understandably anxious about the impact that the delay has had on the pace at which we can move to safety as many as possible of those who are eligible for relocation.

Many Members will have concerns for the welfare of former Triples who might be ARAP eligible and remain at risk. I share their deep frustrations, but I hope that it is of some comfort to colleagues across this House that if a decision is overturned as part of the review, applicants are informed immediately and the relocations process can then start. I have already begun signing eligible decisions to relocate eligible former Triples to the UK, which is why this statement is necessary. Furthermore, once they arrive in Pakistan and are confirmed as ARAP eligible, we can offer them protection from deportation back to Afghanistan thanks to the UK Government's ongoing and constructive dialogue with the Government of Pakistan.

Confirming that we have found evidence of direct employment for some of the Triples cohort is the opposite of the previous Government's position that no such direct employment existed. I would like to state that I have seen no evidence suggesting a conscious effort by the previous Administration or by any Minister to cause delay or indeed to mislead the House or the public on this matter. When Ministers in the previous Government provided statements to the House on the Triples, I believe that they did so in good faith, based upon the known information under consideration at that time. Record keeping in the context of a long multinational operation is notoriously challenging, but that is no excuse. It is of course critical that we understand how and why that error occurred.

A failure to access and share the right digital records and challenges with information flows across departmental lines have all led to this significant body of information being overlooked, with huge real-world implications. Where corporate memory failed, so did processes. As is all too often the case, it was those who needed help the most who suffered. I am clear that this sort of systems failure is not good enough. Under my direction, officials will now review and renew efforts to improve information flows and processes to ensure that this never happens again.

I do not consider there to be malicious intent in this case, but it is an example of the problems that dogged the Afghan resettlement scheme under the previous Government. The Triples review should not have been needed in the first place. It should not have taken this long, and the system in place at the time that the initial decisions were made should have been led with more competence and grip, to ensure that these mistakes were caught and managed more quickly.

It is with some relief that I, as part of this new Government and as someone who championed the case for the Triples when in Opposition, can assure Members that we have unblocked progress and that eligible former Triples and their families will now rightfully receive the sanctuary that their work in support of our troops in Afghanistan deserves. I am confident that we will be able to relocate those eligible to safety and so that they can start a new life here in the UK. I will keep pushing this work forward at pace so that we can close this chapter in our history, knowing that we did right by those who stood shoulder to shoulder with the UK armed forces in Afghanistan.

I recognise the strong sense of feeling and support across the House on this matter and on Afghan resettlement in general. The Defence Secretary and I will keep the House updated on our approach to Afghan resettlement. Given the seriousness with which we take the Triples review in the MOD, I aim to report to the House when the review is complete.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call the shadow Minister.

5.26 pm

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): I thank the Minister for advance sight of his statement and for its tone. The debt of gratitude that we owe all those who bravely served for, with or alongside our armed forces in support of our mission in Afghanistan is so great that words cannot do it justice. They worked at great personal risk to make Afghanistan a better place, and it is right that we supported them and continue to support them now.

I am proud that, in addition to Operation Pitting, where we evacuated 15,000 people from Afghanistan in 2021, the previous Government established the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme and the Afghan relocation and assistance policy. I welcome that, as of 30 June, indefinite leave to remain had been granted to 12,874 individuals across both schemes. The House will be aware that many former Afghan specialist unit members have safely relocated to the UK, along with their families, through the ARAP scheme. However, I acknowledge the issues relating to applications from a cohort of members of the Triples.

As the House is aware, a review was announced in February by the then Minister for the Armed Forces, the former Member for Wells, my right hon. Friend James Heappey. Rightly, the Ministry of Defence has been reviewing ineligible decisions made against applications from the Triples and other specialist units, with an eye to any inconsistencies. It is important that this work is done thoroughly and with great care. I welcome the Minister's update to the House today on the work of that review process. I also commend him for his courtesy in coming to the House in person to make his statement.

I listened very carefully to what the Minister said about the new information, including evidence that builds a picture of direct employment by the UK Government of some Triples, and the overturning of decisions, including the rate of overturning. We on the Conservative Benches support this review process, which was initiated by James Heappey, being completed successfully. We want the correct decisions made on these very important and highly sensitive applications as speedily and fairly as possible. We hope to receive further updates from His Majesty's Government.

What course of action will the Minister take for the applications of Triples where no evidence of employment is found? More broadly, the House would welcome an update on the flow of those potentially eligible for ARAP from Afghanistan to Pakistan, and from Pakistan to the United Kingdom. Could the hon. Gentleman outline what conversations he has had with the Pakistani authorities to ensure that ARAP-eligible Afghan special forces personnel are not evicted from their country?

As ever, we also want the Government to ensure that those who arrive through the scheme receive the support they need, so that they can begin successfully rebuilding their lives in the United Kingdom. What will the impact be of the decision announced today on housing stock for ARAP applicants?

Finally, we reiterate our call for the human rights of all Afghans to be protected, and for the monitoring and documenting of discrimination and abuses committed by the Taliban. We again strongly condemn the Taliban's attacks on the rights of women and girls. The international community must continue to press the Taliban to reverse course.

Luke Pollard: I thank the shadow Minister for his support for the review and for the Triples in general. Those who served alongside our forces are owed a debt of gratitude by all those in the UK. It is good that there is cross-party support for the Triples and for the contribution they made in support of our mission to Afghanistan.

On the shadow Minister's question, there is an ongoing application process for ARAP, where people can apply and their eligibility is checked. It is entirely possible that someone can qualify while still not having direct employment, but that is subject to the case-by-case process for the individual applicant. The review and the update I am presenting today does not mean that all Triples are eligible, nor does it mean that no Triples are eligible. It means that where a direct employment relationship has been established we will now take forward their applications, whereas previously those applications were refused.

We will continue to work with the Government of Pakistan. We are grateful for their work and support in facilitating the flow of eligible persons from Afghanistan to Pakistan and then onwards to the United Kingdom. It is important that we continue that flow, so people who are currently at risk from the Taliban—it is important that we stress that they are at risk because of the Taliban's actions—have the ability to get to sanctuary. We are doing so at a reasonable pace to ensure that the entire flow can be delivered properly and sensibly.

I am grateful to the shadow Minister for saying what he did on rebuilding lives. There is, I think, enormous support from all parties here for the Afghans who put their lives at risk to support our troops to be settled in the UK and to start a new life. I am grateful to Members from both sides of the House who have supported efforts in their own constituencies to do so. The new Government are working across government, with colleagues in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Home Office. We will make further announcements when we can on transitional accommodation, to make sure the flow is appropriate through the United Kingdom. There will be some Members of Parliament who will have transitional accommodation in their constituencies. I am very happy to speak to them to ensure that the integration and flow is as smooth as possible.

I echo the words of the shadow Minister in relation to the appalling atrocities of the Taliban, not just in their attacks on the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan, but in the way that they are pursuing, and in many cases deliberately attacking, those people who served alongside coalition forces in Afghanistan. It is the actions of the Taliban that put at risk those people who tried to rebuild their own country and work for a better Afghanistan alongside our troops. That is why the ARAP scheme is so important, and why it enjoys cross-party support and will continue to do so.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call the Chair of the Defence Committee.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): I welcome the statement by my hon. Friend the Minister, who was a staunch advocate for the Triples when in opposition. We should never have needed the review, because those individuals bravely supported us when we needed their assistance for the betterment of Afghanistan. Can he advise whether a member of the Triples whose case was previously rejected under the ARAP scheme will be aware that their case is under review? How will the Department and the Government go about making contact with those individuals?

Luke Pollard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support for ARAP and the Afghans involved. As part of the Afghan Triples review, 2,000 or so cases are under consideration. Where we discover that there has been a negative decision that should be overturned, we are contacting individuals immediately, but that does not mean that all Triples are eligible. Nor does it mean that everyone who served as part of the Afghan national army in support of its mission is eligible for relocation to the UK. Additional routes are available via the Home Office, but in the very particular case of the Triples, we aim to conclude the review at pace, contacting all those who we now deem to be eligible based on the new evidence we have found. There is still some work to be done and a number of the most complex cases are

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still to be delivered, so he will understand that I cannot put a timetable on when that review will complete. However, we have made sorting out the ARAP scheme one of our early priorities as a Department and we will continue to deliver the changes we need to make to ensure we can have confidence that all the decisions made in relation to the Triples are the right decisions.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Helen Maguire (Epsom and Ewell) (LD): The late Paddy Ashdown was one of the first to call on the UK Government to recognise that we have a moral obligation to support Afghan interpreters and others who supported us over a 20-year period by providing them with a route to resettlement in the UK. More than three years on from our withdrawal from Afghanistan, it is troubling that those such as the Triples and their families are still waiting for their chance to come to the UK and to safety. Earlier this year, we welcomed the review of those cases, and we thank the Minister for his update today. These brave individuals put their lives on the line in support of our operations, and sadly many now face threats to their lives for that reason. We must get them out and to the UK as quickly as possible.

It was deeply alarming to hear the Minister's revelations about a direct employment relationship. Tragically, during this period some of those brave Afghans have lost their lives; perhaps they would not have done so had this been uncovered more quickly. Can the Minister provide a figure for the number of Triples estimated to have been killed over the past three years? Given this new evidence, does he remain confident in the decision-making processes for other individuals whose ARAP applications were rejected? Does he or his Department plan to look at those again? Will he update us on what steps he is taking to ensure that these people are not only eligible for ARAP, but able to get to the UK safely? Has he spoken to his counterparts in the region to that end?

Will the Minister also look at the treatment of those who have come to the UK under the ARAP scheme, and will he consider widening the scope of the armed forces covenant to include those who came to our aid during our operations in Afghanistan?

Luke Pollard: I am glad that the hon. Lady raised the issue of Afghan interpreters, who sit outside the Triples in this regard. There are a great many Afghan interpreters in Plymouth. As a constituency MP, I know that their contribution is widely recognised and valued by the public.

It is not possible for me to put a number on those who have lost their lives or those who have been persecuted, or whose families have been persecuted, by the Taliban because of their involvement with coalition forces and allied forces in Afghanistan, but it makes clear the reason why we called for the review. This is not an administrative mess that has no consequence, but a failure to deliver consistent standards that will have significant real-world implications for those who are desperately in need of support and sanctuary.

We are confident that the wider ARAP scheme does not involve the same problems in relation to direct employment as those affecting the Triples, although there are areas that we are improving, as a new Government. Individuals are assessed on the basis of their individual circumstances, and in many instances where there is already an employment relationship with a Government Department, which might have been, for instance, the Department for International Development or the Ministry of Defence, that will already have been evidenced. The difficulty arose because of the specialist nature of the Triples units and the problem of establishing that direct employment relationship.

We continue to engage in dialogue with our friends in the Pakistani Government to ensure that we can go on delivering this programme as we intend. The hon. Lady may want to feed her views into our further work on the armed forces covenant ahead of the armed forces Bill, in which we will seek to put the covenant fully into law.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): I thank the Minister for the tone and intent of his statement, but it was not only the Triples who suffered as a result of the mistakes of the last Government, who capitulated to the Taliban. Will the Department also re-examine cases such as that of Major General Mohammad Dawood Amin, whose case the MOD closed owing to a correspondence error at its end, despite his service to the UK? His brother, Abdul Basir Jaji, and I are still raising his case. He is a constituent of mine, and we are still seeking his safety here in the UK.

Luke Pollard: It is hard for me to talk about individual circumstances and individual cases at the Dispatch Box, but I shall be happy to discuss the issue with the hon. Gentleman further.

Sir Gavin Williamson (Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge) (Con): I very much welcome the announcement by the Minister. It is absolutely the right thing to be doing. I was privileged to see at first hand the amazing work that the 333 and 444 units did, side by side with British forces. Can the Minister assure the House that he will work closely with the Pakistani Government to ensure that none of those individuals is expelled or moved on from Pakistan until we are able to look at their cases? Would the Minister be able to find time to meet me in order to go through some individual cases that are a bit too sensitive to talk about on the Floor of the House?

Luke Pollard: I am very happy to meet the right hon. Gentleman to discuss any cases. On the conversation with the Pakistani Government, the main concern in relation to the Triples is about moving them out of Afghanistan and into Pakistan in the first place. The agreement we have with the Pakistani Government means that anyone who is being assessed as part of the ARAP scheme will not be deported back to Afghanistan, which is really important, but there is still a requirement to make sure that we can relocate eligible individuals and their immediate families to the UK in an appropriate and reasonable way.[1] We are continuing that work, and we are continuing the dialogue with the Pakistani Government in relation to this issue.

Shaun Davies (Telford) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his work in this area over many years. My constituency and wider borough have played a key role in relocating a number of Afghans over many years. Can the Minister

1.[*Official Report*, 11 November 2024; Vol. 756, c. 6WC.] (Correction)

confirm that he is having conversations across Government, including with local government, to ensure that when people are relocated to the UK, it is done in a joined-up and supportive way?

Luke Pollard: I pay tribute to all those in my hon. Friend's constituency who are taking steps to support our Afghan friends. We owe them a debt of gratitude, and it is not just about words; we need to make sure that we are living those words. I know that communities, and especially veterans of the conflict, take that responsibility very seriously, and I reassure him that we do too. This new Government have already looked at how we can work across Departments to ensure that we provide better value for money and a more joined-up approach, and further announcements will be made in due course.

Stephen Gethins (Arbroath and Broughty Ferry) (SNP): I thank the Minister for his statement and for early sight of it, and I also thank him for the attention he has given to this matter. I pay tribute to colleagues across the Chamber for their service in Afghanistan, and to those who have worked on this issue.

I pay particular tribute to the former Member of Parliament for Glasgow South, Stewart McDonald. He received a letter just two weeks before the general election, at which he lost his seat, and he has been unable to take up this matter. The letter said that an error was identified in a response to a parliamentary question on 22 March 2024, which was shocking. It said that there were ineligible decisions and that assessments had been made by the Ministry of Defence—there was a bit of coverage during the election campaign that the Minister probably recalls. Will he please look into that as a matter of urgency?

We recognise the brutality of the Taliban regime. We also the recognise the value that the Afghan refugee community brings to communities across the length and breadth of the UK, including in Glasgow and Dundee. Can the Minister speak to the Home Office about how we treat Afghan refugees? A lot of this goes back to the fact that we have a refugee system with a presumption against, rather than in favour of, those who are fleeing the most brutal regimes.

Luke Pollard: Plymouth is a long way from Scotland, but I enjoyed a cross-party friendship with Stewart McDonald. When it comes to an issue like this, it is important that partisan divides do not affect our collective work, so I am very happy to pick up the issues that the hon. Gentleman mentioned in his question.

Julia Buckley (Shrewsbury) (Lab): Will the Minister join me in thanking our British personnel for the hard work they have done in processing the entitled Afghan personnel—for example, at the Nesscliffe Army camp in my constituency of Shrewsbury?

Luke Pollard: I am happy to join my hon. Friend in doing so. When we look at the Triples in particular, it is apparent that there has been real advocacy from serving and former members in highlighting that there were inconsistencies in the decision making in support of individuals who put their lives on the line in support of our mission. That applies not only to those who served in Afghanistan; I say an enormous thanks to people who are supporting Afghans who relocate to the UK. I know that an awful lot of good work is taking place, including in Shrewsbury.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I recall that when the Minister and the Security Minister were campaigning previously on behalf of the Triples, there was some doubt about the comprehensiveness of the records that show which people had actually served in the way necessary to qualify to come to the United Kingdom. Is the Minister absolutely satisfied that there is no question of any records being withheld—for example, by special forces—that would help identify eligible former members of the Triples?

Luke Pollard: The review has not yet completed, but as part of it we are looking at evidence amassed across different Government Departments—where evidence of a direct employment relationship can be established. This excludes top-up payments and operational payments, which sit outside that. The right hon. Gentleman will know that I am unable to comment on special forces on the Floor of the House, but I can say that all parts of His Majesty's Government that kept records of that are contributing to the review. I have to be cautious about this because of the ongoing Afghanistan inquiry, which is looking at elements of this, but I will happily pick this up separately with him.

Kevin Bonavia (Stevenage) (Lab): I welcome the work that my hon. Friend the Minister did in opposition and is now putting to good use with this review. We in this country owe a special obligation to those people who are engaged with our armed forces abroad, wherever they may be, and the failures that are coming to light are really worrying. What lessons does he think we can learn from those failures?

Luke Pollard: I intend, at the conclusion of the Triples review, to be able to publish a full "lessons learned" summary looking at where we need to get to, but there are a number of lessons. One point that has been reinforced in my mind is that there is enormous support for those who served alongside our troops, but we did not see record keeping that matched that type of personal connection and personal thanks for those who served. That is why, as part of this work, we have instructed that there should be changes in processes within the Ministry of Defence—and beyond that, in how we work with other Departments and parts of HMG—to ensure that in future when we have a direct relationship with people, that information is properly stored and accessible.

Richard Foord (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): The Minister talks about the parallel independent inquiry on the deployment of special forces to Afghanistan between 2010 and 2013. Former members of UK special forces told the BBC's "Panorama" earlier this year that they believed their veto powers on applications by Afghans claiming to have served with the Triples represented a conflict of interest. This conflict of interest might not have arisen had there been good parliamentary oversight of UK special forces. Will the Government consider extending the scrutiny powers of the Intelligence and Security Committee so that it has oversight of UK special forces?

Luke Pollard: I understand where the hon. Gentleman is trying to get to with his question. It is difficult for me to comment on special forces, for reasons that he will appreciate. I am also really keen to see the output of the Afghanistan inquiry and to understand what lessons Lord Haddon-Cave can identify from that. That might be the moment when that conversation is more appropriate, but it is not one that I can have now.

Mr Calvin Bailey (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): I praise my hon. Friend for his pursuit of justice with regard to the Triples, and not only in opposition but since he has entered power. On lessons learned, one of the tenets behind a number of the Bills that the Government have pursued—in relation to the Hillsborough inquiry, for example—is a duty of candour. Might that be considered as part of the Afghanistan inquiry as a whole?

Luke Pollard: The Government certainly intend to bring forward the Hillsborough Bill, which I hope will enjoy cross-party support, particularly in relation to a duty of candour. What we have discovered with the Triples review—I await the final report—is more a failure to organise and record properly, rather than a deliberate attempt to disrupt and not share information. It is that essential plumbing that failed, but also the grip and leadership of the programme, and we need to learn from this to ensure that it never happens again and that all those people who had an eligible case get the support and sanctuary that they need.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): I understand that, as a result of the ARAP programme, there will now be a new temporary centre to receive families at Beckingham camp and training ranges in my constituency. This fairly isolated site, consisting of Nissen huts, is normally used by cadets and personnel practising on the ranges. How long will the individual families be expected to stay in these Nissen huts? What money will be given to local authorities to ensure that people can be properly cared for while they are there? And how long does the Minister anticipate this temporary centre being open before it is returned to military use?

Luke Pollard: I sent a letter to the hon. Lady on this issue, which I am happy to pick up directly outside the Chamber. However, I reassure her that our intention is to use transitional facilities, such as the camp she mentioned, only on a temporary basis. I am happy to go into further detail with her about how long we intend to use the sites, but we will also be working with local authorities to ensure that the correct level of funding is provided to support former Afghan personnel and their families while they are temporarily housed there. It is important to note that, from the feedback we have received from other locations, many communities have welcomed these families and want to support them, in order to thank them for their work in support of our troops. I am very happy to meet her to discuss this further.

Louise Jones (North East Derbyshire) (Lab): Having served in the conflict in Afghanistan, I know how vital the work of units such as 333 and 444 was in supporting our troops. Is work currently under way to consider the other specialist units that supported our troops?

Luke Pollard: I thank my hon. Friend for her question, and for her service. It is important that, on both sides of the House, we have voices of Members who have served and understand the serious consequences of our decisions.

At this stage, the Triples review is looking at 333 and 444. However, we hope to get to other specialist units that we believe may have a similar direct employment relationship. I will be able to report back on that once the review has concluded.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): A constituent of mine who served with British forces in Kabul came to see me earlier this year about a friend who had appealed his failed ARAP application. This individual is an Afghan national who was contracted by the British military in the early 2000s. He worked as an interpreter, including with the British embassy. I cannot say much more publicly, for fear of putting his safety at risk. He has already been labelled a collaborator, and his father was tortured and murdered by the Taliban. His life and that of his children are at risk. Unfortunately, the Minister's Conservative predecessor, to whom I wrote in April, did not respond to my request for his personal intervention in the case. Will the Minister meet me to discuss this case and to see what he can do?

Luke Pollard: I thank the hon. Lady for her approach. This case is a perfect illustration of why it is important to get these decisions right. It is not possible to relocate every single person who supported the UK mission in Afghanistan, but there is an opportunity to appeal rejected applications. I would be very happy to meet her to discuss the case further, and to take it forward.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I welcome the tone and substance of the Minister's statement. Few of us thought 20 years ago that we would still be mopping up after Operations Telic and Herrick. Does he agree that the long shadow of discretionary warfare, particularly in the civil domain, should act as a powerful incentive for any Government when considering future military conflict?

Luke Pollard: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his question, and for his work as a Minister in the previous Government.

As part of the new Government's reset, we have commissioned Lord Robertson to undertake the strategic defence review, which will consider the threats we face. Although it is certainly true that state-on-state threats are more prominent than they have ever been, there are still non-state threats to the United Kingdom, which creates an enormous challenge not only in the military space but in the civil security space. The strategic defence review will try to work out the best shape. We have invited submissions from all parties, as well as from individuals.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the Minister. We discussed this issue last week, and I appreciated the opportunity to have that chat in advance of today's statement. I also welcome that he said

"we did right by those who stood shoulder to shoulder with the UK armed forces".

I, like the shadow Minister and Members on both sides of the House, have always spoken up for these people.

With that in mind, I welcome what is happening. A review is important to supporting those who worked tirelessly alongside British forces.

I brought the previous Minister's attention to a guy I met in Pakistan in September 2022. This man served alongside Afghan forces, and I pursued his application on three occasions. I was very frustrated by where the process ended up, so I am pleased to see that today we can do something to help this gentleman. My constituency can offer him and his family a house, a job and school places for his children. We just need to make sure we have the process and the data to bring him and his family to my Strangford constituency.

Luke Pollard: It would not be a statement without the hon. Gentleman's contribution. I thank him for his kind offer. It is important that, whatever the plumbing, the process sees the relocation of those who served alongside our forces in Afghanistan and gave them so much support. It is important that support is available to them in all nations of the United Kingdom. I know that an enormous amount of work is being done by local authorities and the devolved Administrations to ensure that Afghans have wraparound support after being relocated into their area.

I hope the review will conclude relatively soon, and I will then be in a position to make further announcements. In the meantime, I am grateful for the support from both sides of the House for those who served alongside our forces in Afghanistan. I will report back to the House in due course.

Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill

Second Reading

[Relevant document: Fourth Report of the Home Affairs Committee of Session 2023-24, Terrorism (Protection of Premises) draft Bill, HC 1359.]

5.57 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Yvette Cooper): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill has the wholehearted support of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and, I hope, the whole House. Some of those who campaigned hardest for it have joined us in Parliament for this evening's debate.

Seven and a half years ago, on the evening of 22 May 2017, thousands of people went to Manchester Arena for a music concert. Many of those in attendance were children and teenagers. They were there to see Ariana Grande, their favourite pop star, and to dance and sing along to her songs. They were there to soak up the atmosphere with friends and family. But as the event drew to a close and people started to leave, terror struck. Scenes of happiness gave way to shock and trauma, and what had been an enjoyable spring evening was transformed into a nightmare. More than 1,000 people were injured, and 22 of them never came home—nine of those were teenagers. Today, we remember them all. Their lives were brutally cut short in an act of pure evil.

We also think of the victims of other terrorist attacks. They will never be forgotten. Their families and friends, left to pick up the pieces and somehow go on, are in our hearts and prayers. We think also of all those who survived this and other similarly abhorrent acts, the survivors of all terror attacks, who live with the scars, whether physical or psychological. We think of the first responders who are on the frontline when the worst happens, bravely working to protect the public and to save lives, and we think of the police and security and intelligence agencies who work night and day to prevent attacks and keep us all safe. We give them our thanks.

In the aftermath of the Manchester Arena attack, our country did what it always does when confronted with terrorism: we came together. As the city grieved, we stood shoulder to shoulder with those affected and offered our friendship and support. In the darkness came rays of light—those who were determined to support each other and ensure that more was done to save young lives in future.

That spirit is embodied by Figen Murray, who is with us in the Public Gallery today. It is because of Figen that we are all here to talk about this legislation. Figen's son, Martyn Hett, was among those killed in the attack. I cannot imagine Figen's pain and I am in awe of her courage. To suffer such a horrendous loss and somehow find the strength to fight for changes that will help others is heroic. Despite her grief, she has campaigned, and when asked this morning why she does so, she said that she looks at her child's ashes on the bookshelf and she does not want other families to have to face the same. Figen and campaigners have fought for this law. This Bill has been a long time coming, but she has never given up. I am sure the whole House will agree wheneb;normal;j I say to Figen, "You are a true inspiration.

[Yvette Cooper]

Officially, we are debating the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill but in essence and in spirit, this is 'Martyn's law'."

The first responsibility of any Government is to keep the public safe. That is, and will always be, our No. 1 priority. We will not let terrorists or extremists destroy or distort our way of life. That is why Labour committed in our manifesto to strengthening the security of public events and venues, why the Prime Minister made a commitment to Figen Murray and why we have moved at speed to introduce the Bill in a matter of weeks after the general election. Earlier work was done on the Bill under the last Government and I am glad to say that it has cross-party support—I hope that, when it comes to security matters, the House will always be prepared to come together.

The Manchester Arena inquiry made 169 public recommendations. Volume 1 focused on the security of the arena and set out the need for a protect duty in primary legislation. The chair, Sir John Saunders, whom I thank for all the work he did, concluded:

> "Doing nothing is, in my view, not an option. Equally, the Protect Duty must not be so prescriptive as to prevent people enjoying a normal life."

That encapsulates the purpose behind the Bill and behind so much of what we do when countering terrorism and extremism: ensuring that proper measures are taken to keep us safe; ensuring that people can get on with their lives and making it possible for people to keep enjoying all the things they do; and protection of life—protection of our way of life.

Since March 2017, MI5 and the police have together disrupted 43 late-stage plots and there have been 15 domestic terror attacks. We know from those incidents that the public can be targeted at a wide range of public venues and spaces. We know too that the terror threat has become less predictable and potential attacks harder to detect and investigate. That is why everyone needs to be part of the measures we take to keep people safe—including those who run premises and events, who need to know what they can do and what they should be doing to keep people safe.

Pete Wishart (Perth and Kinross-shire) (SNP): I am loath to interrupt the Home Secretary; she is making a passionate and clear case for why the Bill is necessary, and the SNP will be supporting her. Is she aware of the concerns from the live music sector, which will be most burdened and most impacted by this particular Bill? Is she in constant contact with the live music sector, and can she offer any reassurance on the number of issues that I know it has raised with her?

Yvette Cooper: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, and I know there will be many detailed discussions on that in Committee. Since the original draft legislation was published, we have sought to ensure that there was extensive consultation with businesses, with premises and with venues of all sizes. That is why there is a different approach, which I will come on to, for different sizes of venue, ensuring that the response that premises need to make is proportionate and recognises the detailed individual circumstances, which will be very different from one venue and one organisation to another. I will come to that point and that detail.

The legislation requires for the first time that those responsible for certain premises and events consider terrorist risk and how they would respond to an attack. Larger premises and events will need to take steps to reduce their vulnerability to terrorist attacks. For premises to fall within the scope of the Bill, it must be reasonable to expect that there may be 200 or more individuals present on those premises at the same time. In addition, the premises must be used for one or more of the activities specified in the Bill—for example, entertainment or leisure. For those premises that are in scope, a tiered approach has been established, with requirements varying. Events and premises where it is reasonably expected that 800 or more people may be present at once will generally be in the enhanced tier, and any other premises—those where 200 to 800 people may be present—will be in the standard tier.

Those responsible for premises in the standard tier will be required to notify the regulator and have in place public protection procedures to reduce the risk of harm to individuals in the event of an act of terrorism. It is important that those procedures are designed to be very simple and low cost. There will be no requirement to put in place physical measures in the standard tier. There are four categories of procedure: evacuation, which relates to the process of getting people safely out of the premises; invacuation, for example where we need to keep people safe within premises; lockdown, if a premises needs to be kept secure from an attacker who is trying to get in; and communication—simply communicating to all those involved, including staff and the public who might be at risk.

In recognition of the potentially greater impact of an attack on larger premises, those in the enhanced tier will be subject to additional requirements or public protection measures: monitoring for risks and indicators; security measures for individuals, which might mean search and screening processes; physical safety measures, where relevant, such as safety glass; and securing information to make it harder for people to plan, prepare or execute acts of terrorism.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): May I just ask, given that the atrocity in the Manchester Arena was caused by a terrorist coming in with explosives in a very prominent backpack, how the measures being proposed would have affected that scenario?

Yvette Cooper: We are being clear that it is not for the Government to specify precise arrangements for every venue. I do not think it would be appropriate to do so. Arrangements will vary according to the event. We know that many large venues already have procedures to search bags or conduct those sorts of checks. We are clear that this needs to be done proportionately, and according to the size of the venue and the arrangements in place.

Sir Julian Lewis: If I may pursue that point a little further, if what we are really talking about is explosions being carried out by suicide bombers among large numbers of people, the one thing that all those atrocities have in

common is that an explosive device, which is invariably bulky, has to be carried in. Is that not the central point that everybody ought to be addressing?

Yvette Cooper: The right hon. Gentleman is right. That is why one of the things we would expect is that premises have proper search measures, and particularly to ensure that there are security measures around the movement of individuals, but as well as the searches that might take place at an event itself, safety measures may also involve having monitoring procedures in place—for example, if the same individual has been back, circling a venue several times, and is behaving in a suspicious or inappropriate way. Making sure that staff are trained to recognise those kinds of risks and indicators may be an important part of keeping the venue safe.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab) *rose—*

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con) *rose—*

Yvette Cooper: I will give way first to my hon. Friend and then I will come back to the right hon. Gentleman.

Neil Coyle: I thank the Home Secretary for introducing this important legislation, which means so much to those who were affected in Manchester and to those affected on 3 June 2017 in the London bridge and Borough market attack. My question is on measuring risks and taking measures in advance to try to protect people. Will venues be able to draw down on terror insurance where they have it? Will the Government support an awareness campaign on the need to have terror insurance and support? Where risk assessments highlight a physical barrier or a change to an external area, how will the Bill support venues and local authorities to work together to resolve concerns? Barriers to securing literal barriers around Borough market have included the design and who is going to pay; there have been lots of practical difficulties in designing and installing the permanent barriers to protect all those who still use the amazing Borough market in my constituency.

Yvette Cooper: As my hon. Friend will know, the prevention of future deaths report from the London bridge and Borough market inquests called for clarity of responsibility for venue operators regarding protective security. Addressing that point is one reason that we are bringing forward this legislation. My hon. Friend is also right that, in practice, security and safety measures require people to work together and require partnerships among them, the venue, local councils and others. It is not for this legislation to set out the decisions for insurance companies; its whole purpose is to make venues safer and more resilient to the kinds of pressures and attacks they might face.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP) *rose—*

Yvette Cooper: I said I would give way to the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes). I will then come to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon).

Sir John Hayes: The right hon. Lady makes two profoundly important points. The first is on the metamorphosis of terrorism and how we need to be persistently clear about how we respond to it in the event of the changes we have seen. The second is about how the whole House comes together on these matters; as the right hon. Lady knows, I have had an interest in this subject for some time and I entirely endorse what she says.

The particular point that I want to make is about anticipating events. The right hon. Lady has spoken a great deal about how we deal with events in the moment, as it were—the training of staff is critical, as she said—but of course we could be talking about a timed device that is planted long before a large event takes place. How does she see the legislation having an impact on a plot that is made well in advance, as I am sure the one in Manchester was?

Yvette Cooper: The right hon. Member makes an important point and I thank him for his long-standing interest in the issue. Those responsible for premises and events in the enhanced tier will be required to provide the regulator with a document that sets out all the public protection measures and procedures they have, and how they expect those processes to reduce their vulnerability and risk of harm from terrorism. The first category is about monitoring for risks and indicators. That might include monitoring prevention measures—for example, if there has been some kind of security breach a week before or some days before—or assessing what the risks might be. The third measure is about physical safety, which might include the physical arrangements that can prevent somebody from being able to take action in advance of a major event to create that risk and threat. There are ways of having those checks in place.

The Bill ensures that there is a new regulator to oversee compliance through a new function of the Security Industry Authority. We expect the SIA's primary role to be supporting and advising businesses to implement the legislation's requirements. Even though the SIA will have a suite of powers and sanctions, including the power to issue fines for non-compliance or to shut down events in the enhanced tier, in fact those sanctions are primarily civil. I reassure the House that those responsible for premises and events will be given time to understand and that the SIA's approach will be to support venues to adopt the new measures. A range of factors will be taken into account so that penalties will be used only to address the most serious or repeated failings.

Jim Shannon: I thank the Secretary of State for her contribution and for setting the scene so well. We will support the Government's legislation because it is the right thing to do. The Secretary of State knows very well that we in Northern Ireland have suffered a campaign lasting 30-plus years from the IRA, where shopkeepers and those involved in businesses took steps against firebombs, against people bombing houses and against car bombs, which resulted in a large loss of life. Has there been the opportunity to consider what was done in Northern Ireland in a voluntary capacity to combat such things? I am ever mindful that it was perhaps not necessary to have legislation that handed out fines.

[Jim Shannon]

Everyone wants to do the right thing and if that is the case, it is about how we encourage people to do that. Lessons can be learned from back home. I will speak later and highlight some of those things, but I think it is important that we take all the knowledge from everywhere in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Yvette Cooper: The hon. Member is right that there has been considerable work by many venues and premises in Northern Ireland to respond to the kinds of threats and risks that, sadly, communities have faced through the years. He may also be interested to know that in Manchester a voluntary version of Martyn's law was introduced after the appalling Manchester Arena attack; training and support were provided for venues and many businesses were keen to sign up. That has been very well supported and the view in Manchester is that it has been hugely successful.

The experience of the hon. Member for Strangford in Northern Ireland and the experience in Manchester is that, too often, there has been a tragic reason as to why organisations have responded in that way. We need to make sure those same lessons are learned right across the country. That is why we are setting out this comprehensive legislation, so we are not in a situation where the biggest venues only respond when something terrible happens—when it is too late and lives have been lost.

We are committed to working extensively with the business community during the passage and roll-out of the Bill. As well as the ongoing programme of direct engagement, we have also updated ProtectUK to make it easier for businesses and others to navigate and understand the supporting information on the Bill. We are acutely conscious in introducing this legislation of the need to get the proper balance and detail right. That is why, as hon. and right hon. Members will know, the Bill's proposals have been subject to extensive development, and the draft version of the legislation was subject to pre-legislative scrutiny under the previous Government.

Most crucially, we have raised the threshold for being in scope from 100 to 200 individuals. We recognise the need for a location-specific approach because the procedures in one place may not apply to another. We have also ensured that in both tiers appropriate procedures and measures are required only

"so far as is reasonably practicable".

Those words are crucial to recognising the importance of protecting life and our way of life.

With Figen here, we always keep in our minds that terrible day in Manchester seven and a half years ago. The youngest victim was an eight-year-old girl, Saffie-Rose Roussos. Her headteacher asked the question afterwards:

"How do you tell 276 children that their friend has been murdered"?

That is a question we all ask: how can we explain how anyone could have targeted the event that day, with young children enjoying their love of music and dancing? But that is the point. When terrorists want to cause maximum damage—when they want to destroy our way of life—of course they seek out crowds, but they also seek out innocence, happiness and joy. That is why our task is not just to take measures to keep people safe but to work tirelessly to ensure that people can get on and enjoy their lives, and that we never let terrorists, extremists and criminals win.

Let me finish by quoting Figen. She said:

"It's time to get this done."

I could not put it better. I commend the Bill to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call the shadow Home Secretary.

6.20 pm

Mr James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): I thank the Home Secretary for bringing the Bill forward with such pace and alacrity. I pay tribute to Figen Murray for her tireless campaigning; I know that she, her husband and other campaigners join us in the Chamber. It is also appropriate that we pay tribute to her son, Martyn Hett, who was murdered, alongside 21 other innocent victims, while going to the Manchester Arena in 2017 to watch a concert. It is of course in that tragic context that we find ourselves considering this legislation.

As the Home Secretary said, the Bill enjoys cross-party support, and the Opposition support its aims and aspirations. I am grateful to her for recognising at the Dispatch Box the work that was done, particularly in pre-legislative scrutiny, to ensure that the Bill has the best chance of navigating its parliamentary stages and concluding in a manner that achieves the dual purpose of keeping people safe while supporting the music and entertainment industry, of which we are so proud.

When I met Ms Murray ahead of the general election, I said, perhaps rashly, that I was confident that, irrespective of the outcome of the election, the Bill would be brought forward. I am glad that the Home Secretary did not put me in an awkward position having made such a commitment. I felt confident at the time that I would be proved right, and I am pleased that, on this one occasion thus far, she and her Ministers have done so. Martyn's law was in both our parties' manifestos at the last general election, and it is important that this measured and well thought through piece of legislation is properly scrutinised legislation and makes it through the House.

As the Home Secretary said, the threat picture is complex, evolving and enduring, and terrorists choose to attack a broad range of locations. As she also stated, they choose to attack in a manner and in locations that maximise the detrimental impact on our way of life. The protection of our way of life is in many ways just as important as the protection of life itself. As there is a range of potential targets, it is right that the Bill proposes that a range of premises be better protected and ready to respond in the event of a terrorist attack. At the same time, the Government have to think very carefully when regulating in this way, to ensure that we recognise that we cannot regulate away all risks. We should regulate when and where it provides greater safety to the public, ensuring that we do not create a false sense of security or impose a cost so high that venues are unable to comply and therefore fail to reduce the risk.

It is appropriate that we look at the impact assessment produced by the Government, and recognise that the new regulations will affect an estimated 155,000 small

businesses with a venue capacity of between 200 and 799 people. That will impose an average cost on them of around £330 a year. The regulations will also impact around 24,000 larger venues with a capacity of 800 and above, imposing an average cost of around £5,000 each year. When I was the Home Secretary, I looked at ways of reducing the burden on the industry as much as possible, while ensuring that those with the broadest shoulders, as it were, could bear the largest load, protecting smaller venues. I therefore welcome the lighter-touch approach that has been put forward, particularly in the standard tier.

While in government, we also looked at the case for raising the standard threshold beyond 200 to around 300. I see in the Bill that a capacity of 200 was settled on. Clearly, as the Bill goes through the scrutiny process, questions will be asked about whether 200, 300, or a lower or higher figure is appropriate. It is right that those questions are asked, and Members across the House should feel at liberty to probe the Government on the rationale, because this is about balance, and ensuring that people are safe and venues stay viable.

In recognition of the important but novel approach that is being taken, what thought have the Government given to a feedback process whereby the implementation could be assessed and thresholds adjusted if needs be? The Government might consider implementing the enhanced tier in a staged process and learn lessons before implementing the standard tier fully. I would certainly be more than happy to discuss that with the Home Secretary across the Dispatch Box, in Committee, or elsewhere.

Turning to the establishment of the new regulator, I welcome the Government's intention that the regulatory function of Martyn's law will be delivered as a new function of the Security Industry Authority, but what assurances has the right hon. Lady had from the SIA regarding its readiness for this? As I said, including the standard tier, we are looking at nearly 200,000 venues. We want to ensure that the legislation is effective, and not just on the statute book gathering dust.

Sir John Hayes: I am mindful of my right hon. Friend's earlier point about how small businesses can cope with the new requirements. Part of that involves increasing their staff's awareness and understanding of the threat. The training that the Home Secretary spoke about will be vital in that respect. Does my right hon. Friend agree that one way of minimising costs will be for umbrella organisations to co-ordinate some of that training, in organisations big and small, to improve staff understanding of the risk and how it can be countered?

Mr Cleverly: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. Given that so much legislation of this nature enjoys cross-party support, there are opportunities to discuss the most effective way of implementing our universal desire to get good and effective, but not overly onerous, legislation on the books. Members may feel a bit reticent about asking challenging questions for fear of coming across as seeking to undermine the work of legislation, but I know from the conversations that he and I have had that the opposite is true here. There are opportunities to do as he suggests, for example with the requirement for the enhanced tier venues to get their house in order. That could be done in close co-ordination with local venues in the standard tier, and the relevant training could be done hand in hand without the full financial, time or other burden falling on smaller venues. That kind of detail could make a fundamentally sound Bill increasingly effective.

We need to look at what else can be done to ensure that the plans for premises cannot be used against them, and that if those plans are disclosed, they cannot be utilised by would-be attackers as part of their preparation. Of course, there is a balancing act between having best practice made public—something that would benefit smaller venues—and ensuring that we do not give advantage to those who would do harm.

I also ask that Ministers ensure that the regulator is supportive and constructive. The Home Secretary made that point, and it is important to say it at the Dispatch Box, but making sure that it is really embedded in the organisation is key. The regulator's desire should be to help venues to stay safe and viable, rather than looking for opportunities to rush in with fining powers, which could either put businesses out of business or introduce such a fear of fines that they decide to take the easy option and close their doors. That is not something that Members on either side of the House want.

Organisations will, of course, need time to adapt and familiarise themselves with the new guidance. On that point, I note that the new legislation is unlikely to be implemented for around 24 months after Royal Assent. If that is the case, will the Home Secretary commit to engage with the industry via the Federation of Small Businesses, Live music Industry Venues and Entertainment, the Greater London Authority and other bodies to ensure that we do not have a one-size-fits-all approach that might, perhaps inadvertently, squeeze sensible changes that could increase compliance without increasing risk?

What mitigations or exemptions will the Home Secretary consider to protect voluntary and community venues, such as churches or places of worship, particularly those that have already said that the new regulations will be burdensome for them? It is vital to keep the thresholds and guidance under review as the legislation is implemented. Fear of regulation often incentivises owners and organisers to take the most cautious point of view rather than the most appropriate one, and that would be counterproductive.

As the Home Secretary said, terror threats are constantly evolving, and we must evolve with them. In doing so, we must be alive to the threat that new regulations and protections have on our everyday lives—on gatherings, on places of worship and on business—and we should keep proportionality at the forefront of our minds. She has made a commitment to do that, and I am grateful that she has done so. In that spirit, I offer the Opposition's support in ensuring that the legislation passes promptly through the House and is implemented in the best form possible, and that we do what we can to ensure that tragedies such as we saw in the Manchester Arena never happen again.

6.34 pm

Mr Connor Rand (Altrincham and Sale West) (Lab): It is a privilege to speak today in support of this vital Bill. I start by joining the Home Secretary and the shadow Home Secretary in paying tribute to the bravery

[Mr Connor Rand]

and phenomenal campaigning of Figen Murray. To so selflessly and bravely campaign for the safety of others after suffering such unimaginable trauma is truly inspirational. It is the reason this legislation is before the House today, and it is the reason lives will be saved when this Bill becomes law. That should lead to an enormous sense of pride for her and for all the campaigners involved.

As a Greater Manchester Member of Parliament, I find this legislation especially poignant, coming as it does after the Manchester Arena attack in 2017, which united Manchester, our region and our country in grief. Twenty-two people died that night, and many more were left with lifelong physical and psychological trauma. First and foremost, they suffered from an act of indescribable evil and cowardice from people who seek to destroy what binds us and our way of life. They also suffered as a result of security arrangements at Manchester Arena that were not proportional to the severe threat posed by terrorism.

The Manchester Arena inquiry carried out by Sir John Saunders found multiple missed opportunities for detecting and stopping the bomber, or, at the very least, minimising the number of casualties that he was able to inflict. Sir John spoke of serious shortcomings from the operators of the arena, the company tasked with the concert security and the British Transport Police, including a lack of preparedness and a lack of communication between security employees regarding suspicious behaviour. That contributed to the attacker being able to do covert reconnaissance on the arena undetected and find a CCTV blind spot.

Underpinning those missed opportunities was a failure to treat the terror threat with the severity it deserved. At that point, the terror threat facing the country was classed as severe, but now it is classed as substantial, with an attack sadly likely. Indeed, we know that since the Manchester Arena bombing, 43 terror plots on UK venues have been foiled at a late stage. Figen Murray has said:

"We've been lucky 43 times but they only have to be lucky once."

That is why there is such an urgent need for this overdue Bill. I am proud that the Government are treating this issue as the priority that it deserves to be. After all, our most basic responsibility in this place is to do everything we can to ensure the safety and security of our residents. The Prime Minister promised he would act, and he has done so just months into his Administration. I thank him and the Home Office team for their swift action to deliver us to this stage.

The striking thing for me about this legislation is how common-sense it all is. We would be hard pressed to find a constituent who disagrees that all public premises should take reasonably practical measures to mitigate the impact of a terrorist plot. Similarly, it feels like a significant oversight that there was no previous mandate setting out who is responsible for implementing these measures, as there will be should this Bill become law. These are common-sense proposals to deal with serious issues—something every Bill in this place seeks to do, but does not always achieve. That is why it has such strong support in all parts of the House.

I note the supportive comments of the head of counter-terrorism policing, Matt Jukes, who talked of

"the opportunity that this Bill brings to drive greater consistency"

among businesses and communities, and

"to take simple low or no-cost steps that will save lives".

I appreciate that concerns have been expressed about the burden that will be placed on businesses, particularly smaller music venues that are still recovering from the covid-19 pandemic, but with the support of a dedicated regulator to help them and a period of 24 months to prepare, I do not believe that any business is facing obstacles that cannot be overcome. I thank the Home Secretary for setting out the Government's tiered approach, and I know that much more will be said about support for businesses as the Bill progresses through the House.

For the Bill to be as effective as possible, we need collaboration between Government, business and campaigners. We have a duty to make it as effective as possible, because while it cannot remove the hurt or pain of those who suffered a loss in the Manchester Arena attack or ease the pain of those who are living with their injuries, it can forever reduce the likelihood of such an event happening again, and it will save lives. That is why I am proud to support the Bill.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

6.40 pm

Lisa Smart (Hazel Grove) (LD): As this House reflects on the measures we must take to protect our nation, it is essential that—as others have already done—we remember the tragedy of 22 May 2017, when the Manchester Arena bombing claimed 22 lives in a shocking act of terror. Those of us who are from Greater Manchester all know someone who was there that night, whether they were watching the concert, picking up their daughters, or responding as a member of our emergency services. Among the 22 who were lost was Martyn Hett, a young man from Stockport who was full of life, boundless energy and a personality that lit up every room he entered. Martyn was 29 years old, and for anyone who knew him—as many of my constituents did—he was a symbol of joy and creativity. His love for life, humour, and unique way of connecting with people left a lasting impression on so many Stopfordians.

Martyn's mum Figen endured a loss that no parent should ever have to face. However, Figen's response to that unimaginable pain has been one of remarkable strength and resolve. She has become a tireless advocate for change and an inspiration to us all, and she has led the campaign for Martyn's law in memory of her son. Figen's efforts have not gone unnoticed: over the years, she has worked with policymakers, security experts and communities to push for these changes, with the goal of ensuring no other family has to experience what she and her family have had to. Her determination has turned a personal tragedy into a powerful force for good. She has taken her message to Governments of different shades, to public forums and to schools, reminding us of the urgent need for better safety measures in public spaces. Martyn's law is a testament to her courage.

I must also pay tribute to the people of Greater Manchester, who came together in an extraordinary display of solidarity, resilience and compassion. In the

immediate aftermath of the attack, our city region stood tall: taxi drivers offered free rides to those stranded, residents opened their homes to concertgoers in need, and local businesses provided food and shelter to strangers. Greater Manchester is a city region known for its gumption and its strength, and that night, we showed the world what true unity looks like. In the days that followed, St Ann's Square became a place of mourning, reflection and community, with thousands of people gathering there—as well as across the region—to pay tribute to the victims, light candles and lay flowers. I remember gathering in Romiley Precinct, because it was important to be with our neighbours and to feel part of our community. It was not just a moment of mourning, but a really powerful statement that our city region would not be broken by terror.

The Mancunian way speaks to that enduring spirit—a refusal to be defined by fear, but instead by our unity and resolve. It was evident in the tireless work of the emergency services, who responded with bravery and professionalism on that terrible night, and in the action of the countless volunteers who came forward offering what they could to help. The attack sought to sow fear and division, but it only brought us closer together and reminded us of what truly makes Greater Manchester great: its people. As we consider the legislation before us today, we must remember the 22 lives lost and the families forever changed, as well as the resilience of the people of Greater Manchester. We must honour the memory of Martyn and the work of Figen, whose campaign for Martyn's law is not just a call for better security, but a testament to the power of love and community in the face of terror.

This legislation is intended to ensure that businesses and organisations are better prepared to deal with, and respond to, terror-related threats. The tragic Arena attack exposed deficiencies in the security of public venues. This Bill aims to address those gaps by imposing a legal duty on the owners and operators of public venues to assess the risk of terror-related security threats and implement proportionate security measures. Attention should be drawn to the party responsible for complying with the regulations set out in the Bill, which is the owner, the operator or the leaseholder of the venue. The Bill applies to any premises that, at times, will host 200 or more people, ranging from nightclubs and sports grounds to leisure centres, schools and universities.

A key distinction should be made, and is made, between the three categories to which the Bill applies: enhanced duty premises, which may expect 800 attendees from time to time; qualifying events, which are any event that will have public access and may host 800 or more attendees; and standard duty premises, which may host at least 200 people at times. I welcome the new threshold for standard duty premises of 200 individuals, which largely addresses the concerns raised by Action with Communities in Rural England and will reduce the burden on the organisers and operators of thousands of community-run venues, such as village halls, community halls and church halls. Such venues might be used for community groups, exercise classes and weddings in rural areas where the terrorist threat is usually low.

However, some concerns remain. The Bill grants the Home Secretary the power to lower the 200-person threshold to 100. Such a change should require a strong specific justification related to a clear and widespread threat, and in such cases less burdensome alternatives such as increased police engagement with smaller venues should be considered. We urge the Government to examine carefully whether the benefits of the Bill are proportional to the potential costs for smaller venues and their operators. Furthermore, the Bill contains little scope to train venue operators in their new responsibilities, leaving them preparing the required procedures with—in our view—not enough support. If the legislation is to be as effective as possible, the Government will need to address those concerns.

At this stage, the Liberal Democrats support Martyn's law and look forward to further constructive scrutiny as it progresses through Parliament. It represents a step forward in ensuring the safety of our public spaces. The devastating attack at the Arena in 2017 serves as a stark reminder of the vulnerabilities that exist and the heavy price we pay when they are exploited. We owe it to the victims and their families, and to every citizen, to learn from that tragedy and take measures to prevent it from happening again. By strengthening the security of our venues and enhancing our preparedness, we honour the memory of all those lost, and we demonstrate our commitment to protect the public from such senseless acts of terror.

6.48 pm

Kirith Entwistle (Bolton North East) (Lab): Greater Manchester is my home. In a recent podcast, Sir Ian McKellen said:

> "If you ever arrive in Manchester, if you're lucky enough to be able to afford the train fare, you come down the steps at Piccadilly, and if you're lucky enough to be able to afford a taxi, you get in the back of one, and the taxi driver—usually a man, but not always—says, 'Where you going to, love?'"

He went on to say:

> "Where grown men call strangers 'love'. I think if we all did that, it would be a rather better place, wouldn't it?"

That is the Greater Manchester I recognise and am proud of. Although I am not a native, I have come to know the warm, welcoming compassion of its people. This is the Greater Manchester that was shaken to its core by the unspeakable devastation caused by the Arena bombing—an act so far removed from the values of the place I now call home. I join the Home Secretary in commending the action Manchester took, effectively enacting Martyn's law following that dreadful attack. I know that Members on all sides of the House who have visited our region, even for a brief moment, will recognise the warmth and compassion of which I speak.

This Bill, Martyn's law, is an important step towards ensuring that no other family, no other mother and, indeed, no other parent has to endure the same pain and loss that Figen Murray and so many others have faced. Everyone in Greater Manchester and across the country should feel safe when they attend public venues, whether they are at a local theatre production, a concert or a football match, or simply enjoying a day out, and they should know that their children will be safe too.

In my part of Greater Manchester, Bolton North East, our vibrant arts sector is the heartbeat of the community. Local venues such as the Albert Halls and the Octagon theatre, which will fall under the standard tier of this legislation, play a vital role in bringing

[Kirith Entwistle]

people together and providing spaces where families can celebrate creativity and culture. For smaller venues such as these, it is crucial that we strike the right balance, ensuring that both safety and culture can thrive side by side.

I would like to end by paying tribute to Figen and her campaign team, who have worked tirelessly to keep this Bill on the agenda. I would also like to express my sincere thanks to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, the entire Home Office team and the Prime Minister for wasting no time in bringing Martyn's law to the House within the first 100 days of this Government, and I look forward to supporting the Bill through the House.

6.51 pm

Priti Patel (Witham) (Con): I think it is right that at this moment we all pause to remember those who have lost their lives to acts of terrorism, and not just in recent years but across many decades.

I pay particular tribute to Figen Murray, Martyn Hett's mother, whose role in this legislation has been recognised today by the whole House. Other families have lost loved ones to terrorism, but she has single-handedly championed Martyn's law. I have had the great privilege of spending time with Figen, and with so many other families, and it is quite something, frankly, to listen to them speak not just of their concerns, heartbreak and suffering, but of their determined resolve to seek justice for their loved ones, and to steer this legislation across different political parties and bring it before Parliament. I do not have enough words to pay tribute to Figen and so many others, but I can say that the tragedy that has affected their lives has led them to stand tall.

There are other individuals such as Travis Frain, who has made such a big impact by standing up and giving voice to the victims of these atrocities, and they all deserve the greatest recognition and respect. They have shown a great deal of courage in dealing with the pain, suffering and trauma that they have experienced, and in working towards making our country and our community safe, and protecting other citizens from the suffering and hardship that they themselves have faced. It is a testament to their campaign that Martyn's law has consistently attracted cross-party support.

I want to thank everyone in the House, including those on both Front Benches and the Home Affairs Committee, which examined the draft Bill, as well as everyone who has worked on progressing Martyn's law from 2021 onwards. That was when the first consultation took place, for 18 weeks. It provided some startling insights into the public's attitudes towards the protection of venues and the steps they wanted their Government to advance. So many people have been involved in this legislation, but I do want to pay tribute to a former Security Minister who worked on this with me in the Home Office. James Brokenshire, who was a diligent Security Minister, led this work. This month marks the third anniversary of his passing, and he will be in our thoughts.

Of course, our thoughts and prayers must also be with the family of Sir David Amess, whose murder took place three years ago tomorrow. We look at his plaque in the same way that we look at the plaque in memory of Jo Cox. They and their families were victims of some of the atrocities that have taken place in our country.

Yvette Cooper: I thank the right hon. Member for her tributes to David Amess and Jo Cox, and I join her in those tributes. David's family will be very much in our hearts as we remember him tomorrow, as will Jo and all of her family. The right hon. Member is right to pay tribute to them, and I thank her for doing so.

Priti Patel: I thank the Home Secretary for her comments. Debates such as this concentrate all our minds and thoughts on how we must work together. It is so sad, but many of the Members here have spoken about Sir David and Jo, and in fact great security measures have then been enacted. Indeed, I pay tribute to Mr Speaker, staff members and everyone who has stepped up to do so. However, there is a threat here, which is the suffering, the loss and the pain, and as has been said in the debates thus far, the Manchester Arena tragedy will live with so many of us for so long.

I set up the inquiry when I was Home Secretary, and many of the findings of the important work of Sir John Saunders were absolutely shocking. The families had to sit through and participate in the inquiry, and they were retraumatised to a certain extent while giving evidence and listening to some of the failings, which was deeply painful. This is very much about the lessons we can learn collectively, and not just across Government but as a society. This Bill will always be in memory of Martyn, of course, but it is also in memory of the many others affected.

Sir John Hayes: I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend for setting up the inquiry, but those recommendations did not stop with this legislation. While it is important that we welcome this in the spirit that has imbued the debate so far, the recommendations on co-ordination and some of the failures in communication between different agencies—those recommendations were mentioned by the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Mr Rand)—do need to be acted on. Notwithstanding the spirit that I have described, it is important that that scrutiny continues and that we learn the lessons to which she has alluded.

Priti Patel: I thank my right hon. Friend for his comments. He will know very well from his own time in government, given the roles in which he served, that we have been privy to the details of some awful plans, plots and issues that could have inflicted a lot of problems on our country. We must always have these policies under review.

I want to pay tribute to the work of our security and intelligence services. Their work behind the scenes is just outstanding, and we are blessed in so many ways with the level of scrutiny, the work they do and the resources that come from Government. I want to pay tribute to the team that set up the counter-terrorism operations centre—a new organisation established by the previous Government during the last Parliament—which focuses on the integrated approach of our security services for a lot of the operational work that takes place. We should not just pay tribute to it, but recognise that this work always has to be kept under review,

because the threats change. The nature of the threats evolves and changes constantly and, as we know, terrorism is not just domestic but takes place outside this country.

The Bill has had extensive consideration and consultation. It has taken into account the recommendations and details contained in reports and inquests from the Manchester Arena attack, and from the attacks at London bridge and here in Westminster, and other incidents, as is absolutely right. During my time at the Home Office, we gave a commitment to introduce a protect duty, which was welcomed across the House and by campaigners and many businesses, and that consultation was undertaken in 2021. We had to consult and consider carefully how best to implement that and improve public safety protections while being mindful of the many impacts on businesses to which the House has alluded—the need for those impacts to be proportionate and for burdens to be minimised—particularly on smaller businesses and venues, and contemplating the role and responsibilities of the regulator. The Home Secretary touched on some of those points.

Since then, the draft Bill was published last year and was considered by the Home Affairs Committee, and this year the standard tier consultation took place. The results were published last month with the Bill and, importantly, the provisions have been built on and some changes made. It is right that the details have been scrutinised. It is important that we recognise the patience of the campaigners who wanted the Bill to come forward much earlier, but we needed to get the technicalities and the details right. There is no point in bringing forward legislation if we cannot operationalise it.

The Home Secretary has spoken about the role of the SIA. We need to consider how the SIA will be equipped adequately. It was resourced heavily during the covid pandemic, with new duties and responsibilities, but again it is the practicalities that are important, because the Bill brings an estimated 179,000 premises under the scope of the requirements of Martyn's law, with a distinction in place—some have a standard duty, as we have heard from the Secretary of State. It is right that the provisions are proportionate to the scale and size of premises and businesses, and that there is a link to the risk, but we do not want to see issues with the enforceability of the provisions, so I want to ask the Home Secretary and her team some questions in that regard.

The Home Secretary touched on the whole issue around the SIA, the regulator and the potential to enforce civil penalties, but we need to understand the practicalities, because she also highlighted that we do not want to put additional burdens on businesses through the work that has taken place already. If businesses are not stepping up—not learning from past mistakes and the recommendations of other inquiries—how will that be picked up? Penalties are one thing, but they should be the last resort; we need these institutions and organisations to put public safety and the practicalities first.

I hope that the Minister responding to the debate will talk about the impact on local authorities, including local councils and town parishes. What assurances can be given about the work under way with colleagues in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to support local authorities to meet these obligations, including through training, and considering the implications, practicalities and scope? Will there be financial support for them? What support will be given to schools and educational institutions on their standard duty?

Given the existing measures that some premises have in place to ensure compliance with fire safety, health and safety, and crime prevention requirements, will the Minister look carefully at the interplay between those responsibilities so that the guidance is not complicated but consistent and comprehensive, and that we assist premises in minimising cost burdens while allowing them to work in an integrated way? One big lesson from Manchester, and Sir John's inquiry and the reporting—we know this, as it was in the public domain—was that there was a lack of integration between the various services working together. That absolutely has to be recognised. We must ensure there is a golden thread running through all the services locally, so they know how to integrate and work together. The impact assessment gives an estimate of the overall cost of the standard duty and the enhanced duty over a significant period, but there is again the question of the practicalities: what does this really mean for the many organisations and institutions that will be involved?

I seek clarity from the Minister about the role of planning policy in delivering Martyn's law. This is important; with changes in planning policy, we might be able to make changes to the way in which buildings are shaped and designed, and to what local authorities take on board. We might be able to ensure that the relevant authorities receive advice and guidance from the police on how to design out some of these issues and put in safety measures, and bring in developers to introduce good designs and new concepts, future-proofing many institutions, buildings and developments.

I will touch on the nature of terror incidents and the premises that need to be considered, because we need procedures to examine how best to prevent incidents from taking place and places from becoming targets. Monitoring and surveillance is second nature to our institutions, but there is also the question of how premises hosting events should respond to a particular threat or even anticipate an incident—what kinds of processes and procedures will such premises be undertaking? Perhaps the Home Secretary or the Minister could talk a bit about some of the discussions they have had with key sectors. Live venues and events were discussed earlier, but have they been consulted not just on how they will design these incidents out but on the practical measures—the kind of work that will be undertaken or the drills that will be put in place?

There are a lot of lessons to learn just from recent incidents. We saw what happened at London bridge in 2017, which differed from the Finsbury Park attack, the Manchester Arena attack and the Reading Forbury Gardens attack as well. It is important that the SIA, the regulator and the Government work to ensure that those responsible for premises and events have the full duty, and can go into their own planning and preparations in the right way.

I will mention one particular inquiry that is taking place, as it is in the news today: the inquiry into the 2018 Novichok poisoning in Salisbury of Dawn Sturgess, chaired by Lord Hughes of Ombersley. The Government will naturally be considering the harm and damage that that caused, because the actions of a hostile state led to the most atrocious and appalling deaths of innocent

[Priti Patel]

people in our country. It reminds us all that incidents come in all shapes and guises, and that we need to find better ways to protect the public and put public safety first.

I conclude by asking the Minister about support for victims of terrorism. The Home Office has been conducting an internal review into the support package available to victims of terrorism, and considering the introduction of a national day of service and tribute to victims of terrorism. Travis Frain, whom the ministerial team will be familiar with and know of, has been a long-standing and deeply passionate campaigner for that. Ministers prior to the election were looking at this matter as well, so we would welcome even a small update on the Government's thinking regarding support for victims of terrorism and on some of the work that Travis was leading.

I note from the programme motion that the Government are keen for the Bill to complete its Committee stage by mid-November. To ensure it progresses quickly, I hope that Members across both Houses will ask the right questions and work in a practical way with the industry—we have not even touched on the insurance industry but I am sure that will all be covered in Committee—and look at how we can start providing public protection and safety sooner rather than later. I say this in my concluding remarks, particularly recognising that Figen Murray and others are here today watching the debate, because we owe it to them, to their families and to so many who have suffered and who have been waiting in anticipation for this legislation. We owe it to them to enact these measures in a practical way: to give them and the public confidence, as they look to us all to drive this legislation forward with positive outcomes, sooner rather than later.

7.8 pm

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the former Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel). I wish to make it clear at the start of my speech that I very much welcome this Bill, which means so much to so many, in Manchester in particular, for the reasons outlined by the Home Secretary, but also those affected by other terror attacks in our country, including my own community which was attacked on 3 June 2017 at London bridge and Borough market.

The Bill is targeted at protecting people from further incidents, primarily at large entertainment venues. This is very relevant to my constituency. Many former printworks in Rotherhithe are now live music venues; Members may be familiar with the Ministry of Sound at Elephant and Castle; and of course many will also be aware of the Young Vic. They could all be brought into the scope, and there are thousands of other smaller hospitality venues that could also be brought into scope for different levels of requirements under this legislation.

As has already been pointed out, we are at substantial risk of further attack, and the people whose motives are to attack us and our way of life sadly choose areas where there are multiple innocent civilians and there is likely to be an international impact, which makes constituencies and communities such as mine more vulnerable, because we have one of London's busiest train stations. We have part of a world heritage site at Tower bridge. We have millions of visitors at Tate Modern and the Globe theatre, and the Shard itself, which are all sadly targets for those who seek to disrupt or destroy our way of life. I need this Bill to be effective to ensure that my constituents can go about their business and way of life routinely, with minimal fear.

My community did receive a visit from the then Prime Minister Theresa May after the attack in 2017, which was welcome, but the level of support from former Governments was not sufficient. The strength to rebuild the community and the footfall at Borough market and more widely came from the local community, and our community is still indebted to the former dean of Southwark cathedral, Andrew Nunn—now retired—who led and shaped some of the work with his team. There was also the work of the Borough market trust and others, from individual traders who operate as very small businesses right through to large restaurants and traders across London. Many other local businesses played their part, including Barclays bank on Borough High Street, which provided facilities for those locked out of their own premises. News UK, which does not often get praise from this party, provided a generous voucher scheme for hundreds of its employees to ensure that the market was receiving more business sooner, for which traders were incredibly grateful.

I am almost apologetic in raising this matter, because it sounds niche, but one issue that concerns me is the security barriers and the bollards. Seven years on, there have been many issues in trying to ensure sufficient external protection for venues. That comes back to the nature of the attacks we see. Manchester was very different from London bridge and Borough market. Many of the more recent terror attacks we have seen have involved vehicles and knives and blades. Vehicle protections are an issue for many venues that will be covered by the legislation, but they will not be able to act alone in installing protective measures. Clauses 11 and 12 of the previous draft Bill required risk assessments but did not confer sufficient requirements on all agencies involved with responsibility for preparedness to prevent an attack. That is my reading, and I hope that Ministers will address that as the Bill goes forward.

The dispute resolution system set out in clauses 18 to 20 of that document cover use of a premises and venue, but not shared spaces or communal areas. For example, in Southwark we have the entrances and exits from Transport for London roads, Southwark Council roads and communal shared space partly owned by the Borough market trust. Where there is a mixture of owners and responsibilities, there needs to be a clearer means of delivering the change required to make the legislation effective. That needs to be looked at. Do the Government need to work with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to improve the planning process so that where measures are identified, perhaps in a risk assessment as in clauses 11 and 12 of the previous draft Bill, there could be a fast-track process for getting them implemented through planning? There are other plans for this Government to improve the planning system, and that would be a sensible measure to take forward.

Then we have the measure on reviewing preparedness. I was grateful to Pool Reinsurance, which was helpful after the attack in talking through the changes that the

Government made to terror insurance, which I supported at the time. One of the issues it raised was whether there was sufficient coverage. It seems reasonable additionally to require those with duties under the provisions as set out in clauses 11 and 12 of the previous draft Bill to have terror insurance. That insurance could be integral to protections and preparedness, and a means of drawing down on insurance systems could be written into the Bill.

When it comes to security measures, I do not think that the largesse, generosity or imagination of an individual firm should determine whether they will allow venues to draw down on their insurance. There needs to be a minimum requirement. To give a practical example, when lots of Henry Moore pieces were being stolen across London and elsewhere and melted down, Southwark council said, "We had better get rid of ours", but actually, we worked instead with the insurer to build some protective measures, such as a plinth alarm, deep planters with concrete bases and CCTV. Those were all paid for by the insurer, rather than targeted at the residents who have this amazing piece in their backyard. Again, this should not be about the imagination of an individual insurer. Perhaps training could be provided by Pool Reinsurance or another actor, or covered by them. Pool Reinsurance could provide an annual review of preparedness. The number of venues with protection could be reported back to Parliament or put in the public domain at no cost to the Home Office, because Pool Re provides something along similar lines elsewhere. I hope Ministers will examine that.

The former Home Secretary also mentioned local authorities and licensing. I agree that the previous Government loaded additional responsibilities with no new resources on to many councils, including my own, with no recourse to public funds being a very significant one. This is another area where I have a concern—I think the Government's intent is clear, but can full cost recovery be available for local authorities that are having to assess? Some authorities, such as mine, will have more responsibility in delivering that, and local taxpayers should not bear the cost of providing protective measures to defend everyone who visits those venues. It should be a matter of full cost recovery. I hope that that will be made clearer in the Bill.

That being said, I support this legislation. I hope the issues I have briefly referenced will be addressed as the legislation progresses. We all come here to make a difference. This legislation will not just make a difference, but save lives, and it will weaken the chances of those who seek to attack us and undermine our way of life. I am glad it is being welcomed by everyone across the House today.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. You must bob if you wish to contribute. I call Rachel Gilmour to make her maiden speech.

7.17 pm

Rachel Gilmour (Tiverton and Minehead) (LD): Thank you for calling me to make my maiden speech, Madam Deputy Speaker. Before I do, may I commend Figen Murray and her family and friends for the excellent campaign they have continued, completely selflessly? I am sure it will save the lives of hundreds, if not thousands, of people. They are a great example to us all.

I confess to being unusually nervous—as indeed I should be—as I address my honourable colleagues across the House for the first time as the first Member of Parliament for Tiverton and Minehead. I would like to begin by thanking the two previous MPs for Tiverton and Minehead. My fellow Liberal Democrat, my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton and Sidmouth (Richard Foord), has happily been returned by his constituents as their MP, where he will continue to be a hard-working local champion. I am also grateful for the 23 years of service that my predecessor in Bridgwater and West Somerset, Ian Liddell-Grainger, in his own inimitable style, gave to my constituents in that part of my constituency. He is a doting grandfather, who will now have more time to spend with his grandchildren. I also want to thank Rebecca Pow, the former Member for Taunton Deane, who is a prolific gardener—vegetables are a particular favourite, I understand—and whose constituency encompassed some of the villages and towns now in Tiverton and Minehead, as well as the constituency of Taunton and Wellington.

As a new Member of Parliament, this place, even though it bears a resemblance to my alma mater, is a difficult and different environment to master. I know that I speak for all new Members when I thank all members of staff of the parliamentary estate, from Doorkeepers to police officers to catering and cleaning staff. I thank them all for their warm welcome, and for their tolerance and patience with the numerous questions they answer with humour and understanding. Thank you all.

Since September last year, my team, known as "Team Terrific and The Stalwarts", have knocked on nearly 31,000 doors, delivered hundreds of thousands of leaflets, letters and surveys, and spoken to over 12,000 residents. I know what matters to the people of Tiverton and Minehead because I have asked them.

I was raised in Somerset and have spent most of my adult life in Devon, from Holcombe Rogus via Hemyock to Bampton in the Tiverton and Minehead constituency. My husband and I chose to raise our family in Devon. In fact, all four of our children are born Devonians. Our eldest sons, Henry and Tom, were born in the old hospital in Tiverton. It is my sincere intention to support the NHS and social care systems in Tiverton and Minehead by keeping our local hospitals open in Minehead, Tiverton and Williton, and by supporting all our GP surgeries.

Ours is a very rural area and the need to keep local hospitals open is especially pressing given limited transport links and a higher-than-average elderly population. As mine is a rural and often disconnected constituency, transport improvements are one of my key priorities. With that at the forefront of my mind, I have convened a meeting with Peninsula Transport, the body that oversees all public transport in Devon and Somerset. Along with my transport adviser, David Northey, who has a deep history in this area as a former head of strategic planning at Great Western Railway, I have been hard at work for my constituents, putting together a transport plan and highlighting the challenges and solutions for rail and bus services across Tiverton and Minehead.

[Rachel Gilmour]

Minehead train station desperately needs linking to the main line at Taunton; I know that my hon. Friend and neighbour the Member for Taunton and Wellington (Mr Amos) would agree. We need also to secure the No. 25 and No. 28 bus services in the north of the constituency and look carefully at rural bus routes to service the villages of Exmoor, such as Exford, Withypool and Winsford, along with local towns, particularly Wiveliscombe. Those will be key parts of that new plan for the local area.

Poor public transport provision creates a particular barrier to schoolchildren and students in Tiverton and Minehead. Some have no bus to take them to school, no way to walk to school or no way to cycle to get there. Other than the small A-level provision at West Somerset college, there is no—I repeat, no—sixth-form provision in my constituency. Students have to travel to Exeter, Taunton or Bridgwater if they wish to pursue their studies. That limits their aspirations and ability to succeed. Shockingly, West Somerset ranks 324th out of 324 on the social mobility index, and such transport problems explain some of why that is.

However, teachers and heads of primary schools across the constituency and of secondary schools in Tiverton, Minehead, Williton and Uffculme do not lack aspiration for their pupils. They are working daily to improve access to better education. That includes campaigning to have facilities worthy of 21st-century educational standards.

The first letter I wrote, within days of getting elected on 5 July, was to our new Secretary of State for Education, asking for a meeting to discuss the dire state of Tiverton high school. Nearly 25 years ago—I repeat, 25 years ago—Tiverton high school was promised a new build. The previous Labour Government put it on their priority list. The last Conservative Government sat on their hands and did nothing. The school is deemed by the Environment Agency to be a "danger of death" from flooding. There is asbestos in the sports hall, and children are being taught in dining and communal areas. It has capacity for 1,300 pupils but needs capacity for 1,800. Given the pledges made by our new Prime Minister and his commitment to schools, I know that I will get a fair hearing from the Secretary of State for Education. I hope that she will agree to meet a delegation of staff, parents and children from Tiverton high school in the near future.

Community plays a crucial role in Tiverton and Minehead. There are wonderful organisations providing support and help, from community food banks to support groups for carers, to Rotary clubs, conservation groups and the environmental networks with which I work to monitor and prevent the pollution in our rivers and on our beaches. Those organisations all make Tiverton and Minehead the wonderful, beautiful, special part of the UK that it is. When they meet to discuss important community issues, the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill will ensure that they are safe. However, my party has previously had concerns about the impact on smaller-scale venues; I am delighted to hear today that the approach is more light touch than expected.

As a former director of the National Farmers Union, I have a deep passion for and understanding of my local farming community, who are spread across the constituency and facing harder challenges than they have for generations. That is thanks to the disastrous Brexit deal foisted upon them by the previous Conservative Government. In the face of climate change, increased rainfall, drier summers and the rising cost of energy, they battle on. To them I say, "I will always back my farming community. Let's work together to secure a future for farming across Exmoor, West Somerset and mid-Devon. Come to my monthly farmers' surgeries so that I can represent my farming community to the very best of my abilities."

Becoming an MP has been my ambition since I was 17, when I joined the Liberal party at school. It has taken me four attempts over 43 years of campaigning, but now that dream has become a reality. Without my family, it would have been impossible. As a professional woman, I have broken several glass ceilings thanks to my inspirational grandmothers, Mabel and Jesse, who offered wise counsel; to Miss Whaite, now Mrs Michael Limb, my Latin teacher, who kept me sane at boarding school; and especially to my mother, who has always believed in me. Mummy, thank you—I love you. I am so proud to have her here today with my husband and our eldest son in the Gallery, so that she can see this moment.

Yesterday I celebrated my three-score-years birthday; I say to my Conservative colleagues, whose maths skills in government were found somewhat wanting, that that is 60. I share my birthday with Margaret Hilda Thatcher, who must be one of the best recruiting agents for the Liberal and Labour parties. I am proud that I share nothing with her other than a birthday. My passion for politics flows from my compassion for my fellow human beings—whoever and wherever they are, irrespective of background, race, religion, colour, gender, sexuality or ability.

It is impossible to mention everyone and everything in one's maiden speech, but if there is one thing that I wish my constituents to know it is this: they are my world. I feel humbled and honoured to have been elected to represent Tiverton and Minehead in Parliament. They can help me do my job by coming to my surgeries at Tiverton and Minehead, Wiveliscombe and on Exmoor, by ringing my office and my staff, and by writing us letters and emails. I am at their service.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Fabulous at 60! Mabel, Jesse and your mum will be very proud. Now we have another maiden speech. I call Matt Bishop.

7.27 pm

Matt Bishop (Forest of Dean) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is an honour to follow the maiden speech of the hon. Member for Tiverton and Minehead (Rachel Gilmour) and a privilege to speak to the Chamber today as the new hon. Member for Forest of Dean. First, I extend my good wishes to my predecessor, Mark Harper, for his 19 years of service to Forest of Dean. A few years ago, when I was chair of governors at St White's primary school in Cinderford, Mark helped secure funding for a new school building. We worked together to finally get the school what it so badly needed, after 40 years of it crumbling. His help was instrumental during that time, and I appreciate all that he did for us.

I am the second Labour MP and only the third ever MP to represent the Forest of Dean constituency since its recreation in 1997. I agree wholeheartedly with what

both my predecessors, Mark and the great Diana Organ, stated in their maiden speeches: that Forest of Dean really is the most beautiful constituency in the UK. I know that many others have also made that claim over the last year, but how many can boast that their constituency landscapes have graced the screens of iconic shows and films? Puzzlewood, for example, has served as the stunning backdrop for many shows, including "Doctor Who" and even a "Star Wars" movie. That brings the beauty of the forest to the big screen, allowing individuals from all over the world an insight into the place that I call home.

I invite all right hon. and hon. Members to visit the forest, where they will witness not only its natural beauty but a collection of individuals and groups who understand the importance of community. We have inspiring organisations such as the Forest Voluntary Action Forum, which supports many community-led projects, shaped with and for local people, and the Wilderness Centre, which provides exceptional day and residential visits for schools from the primary, secondary and independent sectors.

That community spirit is also evident through the actions of individuals. Just a few weeks ago, we experienced some localised flooding after the intense rainfall; as the constituency is rural, many areas, roads and houses became almost impossible to reach. During the floods, I saw local farmers in places such as Westbury-on-Severn and Sedbury coming to people's rescue without hesitation, picking people up in their tractors and getting them home safely. I might have been one of the lucky ones who received that help. It is this spirit of solidarity that inspired me to move to the forest 17 years ago—the place where my wife grew up, and the place where we chose to raise our children, surrounded by a community full of kind-hearted individuals.

However, certain issues persist that require urgent attention. Many residents experience isolation because of inadequate public transport and a lack of community centres. There is a shortage of bus services, with limited routes and poorly maintained roads. With only 5% of the constituency in built-up areas, substantially improving public transport is vital for relationships to thrive and to combat the isolation that many residents feel. I welcome my constituents' campaigns to turn the site of the former Dilke Memorial hospital into a mental health and wellbeing centre. Campaigning for a dedicated space within the community highlights the drive and determination of my constituents to ensure that no one is left behind.

Finally, throughout my career in public service I have been exposed to the great challenges in our society, and I appreciate the vital role that national Government, local councils, and the community play in addressing those issues. I served for many years as a police officer, including four years here in London for the Metropolitan police. On 7 July 2005, I was one of the first officers on the scene at the Tavistock Square bus bombing, where I saw at first hand the horror, destruction and chaos caused by such despicable acts of terror. I was also struck by the many admirable examples of courage and determination demonstrated by the emergency services, injured victims and members of the public. Perhaps now it is only right that we take a second to remember and pay tribute to all those who lost their lives or were injured during the attacks on our country on 7 July 2005. [Hon. Members: "Hear, hear."]

My time as a police officer has shown me the importance of ensuring that our residents feel safe, and I am acutely aware that the security of our communities, locally and nationally, must be a priority for the Government. That is why I chose this debate to make my maiden speech. I wholeheartedly support Martyn's law, and I am pleased to see it implemented so early in this Labour Government.

Education is another particularly prominent issue in my constituency. As a former governor in multiple schools and as a local councillor, I have seen how national policy directly affects our local education system, which has long suffered as a result of funding decisions made over the past 14 years. During a recent visit to Forest high school in Cinderford, I was alarmed by the state of the school buildings, which were crumbling before my eyes. It is no exaggeration to say that classrooms were flooded, ceilings were collapsing, and the flooring was falling to pieces. We can have the best teachers in the world, but without a basic safe building, how can they provide the education that they want to provide? Our children deserve better, and they deserve better now. They deserve schools that inspire learning and growth, not schools that are collapsing. In recent years, the state of our schools has been forgotten. I, along with the new Labour Government, will not allow this to continue.

There is a song about the Forest of Dean which my constituents will know, called "The Land Between Two Rivers", written by a constituent, Dick Brice.

Adam Jogee (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): Sing it!

Matt Bishop: Later. The song pretty much sums up our constituency. For too long those rivers, the Wye and Severn, have suffered from pollution and sewage issues. The communities in Newnham on Severn, Lydbrook, Lydney and many more villages and towns have rallied to demand action from the Government, and I am committed to bringing their voices to Parliament to reinvigorate the ecosystem and protect our wildlife.

Finally, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am proud to stand before you as a representative of the people of the Forest of Dean. This position is a responsibility I take seriously, and I aim to serve with the same dedication and spirit of co-operation that I observe in our community.

7.34 pm

Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst (Solihull West and Shirley) (Con): I join others in the House in paying tribute to Figen Murray and her fellow campaigners, who have been tireless advocates for positive change. I also congratulate two new Members on their maiden speeches. I can tell the hon. Member for Tiverton and Minehead (Rachel Gilmour) that we could all do with a team of terrific stalwarts. I am sure that Mabel and Jesse will both be looking down, incredibly proud of her comments. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Matt Bishop) for his service as a police officer and the courage that he showed in carrying out his duties.

There can be no doubt in anyone's mind about the importance of today's debate. The horrific events that took place at Manchester Arena are forever etched in our collective memory. My thoughts are with all those affected by those and other terrorist attacks that we have sadly witnessed in recent years. When we are

[Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst]

shaken by such egregious events, that reinforces the fact that the first responsibility of any Government, and of all of us on the green Benches, is the protection and safety of our citizens. It is incumbent on us to take action to prevent these tragic moments in history from repeating themselves. That is why I believe that the Bill is necessary to bring peace of mind and reassurance, and to enable us to stand up to those who seek to harm us and tear our communities apart.

Notwithstanding my overarching support for the Bill, I note the significant requirements it places on the events, entertainment, and hospitality industries. Many in these industries are still recovering from the legacy of the pandemic. The financial requirements for compliance with the Bill add further pressures. I therefore invite the Minister to consider offering financial and logistical support, especially to smaller organisations that struggle to predict footfall. That is particularly pertinent to those premises that experience seasonal peaks and troughs over the course of the year. As the Bill currently stands, those local establishments will still fall under qualifying premises, as defined in clause 2(2)(c), and will be required to put in extra measures at personal cost.

Terrorist attacks evolve at a rapid pace—much faster, as we have seen recently, than the time it takes for legislation to pass through the House. I therefore ask the Minister, first, what consideration has been given to accommodating that? Secondly, will there be regular reviews of the threats and countermeasures through the governing body? Finally, in its current state, the Bill does not accommodate organisations run by volunteers and temporary staff. Large places of worship and sporting venues rely on the good will of volunteers and paid agency staff at peak times. I therefore ask the Minister to engage with such organisations, to find a training arrangement that suits their capabilities as well as meeting the threshold of safety and security sought in the Bill. Those queries aside, I welcome the introduction of the Bill.

7.37 pm

Sonia Kumar (Dudley) (Lab): First, I thank Figen Murray for her tireless campaigning. I wish to speak in favour of the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill, which represents a vital step forward in our collective responsibility to keep people safe.

The tragic events in Manchester reminded us all too clearly of the need for practical measures to safeguard our public spaces and of our vulnerabilities. The Bill provides a framework to ensure that venues and businesses take appropriate steps to protect the public from the threat of terrorism, and I fully support its aims. The need for the Bill is clear. Terrorism remains a real and persistent threat, and we have seen in Manchester, Birmingham and London that terrorism and terrorists are blind to the loss of human life. Public venues are often the target of those who seek to harm us. The Bill will ensure that public spaces are better equipped to manage potential risk, reducing the likelihood of attacks and mitigating their impact if they do occur. We have a duty to protect our constituents, whether they are attending a religious service, a wedding or a concert.

About 2,000 businesses in Dudley could be affected by the legislation, based on VAT and PAYE registrations. It is our responsibility to ensure that those places are not only secure but supported in taking the necessary steps to keep their doors open and their customers safe. The Bill places a duty on venues and businesses to assess their risk and take reasonable steps to mitigate them. It is not a one-size-fits-all approach: the security measures will be proportionate to the size and type of venue. Larger venues such as stadiums will need to implement more comprehensive protections, while smaller ones can adopt simpler measures—I agree with that.

By providing clear guidance and support, the Bill will contribute to the collective safety of our communities. That said, we must be mindful of the challenges that it may pose, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises, charities and places of worship. In Dudley, such institutions are the backbone of the community, providing support and a safe space for people to gather. Many of them are concerned about the potential costs and operational demands that the Bill may bring. I welcome the Government's commitment to a risk-based approach to ensure that smaller organisations are not required to implement the same level of security as larger ones, and I am encouraged by the idea of providing tailored guidance and practical support. I hope that that will be further developed as the Bill progresses.

The Bill is an important and necessary step in protecting our communities from the threat of terrorism. It strikes the right balance between providing security and ensuring that the measures are practical and appropriate. I look forward to working with colleagues in the House and with the Government to ensure that the Bill delivers to our communities the safety and security that they so desperately deserve, and provides the necessary steps for those who have been affected.

7.41 pm

Ben Maguire (North Cornwall) (LD): We have heard from many Members who have huge venues in their constituencies, including the hon. Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Neil Coyle), who mentioned Ministry of Sound. I take this opportunity to add a voice for rural venues such as those in my constituency.

Clearly, the Bill is necessary to protect the safety of the millions across the country who enjoy events. The legislation needs extremely careful planning and scrutiny to ensure that small venues are not put at risk by additional red tape. In rural constituencies such as North Cornwall, small to medium events are truly the lifeblood that brings together far-flung communities, and have been for generations. Under clause 4, thousands of community and volunteer-run venues will be designated responsible for any failures and are liable to face strict penalties.

I am invited to, and often visit, small venues around Cornwall, and I see at first hand the joy, spirit and positivity that they inject into their surrounding communities.

Torcuil Crichton (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab): I am glad that the hon. Member mentions rural communities, because the stain of terror reaches across the United Kingdom. One of the victims of the Ariana Grande attack was Eilidh MacLeod, a 14-year-old schoolgirl from the isle of Barra, whose mother, like many other parents in hearing the report, felt the ground shake and heard the blast that took the lives of Eilidh and 22 others.

The response in Barra has been to set up a musical trust in Eilidh's name to allow other young people to reach their potential. That response, as well as that of the Murray family in their tremendous campaign, shows that terrorism will not divide us, and our collective response here shows that although it may cast a shadow on the hearts and lives of those left behind, it will not diminish us.

Ben Maguire: I completely agree that terrorism should never divide us—what an excellent phrase.

I fear that if we are not realistic and proportionate with the details of the Bill, cherished and beloved venues in my constituency, such the Hayward cider farm, the Royal Cornwall show, countless pubs—including the St Mabyn Inn, and the Golden Lion in Port Isaac—and the BEAT in Bodmin, as well as community centres, could take a hit, especially in the summer, when thousands enjoy the outdoors. Venues with lots of outdoor space can easily reach the 200-capacity threshold. Of course, the safety and security of event-goers should always be kept at the top of our priorities when planning large-scale events, but we must not look overlook the unrealistic necessity for thousands of smaller venues to comply with strict restrictions, facing fines in the thousands of pounds for non-compliance.

Clause 13 gives the SIA the power to issue compliance notices if it has reasonable grounds to suspect that a regulation has been contravened.

Vikki Slade (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): Does my hon. Friend agree that, as well as training, there is a need to consider the regulation around the SIA? Over the past five years the SIA has granted licences to a staggering 95,000 door supervisors who have not been resident in the UK for five years, so we cannot even know their history or criminal records. Does he agree that personnel working in that field not only need to be well trained, but must have the confidence of the public?

Ben Maguire: I wholeheartedly agree with my hon. Friend.

I hope that small venues are given the opportunity to remedy contraventions before any notice is issued. Likewise, clause 14 provides for restriction notices on non-compliant venues. The Secretary of State said in her remarks that penalties will be issued only to repeat offenders. On that point, I hope that there will be mechanisms and training to prevent such repeat offences.

I also have concerns about the penalties set out in clause 18, which provides for fines of up to £10,000 on standard duty premises. As I have said, that could finish off some of our smaller venues if they do not receive proper training or the opportunity to remedy such a contravention. On the protection of smaller venues, I am concerned about the provision that allows the Home Secretary to drop the capacity threshold from 200 to 100. The circumstances in which that can be done should be tightly defined.

The way a venue's capacity is defined will also need careful thought. A community hall might be able to take 200 people in theory, but in practice that might be extremely rare. I am pleased to see that the capacity figure has been increased to 200 from the initial 100, which I welcome, and I will watch the progress of that provision keenly in Committee to ensure that it remains. Provided that those protections are put in place, the Liberal Democrats will of course support this crucial Bill. Safety and security must always be paramount.

I will end my remarks with a quote from Brendan Cox, the husband of the late Jo Cox MP and founder of Survivors Against Terror:

> "Survivors of terror attacks aren't looking for sympathy. They are looking for change that makes it less likely that others will endure what they have."

I am pleased to support the Bill and to see support for it across the House.

7.48 pm

Chris Murray (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): As so many have done, I begin by paying tribute to Figen Murray and the campaigners for Martyn's law. Responding to such tragedy by trying to make the world a better place deserves our highest admiration.

I am pleased that the Government have introduced this important legislation so quickly in the parliamentary Session. The threat that the country faces is "substantial." That means that it is complex, enduring and evolving, so it is right that in response we adapt and update the legislation we use to prevent and deal with terror. The terror threat consistently changes. We used to worry about attacks on national infrastructure or iconic sites; now we worry about them at concerts and in bars. That is why it is critical that we strengthen security at public events.

I am a representative of Edinburgh, a city known for putting on numerous events, especially in August. Its festival is the third biggest ticketed event in the world. I spoke to Edinburgh city council in advance of this debate, which told me that it was hugely supportive of this legislation, which will help not only the council but all the venues and premises in the city to prepare for a terrorist attack. Edinburgh offers itself as a pilot site, if the Home Office is interested in testing how the legislation will work in practice.

Combating the evolving terrorist threat means adapting and updating, which the Bill does. It also means recognising that combating terrorism requires a multi-pronged approach—one of the most important components of the Bill. It includes measures to prevent a terror attack and put obstacles in the way of terrorists, but what is new and important is that it provides for premises to develop the way in which they will handle an attack once it has begun. That is critical. Getting venues to think, prepare and develop protocols before an event and before the emergency services arrive on the scene is how to minimise casualties and save lives. That is an important component of our national defences against terror.

On the specific point about the use of the SIA as a regulator, I welcome that, and I think it is the appropriate place for regulation.

Amanda Martin (Portsmouth North) (Lab): I praise the Government for bringing Martyn's law before the House so swiftly, and I echo the words of campaigners in the memory of Martyn and all those killed in terrorist attacks in our country. I also give thanks to the security services. Given the planned introduction of the Bill and the recent announcement that the SIA will be the regulator,

[Amanda Martin]

many businesses in the security industry, such as the brilliant Vespasian in Portsmouth North, have asked whether the Minister will review the current SIA's core legislation and powers to support the industry, in order to implement the law and its invaluable work on our frontline to counter terrorism and save lives.

Chris Murray: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Discussions are to be held about the role of the SIA as it adapts to the changes.

The SIA is an appropriate body to regulate this legislation, but in 15 long years of dealing with the Home Office and its bodies and authorities, I have found that often these organisations are overstretched and struggle with the diversity of organisations that they have to deal with in the UK. The former Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel), said that there is no point in legislating if we are unable to operationalise. I implore the Minister to look into the SIA's funding and resources, to ensure that this legislation has the desired effect.

National security is a reserved matter, but some aspects of the Bill touch on devolved issues, such as fire services, justice and policing. I hope that the Home Office will work constructively with the Scottish Government and other devolved Administrations to ensure that the implementation is as smooth as possible across the nations of the United Kingdom. I strongly support the Bill. I am very pleased to see it come so swiftly to Parliament, and I look forward to the impact it will have in the communities that want it.

7.53 pm

Jim Allister (North Antrim) (TUV): I support Martyn's law without reservation. It is important that we salute the campaigning and the courage of Martyn's family, and it is appropriate that colloquially the Bill is named Martyn's law. What happened in Manchester was shocking and chills us all to the core. It is reflective of so many brutal, wicked acts of terrorism that have been experienced right across this nation, not least in my own part of the United Kingdom.

Here we are today properly debating, under the rules of due process and doing things in order, rules and laws to help us deal with terrorism. But we are conscious that terrorists play by no rules: they do not live within the confines of regulation, restraint or anything that would meet the standards of human rights—quite the reverse. To that extent, society as a whole struggles on occasion to deal with the excesses of terrorism, because of its determination to live within the rule of law. That is all the more reason why we need to do everything we can, even in the small things.

In the main, this Bill is about the small things of dealing with terrorism, to try to put ourselves in the best possible position to deal with the potential threat of terrorism that, sadly, exists across this nation. In doing that, we have to be realistic that dotting the i's and crossing the t's is good and necessary, but fundamentally terrorism will be defeated across this nation only when there is no room for it; when it meets the full rigour of the law and that puts it out of business. That is the fundamental reality.

I want to make a few comments about some of the particulars of the Bill. I have some concerns about its potential overreach. The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Ben Maguire) touched on some of them. Small schools and churches will now be subject to further regulatory requirements. I chair the board of governors of a small country school. We already have to have policies on fire safety, health and safety, and dealing with emergencies. That is all good and necessary, but I would like the Minister to explain what practical additions will be put upon small rural schools and their boards of governors. What will they have to provide that they are not already providing in their emergency, fire safety, and health and safety policies? Boards of governors in particular will want to know that, because they operate within very constrained budgets. In the school that I am involved with, every penny is accounted for and needed for fundamental provision.

I am concerned that, in its global approach, the Bill might put unbearable bureaucratic and financial burdens on very small users. The impact assessment says that the majority of the cost will fall upon the businesses that have to operate within it. That also means small schools, churches, community organisations and all the rest of it. That concerns me.

Earlier an hon. Member asked what the Bill will do to deal with previously planted devices, which are often deployed by terrorists. It is hard to see the impact, without counter-terrorist measures such as x-raying. I make that point mindful that just this weekend we marked the 40th anniversary of the bombing of the Grand hotel in Brighton, where one of the most audacious terrorist attacks, which aimed to kill the Cabinet of the United Kingdom, was perfected by the planting of a bomb in that hotel weeks before. We need to consider what would help to deal with that kind of situation. That is why I am a little bit concerned that the Home Secretary said there would be no measures in the Bill to require physical steps to be taken. If a hotel, leisure centre or large arena has a deficiency in its CCTV coverage that is observable by the SIA or whoever else—as there was in Manchester, where the terrorists were cute enough to pick out the CCTV blind spots—is it not sensible, if we are going to put in place protective measures, that physical measures could and should be included, such as identifying gaps in CCTV coverage, so that in the event of an outrage there is at least a better prospect of bringing the perpetrators to justice? That might also act as a deterrent. In fighting terrorism, deterrence is very often as important as anything else. It is our duty to ensure that that is so.

I will just touch on a couple of other points in the Bill. I note that clause 31, on civil liability, states:

"nothing in this Part confers a right of action in any civil proceedings in respect of any contravention of a requirement imposed on any person by or under this Part."

That causes me to question. Most or all our buildings are covered by the occupiers' liability legislation, which is premised on the duty of care of the occupier to their visitors. How can we say, in clause 31, that if we are going to impose obligations in respect of taking steps to protect against the potential of terrorist attack and those steps are not taken, that will not create the basis for civil action? Surely that is an indicator and a contributor to the question of whether or not the duty of care was fulfilled to the visitor. It puzzles me why clause 31 is in those terms.

The final thing I wanted to say relates to the SIA. We are giving a lot of powers to an organisation which, frankly, has not always covered itself in glory. I speak of my own part of the United Kingdom, where the SIA has issued licences to some dubious characters. It is not beyond the wit of terrorists—some of us have seen this—to set themselves up as so-called security firms and apply for licences. Do not ever fall into the trap of thinking that terrorists act by the rules we act by and that they would not do that. Yes, they would.

The SIA has been found wanting. In Northern Ireland, we recently had a case of gross overreach by the SIA, where it brought a prosecution that the judge said had to be stopped and should never have been brought. The SIA spent £200,000 and the case involved illegal searches of property, so it is not a body that is a ready recipient for extra powers. I worry that we will overburden it, if it is to do the job in the way that it needs to be done. I therefore say to the Minister that maybe the SIA is not the right regulatory body, because it already has a huge burden of work and it has not always been successful in what it does.

We want to that we—the elected representatives of this House who want to protect our constituents from the most hideous things, namely terrorist attacks—do all we reasonably can, and that means getting this legislation right.

8.5 pm

Luke Myer (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): I rise to welcome the Bill and the cross-party support for it that we have seen in this debate. Seven years ago, I was in the education sector and I worked with a group of trainee paramedics. Those trainee paramedics were deployed on that night in Manchester to the scene of the bombing. They were students, and they ran into the danger and into scenes that are scarcely seen outside battlefields. The support they needed is the reason I support the Bill. I think it is right thing to do. I commend the campaigning by Martyn's family and by all others who have campaigned for justice for victims of terror. This is the right Bill, because its provisions are common sense. The tiered approach is the right one to ensure that an undue burden is not placed on small businesses and that the legal duty on providers is a reasonable measure.

There was another group of students from that university who, sadly, were affected by terror that same year, just weeks before. They were referred to earlier by the former Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel). One is a friend of mine, Travis Frain, who I know Members across the House will be familiar with. He has been campaigning passionately for victims of terror for years, since his experience in that incident. He carried out a survey of over 300 victims of terror, and found that 76% of victims were either unable to access psychological treatment, or rated it to be poor or abysmal. That is unacceptable. That is why Travis has been calling for guarantees on minimum standards for access to psychological treatment and physiotherapy, as well as legal and financial assistance for victims of terror. He has also been calling, as the right hon. Lady referred to, for the publication of the review that was carried internally within the Home Office, so that campaigners can campaign on those recommendations and ensure they are put into action.

We know further actions are needed, but the Bill is an important first step to move towards justice for the victims. It is a fitting tribute to the victims, the families and all those who ran towards the danger.

8.8 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. I thank the Secretary of State for her introduction and for setting the scene so well with passion, delivery and understanding. As I said earlier, there is no one in the Chamber who could oppose the Bill. There is the question of whether it goes far enough—Members have indicated some issues may need to be addressed further down the line—but that is for the future. I thank all right hon. and hon. Members for their speeches. Martyn's law is aptly named after one of those who tragically died in the carnage of the attack on children and young people in the Manchester bombing. I do not think there is anyone who has not shed a tear over that. It lingers long.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak about this issue. As many Members will know, the people of Northern Ireland have an unfortunate history of terrorism which greatly influenced the way in which we lived our lives for many years, as we heard from the hon. Member for North Antrim (Jim Allister). Those are scars that we live with and will live with for all our days, for they will never go away. We used to check under our cars. I served as a part-time soldier for some 14 and a half years, and checkpoints manned by soldiers or officers in the Royal Ulster Constabulary were the norm as they attempted to protect life and prevent acts of terror. We became conditioned to ensuring that at any event, people had half an eye on the possibility of terrorist attacks.

I am pleased to see the Minister in his place, because he and I have been friends in the House for a long time, and I know that he brings to the House personal knowledge based on his own gallant service. We appreciate it very much, and I am putting that on the record for *Hansard*.

I want to give a couple of examples of what was referred to by the hon. Member for North Antrim. One is the indiscriminate shooting at a church hall in Darkley, during which IRA gunmen murdered three elders welcoming their 70-strong congregation of men, women and children with no affiliation to any organisations, and, indeed, with no other qualification other than to be Protestant. The gunmen came into the hall shooting, and stopped only when, after the pastor cried out, the gun jammed; and the gunman ran out to continue spraying the church with bullets from the outside with his semi-automatic rifle. The question that I pose here tonight is this: what will be done to ensure that churches—and schools, which the hon. Member also mentioned—receive the protection that they need?

After the atrocity of the Darkley murders, every church that I knew of in Northern Ireland ensured that there were men at the door and an evacuation plan for crèches and children's church facilities in particular. Indeed, child protection training took place automatically after that event of many years ago, and I know that in that church, and in other faith buildings, evacuation procedures are standard to this day. Those who volunteer in the crèches are given routes to send children to

[Jim Shannon]

freedom should something go wrong. This is our lived experience in Northern Ireland, owing to the evil men who pushed an evil agenda and destroyed the innocence of a nation—but not its spirit.

No one wants these horrors to be a reality, but in Northern Ireland they have been. Our restaurants have a history of being targeted. In the La Mon hotel, which used to be in my constituency, a napalm-type bomb not only took the lives of 12 members of the Collie Club who were having dinner there, but horrifically burned and injured a further 30 people. One of them was Billy McDowell, who died about four weeks ago. Since that time, our hotels have had procedures in place to deal with that dreaded warning phone call.

We have had horrific experiences. We do not like to boast about them, and I am not boasting now. We did things voluntarily because they were the right things to do, and I think that the Bill brings us closer to doing the same things here. The people of Northern Ireland dealt with these horrors and the evil nature that drives them. The police force was so specialised that former RUC officers still train police forces around the world, including in the Balkans, Africa, and countries in the middle and far east. Our expertise is one that I wish with all my heart we did not possess, but it was once rooted so deeply in our minds that someone leaving a shopping bag behind was a cause for the evacuation of shopping centres. That is why I believe that although we cannot live in a lockdown mode, such basic considerations must be standard. The Police Service of Northern Ireland have expertise, knowledge and skills that are transferable, and they should and must be part of the Bill.

I hope that the Minister, who I know will respond to the debate in a positive and helpful fashion because he always does, will tell us the things that we need to hear about the Bill, and about the goals for which the Government are aiming. Let me say this to him, very gently. The police must always be the last word in security. It cannot be individuals and it cannot be organisations; it must always be the police. We must ensure that young kids like my granddaughters, who have no experience of terrorism—and that is something for which I thank God—are kept safe by those who understand that no matter how unlikely it is for an act of terrorism to be perpetrated against kids at a concert, such as those in Manchester, it is a possibility. I have six grandchildren. The two eldest girls, Katie and Mia, do not know enough to view bags suspiciously, or to ask, "Is there something unusual about that?" I know that others have said this, and I say it now very respectfully. Not everyone sees the dangers; not everyone sees what is suspicious. Children are innocent, as they should be, and they should be able to have innocent lives.

We need to find a better way forward. The people in charge of that facility in Manchester need to be aware, for the sake of the children. That is second nature in Northern Ireland, but it must also be in the mindset of people throughout the United Kingdom, which is why I support the reasonable application of the obligations that we are discussing. I have no desire to raise the prices of tickets for events, meals in a large restaurant or beds in a resort and spa, but the basic assumption that such things could happen, and answering the basic questions about what we can we do if it does and who will know what to do, are the bare minimum at this stage.

Let me ask the Minister a few questions. They are intended, as always, to be constructive, and to help the conversation and the building of this legislation. What help and support will be offered to businesses to help them come to terms with what is reasonably expected, and what further support will there be in respect of a cost-effective way of meeting obligations? That, by the way, applies equally to churches and schools. We need to ensure that businesses are not deterred from expanding because they cannot meet costs. Will the Minister outline how we can be a part of the conversation about the introduction of procedures to keep people safe?

Terror is something that I wish was a thing of the past, but the shooting in Omagh in February 2023 of Detective Chief Inspector John Caldwell, who was coaching at his own son's weekly football game, and the atrocity in Southport this summer when three beautiful young children were brutally murdered, are a heartbreaking reminder that evil people are still at work, and we need to do all that we can to stay safe and keep others safe with us. Tonight, through this potential legislation, we are taking a step in the right direction, which I trust will save lives and stop terror attacks.

8.17 pm

Paul Holmes (Hamble Valley) (Con): Let me begin by paying tribute to Figen Murray and the Martyn's law campaign, to Survivors Against Terror, and to all the security partners, businesses, charities, local authorities and victims groups that have informed the Bill and helped to get us where we are today. I also thank the Minister and the Home Secretary for the constructive tone that they have taken in debate, and for their offer to work with us to ensure that the Bill completes its stages rapidly. It is a tragic turn of events that a terrible incident is the catalyst for a change in the law, but I hope that the family of Martyn Hett can take some pride in the legacy that Martyn has left.

We have heard some very good contributions this evening, and in particular two very good maiden speeches, the first of which was made by the hon. Member for Tiverton and Minehead (Rachel Gilmour). It was lovely to see her family in the Gallery—they were obviously very proud of her—and to hear of a number of local priorities on which she will be working on behalf of her constituents. Although she said that she did not have much in common with the Iron Lady, whose birthday was yesterday, I could tell that there was an iron lady within her, and I look forward to hearing her future contributions in this place.

The second maiden speech was made by the hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Matt Bishop). He paid a generous tribute to his predecessor, Mark Harper, who worked hard for the constituency, and told us how hard he would work for his constituents in this place. He challenged a number of Members on whether they could say that a television show had been made about their constituencies, and on which was the most beautiful. Well, I can, because that BBC blockbuster "Howards' Way" was filmed in Hamble Valley. We are particularly proud of that, and the hon. Gentleman should be rightly proud of his constituency.

We have had some other really important contributions to the debate. The hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Mr Rand) spoke as someone representing the locality of the terrorist attack in Manchester—his constituency is in Greater Manchester. He spoke very passionately on behalf of his constituents about the lessons of the inquiry, which were outlined in his speech. I could tell that he cares deeply about his constituency and what happens with this piece of legislation going forward, and I pay tribute to him for his speech.

The hon. Member for Bolton North East (Kirith Entwistle) spoke about the compassion and kindness of the people of Manchester. When Conservatives go to the Tory party conference in Manchester, we are always welcomed very warmly in the bars and by the people of Manchester, despite expectations. We send them our best wishes going forward.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel) rightly paid tribute to Figen Murray and the charities that helped her and her wider campaign secure a change in the law. My right hon. Friend also mentioned the former Security Minister James Brokenshire, to whom I was briefly Parliamentary Private Secretary and who passed away three years ago. She is absolutely right to outline the early work that he did on this change in the law, and we all very much miss him in this place. We also miss Sir David Amess, who was brutally murdered three years ago tomorrow, and we remember Jo Cox in this House as well.

My hon. Friend the Member for Solihull West and Shirley (Dr Shastri-Hurst) rightly outlined some concerns about the Bill's shortcomings, particularly around organisations that have seasonal peaks. I will be interested to hear the Minister outline how some of the challenges for smaller businesses with seasonal peaks can be addressed in this legislation.

Our great country has come under attack far too often, and all Governments have worked tirelessly to protect the United Kingdom. We believe that that is why we must support the legislation in its aim. I am proud of the work that the previous Government, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham, did to bring in Martyn's law. It is a measure of how much work was done by his family and various organisations that both I and the Minister can stand here today to show that this Bill is needed, and that we can broadly support its measures and aims. Once again, I sincerely congratulate the Government on the fast-tracking of this Bill, and I congratulate the Home Secretary on the way in which she opened the debate.

The aim of Martyn's law is to ensure that premises are better prepared for terrorist attacks, to help protect the public. As I have said, we welcome this Bill, but we need to make sure that we find the right balance between public protection and the requirements placed on businesses and community venues. As noted by Neil Sharpley, policy chair of the Federation of Small Businesses, this law will have an administrative impact on small businesses and there will be an additional cost to them. Michael Kill, the CEO of the Night Time Industry Association, said:

> "We must ensure that the balance between heightened security and practical implementation is carefully considered."

The shadow Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr Cleverly), said that although we are supportive of the Bill, we remain concerned about the level of regulation that will be imposed on the venues included in this legislation. The Government's impact assessment outlines that 155,000 small businesses with a capacity between 200 and 799 will have average costs of £330 per year, and that larger venues will have average costs of £5,000 per year, so I would like assurances that the Minister is looking at a range of options to mitigate those costs as much as possible. I would also like assurances about the burdensome costs on smaller venues, charitable venues and religious venues that have that level of capacity, as mentioned by both my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull West and Shirley and my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham.

I want to raise some concerns about clause 4 of the Bill and the "person responsible" element of the legislation. Although I accept that clear lines of accountability are necessary, what important safeguards will be in place for the responsible person in the horrible event that something should tragically go wrong? They could include anonymity, support structures that can be placed around the responsible person, or a line in the Bill stating that the SIA must use its powers and investigatory functions in the most constructive way possible.

I want to finish by thanking the Government once again for continuing the important work on the Bill. As I have said, we will work constructively with the Government throughout the passage of this Bill and raise concerns should we have them, as we have done this evening. I welcome the Minister's approach once again, and praise the family and supporters of Martyn for their work in getting this important legislation on the statute book. As the official Opposition, we look forward to supporting its passage in this place.

8.24 pm

The Minister for Security (Dan Jarvis): It is a pleasure to follow the shadow Minister, and I would like to take the opportunity to thank all hon. and right hon. Members who have spoken in this debate. I will endeavour to address the themes of the arguments that have been put forth. Before doing so, I place on the record my thanks to the Home Affairs Committee for its scrutiny of the draft Bill in the last Session, and I thank the Opposition for the constructive approach they have taken to this Bill, for the support that they have given today and, indeed, for the work done by the previous Government.

As many hon. Members have rightly set out, keeping the country safe is the first duty of government. Just last week, the director general of MI5 set out in his threat update speech that the country is subject to the most interconnected threat environment that we have ever seen. The threat picture is complex, evolving and enduring, with terrorists choosing to attack a broad range of locations. It is not possible to predict where in the UK an attack might happen, or the type of premises or event that could be impacted, but engagement with business indicates that preparedness and protective security in the counter-terrorism space often falls behind areas where there are long-established legal requirements, such as health and safety.

In recent years, inquests and inquiries into terror attacks have set out the need for a legal requirement, including monitored recommendation 4 in volume 1 of the Manchester Arena inquiry. The police, the security services and other partners continue to do all they can to combat the terror threat, and we are immensely

[Dan Jarvis]

grateful to all those who work around the clock to counter threats and protect the safety of our country. The public are safer as a result of their efforts, and we owe them an enormous debt of gratitude.

Many businesses and organisations already do excellent work to improve their security and preparedness. However, the absence of legislative requirements means that there is no consistency or consideration of the outcomes. That is what this Bill—Martyn's law—seeks to achieve. It will improve protective security and organisational preparedness across the UK, thereby making us safer. Through the Bill, qualifying premises and events should be better prepared to respond in the event of a terrorist attack. Those responsible for certain premises and events will be required to take steps to mitigate the impact of a terrorist attack and reduce harm in the event of a terrorist attack occurring. Additionally, certain larger premises and events will have to take steps to reduce their vulnerability to terrorist attacks. The public rightly deserve to feel safe when visiting public premises and attending events, and the Government see it as reasonable that, in many locations, appropriate and reasonably practical steps should be taken to protect staff and the public from the impact of terrorism.

Like other Members, I would like to take the opportunity to thank and pay tribute to Figen Murray, whose campaigning has been crucial in driving this Bill forward. Her tireless work is an inspiration to us all. To have suffered such a tremendous loss and still find the strength to campaign for change is extraordinary, and I know that I speak for all Members of this House in saying Figen, you are an inspiration.

I turn now to the main points raised during today's debate. First, I should say that we were privileged to hear two truly excellent maiden speeches from the hon. Member for Tiverton and Minehead (Rachel Gilmour) and my hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Matt Bishop). Both spoke exceptionally well and did their constituents real credit, and I know that the House will look forward to hearing much more from them as they draw on the huge experience that they both bring to this place.

I should also say, as this legislation progresses, that we keep in our hearts all those who have lost their lives in terrorist attacks, including the late Sir David Amess and Jo Cox. They are gone but their memory endures, as does our commitment to supporting their loved ones and the survivors who live with the scars of being caught up in terrorism, whether physical or psychological. I firmly agree with the sentiments expressed by the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel) in respect of the late James Brokenshire, who is much missed in this place.

Josh Babarinde (Eastbourne) (LD): Will the Minister join me in paying tribute to the late Ian Gow, the former Member of Parliament for Eastbourne, who was brutally assassinated in a terrorist attack in 1990? His shield is here in the Chamber, honouring his memory all year round, and I would invite the Minister and all Members to share their tribute to him as well.

Dan Jarvis: I am grateful to the hon. Member for making that intervention, and yes, of course I join the hon. Member in that. I am sure that all Members will want to pay tribute to the late Ian Gow.

The shadow Home Secretary asked about implementation. Following Royal Assent, there will be time to understand and, where necessary, act upon the new requirements before they come into force. We expect the implementation period to be at least 24 months to allow for the set-up of the regulator, and we will continue to engage and communicate with industry and other stakeholders during this period, including in the live music sector, to ensure that there is sufficient time for those responsible for premises and events in scope to understand their new obligations, and to plan and prepare. A robust monitoring and evaluation plan is also in place to measure the Bill's effectiveness following implementation, and the Government will keep the Bill's measures under review and have the powers needed to adjust the regime if necessary.

Several Members asked about the proportionality of the standard tier. The Government are extremely mindful that many premises and events continue to face the challenge of rising costs. The Bill seeks to achieve public protection outcomes while avoiding an undue burden on businesses and other organisations. In the standard tier, the focus is on having procedures that are intended to be simple and low cost. There will be no requirement to put in place any physical measures.

Paul Waugh (Rochdale) (Lab/Co-op): Many of my constituents in Rochdale will warmly welcome this Bill, particularly given that many of them were in the Manchester Arena on that dark day in 2017. I would like to suggest, though, that many small music venues worry about the proportionality of this Bill. Does the Minister want to give them reassurance that the voluntary scheme in Manchester has worked well so far, and that this revised version of the Bill will reduce the costs that were anticipated before?

Dan Jarvis: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, a Greater Manchester MP, for making that important point. It is worth saying in response that the feedback from businesses in the Greater Manchester area has been incredibly positive. While we are mindful of the potential burdens on business, we have consulted and worked closely with the sector and we will continue to listen carefully to the concerns it may wish to raise.

Jim Shannon: Will the Minister give way?

Dan Jarvis: I am going to make a bit of progress. I will come to the hon. Gentleman in a moment, but I am conscious that time is against me and that Madam Deputy Speaker is looking intently at me.

The right hon. Member for Witham made a number of important points, not least that the primary role of the Security Industry Authority will be to provide advice, guidance and support to those responsible, to enable them to meet their obligations. The Bill also gives the SIA the necessary enforcement and investigation powers. These are modelled on those of other similar inspection regimes, which will allow an inspector to enter premises, interview staff, gather the information they need and assess the level of compliance. In the most serious or persistent of instances, criminal sanctions will be available.

The right hon. Lady also asked for an update on our work to support the victims of terrorism, and she rightly referenced the good work of Travis Frain, whom

I also have had the privilege of meeting to discuss important issues, including that of memorialisation. The right hon. Lady raised a number of important points, and I will commit to write to her specifically on this point but also on the other points that she raised. She should be assured, however, as should the whole House, of this Government's commitment to supporting the victims of terrorism.

My hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Mr Rand), another Greater Manchester MP, spoke powerfully about the impact of the Manchester attack. I fully agree with everything he said, as I did with the contribution made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton North East (Kirith Entwistle). The hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Lisa Smart) spoke movingly about Martyn Hett and eloquently paid tribute to the solidarity, resilience and resolve of the people of Greater Manchester. I can also assure her, and the House, that dedicated, easy-to-follow guidance and support will be provided for duty holders to ensure that those in scope have the required information on what to do and how best to do it. This will include local authorities and volunteers, as raised by the hon. Members for Solihull West and Shirley (Dr Shastri-Hurst) and for North Cornwall (Ben Maguire) respectively.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Neil Coyle) asked about planning processes, and I have made a particular note of his point about bollards. I can assure him that we will consider, with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and planning leads in the devolved Governments, how security considerations are referenced in and achieved through the planning regimes and guidance, in the light of the Bill's provisions.

The hon. Member for Solihull West and Shirley made a number of important, pertinent points. He rightly said that the protection and safety of the public is paramount, but he raised a number of points around the impact on smaller premises and the changing nature of the threat. I can give him the assurances that he sought. My hon. Friend the Member for Dudley (Sonia Kumar) made a number of useful points, not least about seeking to strike the right balance between security and the impact on business.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall rightly reflected his own constituency experience and spoke about rural venues, smaller premises and penalties. I am also grateful to him for mentioning Brendan Cox. It is absolutely right to reference the significant contribution that Brendan Cox has made to this process. My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh East and Musselburgh (Chris Murray) made a really important point about Edinburgh. It is a great city that knows how to host events, and I am particularly pleased to hear that the city welcomes this legislation. Of course, we will want to work closely with colleagues in Scotland and elsewhere to ensure the successful implementation of this legislation.

The hon. Member for North Antrim (Jim Allister) made a number of important points, not least on ensuring that we work together to defeat terrorism. He also raised important points about smaller premises and the SIA. I am happy to discuss those points with him further, but I can say to him that the enhanced duty requirements will not apply to premises used for childcare or for primary, secondary and further education. My hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Luke Myer) also mentioned Travis Frain, and I am grateful to him for doing so. I join him in paying tribute to Travis's work. He has been an inspirational campaigner and we will want to continue to work closely with him in the future.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), as always, drew very sensibly on his experience of Northern Ireland from a terrorism perspective. His contribution is always appreciated. He raised a number of specific points and I will endeavour to come back to him by letter in order to give him clarity.

Jim Shannon: The Minister is always very kind and I knew he would say yes to me eventually. He has not commented yet on churches. Could he give us some idea of what his thoughts are there? I mentioned in my contribution the fact that all churches right across Northern Ireland took precautions after the Darkley hall massacre. Every person needs to be safety conscious, and every person in church took that role upon themselves.

Dan Jarvis: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for mentioning churches. All places of worship will be included in the standard tier. We recognise their unique and hugely important contribution, and we have looked very closely at how we can ensure that this legislation will provide them with appropriate protections. Again, I am happy to discuss this further, should the hon. Gentleman wish to do so.

The Bill's provisions have been very carefully designed to strike the right balance between public protection and avoiding undue burdens on premises and events. These simple, common-sense steps will bolster the UK's preparedness for and protection from terrorism.

I finish by reiterating the thanks of the whole House to Figen Murray. To have gone through what she has and still work so tirelessly for change is both humbling and inspiring. Figen has said that it is time to get this done, and she is right.

Security is the foundation upon which everything else is built, and nothing matters more to this Government. I commend this Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

TERRORISM (PROTECTION OF PREMISES) BILL: PROGRAMME

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),

That the following provisions shall apply to the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill:

Committal

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Public Bill Committee.

Proceedings in Public Bill Committee

(2) Proceedings in the Public Bill Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Tuesday 19 November 2024.

(3) The Public Bill Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Consideration and Third Reading

(4) Proceedings on Consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which those proceedings are commenced.

(5) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.

(6) Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading.

Other proceedings

(7) Any other proceedings on the Bill may be programmed.—*(Anna Turley.)*

Question agreed to.

TERRORISM (PROTECTION OF PREMISES) 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 Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill, it is expedient to authorise:

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of:

(a) any expenditure incurred under or by virtue of the Act by the Secretary of State, and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under or by virtue of any other Act out of money so provided, and

(2) the payment of sums into the Consolidated Fund.—*(Anna Turley.)*

Question agreed to.

Business without Debate

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (TODAY)

Ordered,

That at today's sitting the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Lucy Powell relating to Business of the House (Private Members' Bills) not later than one hour after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order; such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; proceedings on that Motion may continue, though opposed, after the moment of interruption; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—*(Lucy Powell.)*

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS)

Ordered,

That Private Members' Bills shall have precedence over Government business on 29 November, 6 December 2024, 17 January, 24 January, 7 March, 14 March, 28 March, 25 April, 16 May, 13 June, 20 June, 4 July and 11 July 2025.—*(Lucy Powell.)*

Speaker's Conference

8.41 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Lucy Powell): I beg to move,

That—

This House considers that it is essential that elections to the United Kingdom Parliament are conducted freely and fairly, without threats or violence; that candidates are able to campaign in safety, with appropriate protection and support; and that elected representatives can do their job securely, and accordingly agrees that the following Order be made:

(1) There shall be a committee to be known as the Speaker's Conference which shall consist of the Speaker, who shall be Chair, and up to 14 other Members appointed by the Speaker.

(2) The Conference shall consider the factors influencing the threat levels against candidates and MPs and the effectiveness of the response to such threats, and make recommendations about the arrangements necessary to secure free and fair elections and the appropriate protection of candidates at future UK-wide parliamentary elections and of elected representatives thereafter.

(3) The Speaker shall appoint one or more of the members of the Conference to act as vice-Chair in his absence.

(4) Except as provided in this Order, the Conference and any sub-committee thereof that the Speaker shall appoint shall conduct its proceedings in such manner as the Speaker shall determine, notwithstanding any Standing Order or practice of this House.

(5) The Conference shall have power—

(a) to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House and to adjourn from place to place;

(b) to report from time to time;

(c) to appoint legal advisers, and to appoint specialist advisers either to supply information which is not readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the committee's order of reference.

(6) The Speaker shall have power to appoint sub-committees of the Speaker's Conference and sub-committees appointed under this order shall have power to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place, to report from time to time their formal minutes, and shall have a quorum of three.

(7) The quorum of the Conference shall be five.

(8) This Order shall have effect until the end of the current Parliament.

This week marks three years since the death of Sir David Amess, and this motion will establish a Speaker's Conference to consider and make recommendations on the factors influencing the threat levels against candidates and MPs, and the effectiveness of the response to such threats.

I reassure the House that there will be Members of Parliament on the Speaker's Conference, and that this is a process, not an event. There will be plenty of time and opportunity for people to contribute to the Speaker's Conference.

Finally, I take this opportunity to thank Mr Speaker for all the work he does, and has done for many years, to keep Members of this House safe. This Speaker's Conference will be a very important moment in that journey, as we all come together to think about recommendations for the future.

Question put and agreed to.

Business without Debate

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS (JOINT COMMITTEE)

Ordered,

That Lewis Atkinson, Mark Ferguson, Claire Hughes, Sir Bernard Jenkin, Charlie Maynard, Gordon McKee and Ms Julie Minns be members of the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments.—*(Chris Elmore, on behalf of the Selection Committee.)*

Nuclear Industry: Cumbria

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*(Anna Turley.)*

8.42 pm

Josh MacAlister (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): In just three days' time, we will mark the 68th anniversary of the opening of Calder Hall, the world's first commercial civil nuclear power station, in my constituency. At 12.16 pm on 17 October 1956, Queen Elizabeth II pulled the lever directing electricity from the power station into the national grid, and Workington, 15 miles up the coast and also in my constituency, became the first town in the world to receive light, heat and power from nuclear energy. Speaking that day, Her Majesty the Queen said:

"This new power, which has proved itself to be such a terrifying weapon of destruction, is harnessed for the first time for the common good of our community."

And it was good for my community.

Lizzi Collinge (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Lab): We have two nuclear power stations at Heysham, and I am campaigning for new nuclear at the same site. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need to recapture the spirit of the early days of civil nuclear and move at pace to deliver new nuclear for the new generation?

Josh MacAlister: I thank my hon. Friend for the intervention, and given that my entire speech is dedicated to that very point, I will gladly agree with her. West Cumbrians are incredibly proud of the part we played in the first clean energy revolution. We need only speak to some of those who worked at the power plant during its 47 years in operation to hear the pride in their voices.

After Calder Hall came another 10 nuclear power plants in 10 years—we opened 10 in 10 years.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Gentleman for securing the debate. He is right to point to the 10 power stations that were built, but if I may, I will gently remind him of the one that did not happen—although not as a result of what he says. Northern Ireland and the devolved nations have an important role to play in nuclear power provision. Almost 70 years ago there were plans to build Northern Ireland's first atomic power station in County Tyrone, but ultimately they fell through. It is so important that we collectively have the facilities necessary to advance our nuclear power. Does he agree that, alongside his constituency and other areas of the mainland UK, more must be done to ensure that the devolved nations, including Northern Ireland, are considered for manufacturing bases and as potential areas for power stations in the future?

Josh MacAlister: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the intervention and I am glad to hear he is not blaming me for the decades-old issue with nuclear power in Northern Ireland. I agree with him that every corner of the United Kingdom could benefit from its energy output.

Richard Butler said at the time that Calder Hall was opened:

"It may be that after 1965 every new power station being built will be an atomic power station."

[Josh MacAlister]

From our dependence on fossil fuel towards the end of the 20th century, however, we know that that was not the case. It was the last Labour Government that reignited interest in new nuclear in 2005. The then Prime Minister, Sir Tony Blair, announced a review of the Government's energy policy in order to reduce our reliance on foreign imports and tackle the threat of climate change. He recognised that we could not do that with renewables alone and he rightly and firmly put civil nuclear power back on the table.

In 2009, following an announcement by the then—and current—Energy Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Ed Miliband), we had ambitious plans for 10 sites to be the home of a new fleet of nuclear power stations, including three in Cumbria. The aim was for that fleet to shift the UK decisively from fossil fuels to clean, dependable power, to safeguard our nuclear skills and to provide energy security for decades into the 21st century. Moorside in my constituency, Hinkley, Sizewell, Hartlepool, Heysham, Wylfa, Oldbury and Bradwell were the communities identified to deliver that mission.

How many of them have a new nuclear power station today, 15 years on? Zero. Under the Conservatives, only one new nuclear project, Hinkley, was given the full go-ahead, and none opened during their time in Government. Fourteen years squandered—not only that, but we actually went backwards, with new nuclear projects collapsing on their watch.

Llinos Medi (Ynys Môn) (PC): After 14 years of standstill in the nuclear sector, our communities have been left without jobs, without security, without strength in the economy and without energy security. Now more than ever, communities such as mine need an answer on whether nuclear is on the agenda, and we need a timescale. Our young people are leaving our communities, the economy is dying on its feet and we are poorer as energy producers than ever. I believe the last Government failed this country on energy security.

Josh MacAlister: I agree with the hon. Member; I share many of the concerns of remoter parts of Wales and England and I think we both represent seats that have those issues. A plan in my constituency, which is not dissimilar to that of Wylfa, for a new 3.4 GW nuclear power plant to be built at Moorside, adjacent to Sellafield, collapsed in 2018. We now know that the previous Government did nothing to intervene or to assess the impact of that collapse on my community. Instead, they promised a new process that would deliver small modular reactors and set up Great British Nuclear to oversee it. That decision and others have allowed Conservative politicians to hide behind process for year after year, promising jam tomorrow. For my community and many others, it has been election after election of broken promises.

I first raised the alarm about potential roadblocks to new nuclear in Cumbria before the election, which is why I launched the New Nuclear Now campaign. However, it is only through questions asked since then that I have been able to uncover the roadblocks to siting new SMRs in Cumbria. Those roadblocks are specific to west Cumbria but are also a reflection of Britain's problem with building.

I will briefly explain the exact nature of the problem. The crux of the issue lies in competing demands on the land designated for new nuclear at Moorside. In short, the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority wants to use a large area of the land for the laydown of construction materials for future buildings that it hopes to construct on the Sellafield site as part of its decommissioning activity. Great British Nuclear needs to make a decision imminently about the site selection and, if Moorside is a contender, it needs to be confident that the land will be available for new nuclear plants. To put it simply, zero-sum thinking and the lack of a serious plan B from the NDA is putting the economic future of my community at risk.

Ms Julie Minns (Carlisle) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that bringing new nuclear to our wonderful county is not just important for economic growth but absolutely essential if we are to attract new people to come and live in Cumbria, so we can grow our population and begin to overcome some of the demographic challenges we currently face?

Josh MacAlister: My hon. Friend and I frequently talk about the demographic challenges facing Cumbria, like many other post-industrial parts of our country. New nuclear can put those communities on the map and act as a magnet for inward investment and migration from elsewhere in the UK. Hypothetical future decommissioning work, not yet approved or funded by Government and that could use different available land, is putting a very real and current proposal to build new nuclear power at Moorside in jeopardy. That is simply unacceptable to me and to my community.

I am incredibly proud of the world-leading decommissioning work taking place at Sellafield. It is our biggest local employer, with 12,000 people directly employed and thousands more in the supply chain. The work being done there under the leadership of CEO Euan Hutton is truly groundbreaking, and it has ensured that west Cumbria will continue to play a crucial role in the nuclear industry well into the future. I will back any viable new projects that speed up decommissioning and create more opportunities for my community. What must change is that that work must become a springboard for Cumbria's future opportunities and not simply an anchor providing security.

In truth, I have met too many people in Whitehall who think that we in west Cumbria should consider ourselves lucky to have what we have. I have absolutely no time for that sentiment. It shows a complete lack of regard for the members of a community who have been custodians of one of Europe's most hazardous sites and who want and deserve a diverse economic future that is not simply dependent on one employer.

New nuclear is the key to creating that springboard to a diversified, vibrant and entrepreneurial economy. New nuclear would create a Cumbrian magnet for the energy-intensive industries hungry for the clean, reliable baseload power that only nuclear can provide. It would build on our existing world-leading workforce and strengthen it too. It would capitalise on the good will of a community whose members understand nuclear and are eager to get building. In short, new nuclear power generation is in no way incompatible with my community's role in decommissioning. In fact, it is a mutually beneficial endeavour.

I understand the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority's position—the clue is in the name. It is there to deliver safe, efficient and effective decommissioning programmes for our nuclear waste across the UK. However, under the Energy Act 2023 it also has a responsibility to work in the interests of the local community. Our community needs and deserves more than simply decommissioning work into the future.

I am confident that the NDA can come up with a plan B for its future that will preserve Moorside for its original purpose of new nuclear. I say that with confidence because until 2018 the NDA was planning on the basis of gigawatt-scale reactors at Moorside. My community, which overwhelmingly supports the building of new nuclear, and has the skills and expertise to deliver it, has a site designated for new nuclear, so my ask of the Minister is simple: I would like his Department to make clear the primacy of new nuclear use on sites currently designated for new nuclear over any other potential future uses of those bits of land—not just those in my constituency. I would like the land needed for new nuclear at Moorside transferred from the NDA to Great British Nuclear to make that intent clear.

GBN has taken ownership of other land for nuclear developments, and it is now time that the same should happen at Moorside. The clock is ticking on the need for that transfer of land, as GBN will make siting decisions in the coming months. I also ask that the Government support the NDA to come up with plans for laydown using other land available, and that they provide long-term confidence to the NDA on some of the major decommissioning choices that lie ahead, not least on plutonium. Finally, I would like the Department to instruct GBN to assess the Moorside site as it stands, and not on the basis of any other future land use, hypothetical or real. It is my firm belief that the Moorside site will score very highly without those roadblocks in its way.

West Cumbrians are ready to play our part in Britain's new nuclear future. We are globally recognised in the nuclear sector as an area with a match-fit supply chain, decades of knowledge, and the experience needed to build complex nuclear technology. We have a strong skills base that wants to deliver the net zero infrastructure of the future, backed up by the excellent educational institutions needed. My hon. Friend the Minister and the Government have been handed a mess by their predecessors, which they are now being asked to fix at the eleventh hour. It is my hope that the new Government will support Cumbria in our ambitions, and remove the roadblocks that stand in our way.

Mr Jonathan Brash (Hartlepool) (Lab) *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): Order. Can I just check whether the hon. Member has given notice to the Member in charge and to the Minister of his intention to speak?

Mr Brash *indicated assent.*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Thank you. I call Jonathan Brash.

8.57 pm

Mr Jonathan Brash (Hartlepool) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Whitehaven and Workington (Josh MacAlister) on securing the debate and on his continued leadership on this issue in this place. It is worth noting that "community" was perhaps the most common word in his speech. There is also that community in Hartlepool in my constituency, which has been proudly home to a nuclear power station for more than 40 years. A third of our economic footprint is down to that station, as well as three quarters of our business rates and more than 700 employees.

In my brief remarks—I do not want to take up too much the House's time—I want to impress three things on the Minister. First, the delivery of new nuclear for towns such as Hartlepool and elsewhere is integral to our mission to secure clean power. Secondly, it is incredibly important for decarbonising our industry, particularly the advanced modular reactor options potentially available in Hartlepool. Thirdly, and most importantly, new nuclear can deliver for communities such as mine the reindustrialisation and prosperity that has been taken from them for generations; it can truly transform our local economy. My message to the Minister is that time is of the essence. Decisions are required. We have had 14 years of dither and delay. Now we can truly change our communities for the better.

8.59 pm

Tom Hayes (Bournemouth East) (Lab): It is a privilege to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr Brash). I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Whitehaven and Workington (Josh MacAlister) for securing the debate.

To meet our growing energy needs and prevent the catastrophic costs of climate change, we need nuclear alongside renewables. It is that simple. With nuclear power, more jobs will be highly skilled, well paid and unionised, and here I commend the dedicated and consistent work of the GMB union over many years.

If ever anyone wanted to see the difference between our new Government and the last, nuclear power is a good place to start. The Conservatives may talk a good game about nuclear power, but I note that not a single Conservative Member of Parliament is sitting on the Opposition Benches. Fourteen years of Conservative rule have got us nowhere. No nuclear plants were built, despite a positive inheritance of 10 approved nuclear sites from the last Labour Government. David Cameron sent Horizon in Wales and NewGen in Cumbria to the wall—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): Order. I gently remind the hon. Member, who should sit when I am standing, that the debate is specifically titled "Nuclear Industry: Cumbria", and he might like to confine his comments to Cumbria.

Tom Hayes: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Just to repeat, David Cameron sent Horizon in Wales and NewGen in Cumbria to the wall. George Osborne begged the Chinese to invest in nuclear power, and we are now unpicking his mistake. Theresa May proceeded to pause Hinkley Point C, nearly killing it off, and Sizewell with it. Boris Johnson may have shown some love to nuclear, but what came of it? Thankfully, Liz Truss was in power for too short a time to do any more damage, and the right hon. Member for Richmond and Northallerton (Rishi Sunak) focused only on small modular reactors in the dying days of his Government.

[Tom Hayes]

It is important to spell out the ways in which Conservative Prime Ministers have done such damage to nuclear across our country, because they have therefore stymied the development of nuclear in Cumbria. As my hon. Friend the Member for Whitehaven and Workington has said, it is important that we proceed with plans there. The last Conservative Government had 14 years and a multitude of nuclear projects to sign off, with developers desperate to build. Right now, we could be building Hinkley, NewGen, Sizewell and small modular reactors, as we were just hearing. Instead, two projects were collapsed, there was endless talk about the financing of Sizewell instead of building it and practically nothing was done about small modular reactors.

Turning narrowly to Sizewell C, I am delighted by this Labour Government's commitment and determination to reach a final investment decision as soon as possible. Investing in nuclear is not just right for our country; it is right for all our communities. It can affect not just our current generation, but generations to come. Our mission—Labour's mission—is not just about reducing damage from fossil fuels for the benefit of all; it is about our hopes for a better future, and I am pleased that they rest in large part on the prospect of British nuclear power.

9.2 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Michael Shanks): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Whitehaven and Workington (Josh MacAlister) not only on securing this important debate and managing to get a considerable turnout for an Adjournment debate, but genuinely on the passion that he has brought, on behalf of his constituents, to this issue. I think he has had more meetings with Ministers in my Department than any other Member of this House in the past three months, and that is a credit to him. In his opening remarks, he spoke passionately about the importance of nuclear and the need for this Government to pick up from where the previous Government left off, having built no new nuclear in 14 years. We are picking up this work at speed. It has barely moved forward since my right hon. Friend the Energy Secretary was previously in the role, 14 years ago.

I welcome this opportunity to set out the Government's position. Cumbria is vital to the UK's energy, defence and nuclear industry, from Barrow-in-Furness, where the Ministry of Defence is building and maintaining nuclear submarines; to Drigg, where the low-level waste repository disposes of nuclear waste; to Seascale, which is home to the most significant nuclear facility in the country; and finally to Carlisle, where Nuclear Transport Solutions, owner of Direct Rail Services, operates a crucial railhead for nuclear transport. Each of these locations plays a vital role in our nation's nuclear infrastructure, ensuring safety, security and innovation in the nuclear sector. As my hon. Friend outlined, Cumbria's journey has been a remarkable one, of achievements, technological advancements and steadfast commitment—a testament to the people in this area, who have opened their arms to nuclear and who continue to do so.

The story begins post world war two, a time of rapid scientific progress in the global nuclear race. As my hon. Friend the Member for Whitehaven and Workington noted, the Calder Hall nuclear power station—opened by Her Majesty in 1956—was the world's first commercial nuclear power station, generating electricity for 47 years and providing valuable insights into reactor operations. In the 1980s, the site underwent a significant transformation and was renamed Sellafield. That name change signified the site's broader mission, shifting from solely plutonium production to encompass a wide range of nuclear activities including fuel reprocessing, waste management and environmental restoration.

As the nuclear industry matured, Sellafield's focus shifted once again towards decommissioning and environmental clean-up. The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, established under the Energy Act 2004, oversees nuclear decommissioning across the UK. Its mission is to clean up the legacy of nuclear waste safely, securely and cost-effectively. Sellafield is central to that mission: spread across some 276 hectares in Cumbria, it is tasked with decommissioning ageing nuclear facilities, managing nuclear fuel and materials, and ensuring the safe disposal of nuclear waste. The site uses advanced technologies and expert knowledge to tackle those challenges, showcasing the innovation and resilience of the UK's nuclear industry.

Tackling the UK's civil nuclear legacy safely, securely and cost-effectively is a national priority, with more than £3 billion being invested this year alone to ensure the NDA and its subsidiaries continue its mission to clean up the UK's nuclear legacy. Under the Energy Act, the NDA also has the supplementary function of promoting economic development, social wellbeing and environmental sustainability. Figures on the NDA's economic contribution to west Cumbria show that its local activity supported £1.3 billion of gross value added across the local economy, which is 40% of the total gross value added for the entire area. That is why this Government's commitment to new nuclear—which I restate—is so important. My hon. Friend and a number of my colleagues rightly mentioned the standstill approach of the previous Government: a lot of warm words, but 14 years of inaction. I notice that no Conservative Members are in the Chamber this evening.

The legacy of nuclear activity in north-west Cumbria is important, but so too is its future. It continues to inspire confidence and optimism, with a decommissioning mission lasting over 100 years. The NDA and Sellafield will continue to contribute to the community of west Cumbria and remain at the forefront of that vital work. Of course, the region also remains a pioneer in nuclear research and development, contributing to advancements in reactor technology, waste management and environmental protection. The lessons that we learn from Sellafield are invaluable assets right across the country and the world, guiding future endeavours in the nuclear sector.

We welcome the continued engagement of the two Cumbrian communities involved in the national process to find a suitable site for a geological disposal facility. It is a unique process whereby the local community will have the final say on whether it wants to host that facility. As my hon. Friend the Member for Whitehaven and Workington outlined, west Cumbria is also home to Moorside, a previously designated potential new nuclear site and one of several that has the capability to host future civil nuclear projects. That site's location—adjacent to Sellafield—would need to be factored into

any future considerations, and any prioritisation of projects in west Cumbria will of course take into account how to maximise public benefit.

As we look to the future of Cumbria's nuclear industry, we face both exciting opportunities and significant challenges. To meet the demands of our growing nuclear programme and to have a workforce pipeline, industry modelling suggests that we need to fill 40,000 jobs by 2030. That means we must more than double our current recruitment rates to ensure we have the skilled workforce necessary to drive our nuclear ambitions forward. The skills challenge can only be tackled through cross-sector collaborative action, and the Government remain steadfast in their commitment to work closely with the nuclear sector to deliver on those actions, in order to build a workforce that is ready to meet the demands of the future. Cumbria's nuclear future is bright, and with continued collaboration and dedication we will ensure that it remains at the forefront of the nuclear industry, driving innovation and sustainability for generations to come.

I want to turn to the specific questions my hon. Friend raised about the land at Moorside. On whether the Government can make clear the primacy of new nuclear on the sites currently listed in the 2011 national policy statement, the statement listed eight sites as being potentially suitable for the deployment of new nuclear by 2025. The sites were nominated to that process by third parties, and it was never intended that listing such sites should restrict their future use. Any nuclear project at these potential sites must be subject to development consent or to examination and approval, as well as site licensing and other regulatory requirements.

On whether Great British Nuclear could consider the technical potential of Moorside without potential future decommissioning projects nearby, I note that GBN has considered a number of sites, including Moorside, from both a project delivery and a technical perspective. The fact is, however, that the location of the site adjacent to Sellafield does need to be factored into any consideration. Any interaction between existing or future projects could introduce additional complexity, potential pressures on supporting local infrastructure and increased delivery risk. I want to assure the House that use of the land at Moorside will undoubtedly bring investment and employment opportunities in the region, and any decisions will be made with the utmost priority given to the maximisation of opportunity for the local community.

West Cumbria's nuclear history shows its commitment to scientific progress, environmental stewardship and public safety, and by working together we can ensure the best possible outcome as we navigate the complexities of nuclear decommissioning, waste management and this Government's absolute commitment to new nuclear.

Question put and agreed to.

9.11 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 14 October 2024

BUSINESS AND TRADE

The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy

The Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Jonathan Reynolds): I am pleased to announce that today, 14 October, I have published a Green Paper setting out our plans to deliver "Invest 2035: The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy".

Growth is the No. 1 mission of this Government. Our vision for a modern industrial strategy is for a credible, 10-year plan to drive sustainable, inclusive and resilient growth and deliver the certainty and stability businesses need to invest across the UK. This is the only way to boost our productivity, reinvest in our public services, create high-quality jobs and ensure tangible impact in communities right across the UK.

The industrial strategy will ensure we can build on our significant and historic strengths—which are the foundations of a vibrant, global economy and position us well to seize the economic opportunities of the coming decade.

To unlock this growth, the strategy will focus on tackling barriers in our highest potential growth-driving sectors. In doing so, the industrial strategy will create a pro-business environment and support high-potential clusters across the country. It will also support our net zero, regional, and economic resilience and security aims. We are prepared to tackle the critical issues head-on and make the choices required to kickstart investment.

We must create a strong pro-business environment that supports businesses to thrive and grow. This industrial strategy will bring forward co-ordinated, sector-specific and cross-cutting policies that support businesses to overcome barriers and make it simpler and cheaper for companies to scale up and invest. These will be founded on four principles: long-term stability, renewing our commitment to free and fair trade, easing the investor journey, and being a strategic, growth-focused state. By considering and listening to businesses and experts, we can identify the most effective levers for our sectors—and clusters—across the country. These policy areas include people and skills, innovation, energy and infrastructure, the regulatory environment, crowding in investment, and international partnerships and trade.

Jobs will also be at the heart of our modern industrial strategy, supporting growth sectors to create high-quality, well paid jobs across the country, backed by employment rights fit for a modern economy. We must also be clear-eyed about the sectors which offer the highest growth opportunity for the economy and businesses, including where the UK has existing and nascent strengths. Our strategy will be ambitious and targeted, taking advantage of the UK's unique strengths and untapped potential, enabling our world-leading sectors to adapt and grow, and seizing opportunities to lead in new sectors.

Over the last 25 years, roughly 60% of our productivity growth was generated by just 30% of our most productive industries. That is why our industrial strategy has identified eight key growth-driving sectors—advanced manufacturing, creative industries, clean energy industries, defence, digital and technologies, financial services, life sciences, and professional and business services—in which the UK excels today and will excel tomorrow. In the next stage of development of the industrial strategy, we will prioritise sub-sectors within these broad sectors that meet our objectives.

We must also ensure our growth unlocks the economic potential of the UK's cities and regions, by tailoring policy to specific place-based constraints and opportunities. We will give mayors in England the tools they need to grow their economies and develop ambitious 10-year local growth plans. We will also work in partnership with the devolved Governments to make this industrial strategy a UK-wide effort. In doing so, we will explore how the industrial strategy can identify, select and intervene in the most important industrial sites and sectoral clusters across the UK, making them magnets for globally mobile investment.

But this strategy—and our ambitions—can only be realised in partnership. Too often, the impact of industrial strategies has been concentrated in certain regions and not shared across communities. Businesses tell us that past plans have been short-lived, and often business have felt they were done to, rather than with, them. We will engage widely through the development of this strategy, engaging businesses, trade unions, local and devolved leaders, academics, and international partners.

To underscore this approach, I am also very pleased to announce that we are launching the industrial strategy advisory council, and have appointed Clare Barclay, CEO of Microsoft UK, as chair. Ms Barclay brings a wealth of leadership experience at top-flight UK businesses across technology, innovation and artificial intelligence. Further members will be confirmed in due course, drawn from across business, academia and trade unions to provide a broad range of skills and expertise.

Through the Green Paper, the Government are seeking the views of businesses, stakeholders and parliamentarians to inform the continued development of our industrial strategy and ensure it delivers for people and communities across the UK. I would welcome your analysis and insight, as well as the views of businesses and others in your constituencies.

The industrial strategy and growth-driving sector plans will be published in spring 2025. I will keep Parliament informed as the industrial strategy, and industrial strategy advisory council, continue to develop. I am placing copies of the Green Paper in the Libraries of both Houses.

Reforms to company law

The UK has always been a great place for overseas companies to invest and do business. The Government are committed to taking steps to make the UK a place where foreign companies can easily relocate their incorporation. A UK re-domiciliation regime would increase the ease with which companies could move their place of incorporation to the UK, minimising costs and risks that could otherwise arise from the alternative routes and ensuring that the UK remains internationally competitive. Today, we have published a report by the independent expert panel on corporate re-domiciliation, established to consider how best to implement a framework in the UK. The Government

welcome the panel's report and intend to consult in due course on a proposed regime design. A copy of the report will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

I can confirm that my Department will lay legislation by the end of the year that will save companies £240 million per year by removing redundant reporting requirements and uplifting the monetary size thresholds for micro-entities and small and medium-sized companies, as well as making technical fixes to the UK's audit framework. The changes will benefit up to 132,000 companies who will move to a smaller size category, with lighter-touch accounting and reporting requirements more proportionate to their size. These changes are the first step toward modernising the UK's reporting framework, so it is simpler and better for business, supporting the Government's aim of having the highest sustained growth in the G7. My Department will also launch an ambitious consultation next year aimed at simplifying and modernising the UK's non-financial reporting framework. Efforts to modernise will also include examining the potential for updating shareholder communication in line with technology and clarifying the law in relation to virtual annual general meetings.

The Government are also announcing their commitment to speeding up the process for raising share capital. The "Financing Growth" paper committed the Government to implementing the outstanding recommendations from the "Secondary Capital Raising Review", published in 2022. The changes will be welcomed by business and shareholders and will speed up and simplify the process for companies raising new share capital, for example by reducing from 10 to seven working days the minimum time in which a company must offer new shares to existing shareholders before offering them to the wider market.

[HCWS126]

TREASURY

National Wealth Fund

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rachel Reeves): This Government have been clear: our No. 1 mission is driving economic growth to improve the lives of the British people. To grow our economy, we need more high-quality, long-term investment. This means creating a new partnership with businesses and making sure Britain is the best place in the world to invest.

The Government are today creating the national wealth fund, the UK's new impact investor, that will mobilise billions of pounds of investment in the UK's world-leading clean energy and growth industries, taking forward the recommendations of the NWF taskforce.

To mobilise private investment at pace, the Government are turbocharging the UK Infrastructure Bank to become more catalytic and from today it will operate as the "national wealth fund".

As the UK's impact investor, the NWF will have a broader mandate, extending beyond infrastructure to support delivery of the wider industrial strategy in areas where an undersupply in private finance exists, working alongside the British Business Bank. A revised mandate and future priorities will be set following legislation, planned to be brought forward later this Session.

Building on UKIB's leadership and expertise, the NWF will go further to catalyse more private investment.

The NWF will be empowered to make investments that maximise the mobilisation of private investment with an expansion of UKIB's offer, including an expanded suite of financial instruments such as performance guarantees and trialling new blended finance solutions, with Government Departments, that take on additional risk to facilitate higher impact in individual deals.

The NWF will have a total capitalisation of £27.8 billion to catalyse investment that would not have otherwise taken place. It will inherit UKIB's existing capitalisation and have an additional £5.8 billion, which will be committed over this Parliament. The Government previously announced that £7.3 billion additional funding would be allocated through the NWF—the remaining £1.5 billion has been reserved to maintain flexibility in how the Government can best deliver against our aims for the NWF. At least £5.8 billion of the NWF's capital will focus on the five sectors announced in the manifesto: green hydrogen, carbon capture, ports, gigafactories, and green steel.

The NWF will have a larger amount of economic risk capital to free it from previous constraints. This will be used to direct the NWF's investments towards having greater economic impact by taking risk in service of the Government's industrial strategy, clean energy mission and growth mission.

The NWF will adopt a proactive approach, with increased resources and focus on conducting more outreach to identify expanded project pipelines and structure innovative transactions with project sponsors, industry, local authorities and Government Departments.

The NWF will have a strong regional mandate to unleash the full potential of our cities and regions to be reflected in its statement of strategic priorities and how it measures success. It will work in close partnership with Mayors to support investable propositions in their local growth plans, devolved Governments, and other local leaders to support their investment plans and priority sectoral clusters across the UK.

Finally, the NWF will review its range of success measures to demonstrate the impact of its additional capital and realising of investment, impact and outcomes across the economy.

Together, these changes will ensure that the NWF can catalyse additional investment and address the key barriers identified by the taskforce. This will result in the delivery of impactful projects that otherwise would not have happened, unlocking growth opportunities across the UK.

British Business Bank

Alongside this, the Chancellor, together with the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, announced that the Government are strengthening the British Business Bank's ability to support the UK's fastest growing, most innovative companies by establishing the British growth partnership.

The British growth partnership is a new, pathfinder approach to the partnership between the British Business Bank and institutional investors that will further the

Government's goal, as set out in the pensions investment review, of encouraging more UK pension fund investment into UK growth assets.

Additionally, we will implement a set of reforms to the British Business Bank's financial framework that will increase its impact and increase its ability to respond flexibly to the market, including by putting the British Business Bank's £7.9 billion set of commercial programmes on a permanent footing.

The British Business Bank, the UK's largest domestic venture capital investor, will launch this new fund, the British growth partnership, to attract pension and institutional investment into venture capital and innovative businesses. These long-term investments will be made independently of Government on a fully commercial basis, leveraging the British Business Bank's market expertise. The British Business Bank will in the coming months seek to raise hundreds of millions of pounds of investment for this model, supported by a cornerstone Government investment, with the aim of making investments by the end of 2025.

In parallel, the Government can announce that we expect both successful bidders of the Long-term Investment for Technology and Science competition, Schroders and ICG, to begin making investments via their new funds in late 2024, supported by pensions capital from Phoenix Group, with the aim of generating over a billion pounds of investment into UK science and technology companies.

Through LIFTS and the British growth partnership, the Government are acting to make the investment of UK institutional capital into high-growth companies easier. This is set to unlock greater wealth for future pensioners and higher growth in the economy.

[HCWS130]

Bank Ringfencing Reforms

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Tulip Siddiq): The statutory independent review of ringfencing and proprietary trading led by Sir Keith Skeoch, which reported in March 2022, made recommendations to improve the operation of the ringfencing regime.

The Government will implement a package of reforms as soon as parliamentary time allows. The reforms will improve competition and competitiveness in the UK banking sector and support economic growth, while maintaining financial stability.

The reforms will include:

- the introduction of a secondary threshold to exempt retail-focused banking groups from the regime—where investment banking activity accounts for less than 10% of Tier 1 capital;
- new flexibilities to allow ringfenced banks to operate globally, subject to Prudential Regulation Authority rules;
- measures to encourage more investment by ringfenced banks in UK small and medium-sized enterprises;
- measures to reduce the compliance burdens associated with the regime; and
- an increase in the primary deposit threshold for ring-fenced banks from £25 billion to £35 billion.

[HCWS125]

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

South Atlantic Co-operation

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Stephen Doughty): On 24 September, the Foreign Secretary met Diana Mondino, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Worship of the Argentine Republic, in New York.

Following this meeting, the Foreign Secretary and Foreign Minister Mondino were delighted to announce a package of co-operation in the South Atlantic, which was published on the gov.uk website.

The package of co-operation includes the following commitments:

- To resume co-operation on fisheries where fishing stocks are shared between Argentina and the Falkland Islands;
- To develop a more ambitious agenda for co-operation, under the sovereignty formula, aimed at promoting human and economic development and strengthening links between the islands and the continent;
- To resume negotiations to complete the third phase of the humanitarian project plan to identify unidentified Argentine soldiers killed in 1982;
- To organise a trip to the islands by next-of-kin of fallen soldiers before the end of 2024, so that they can visit the graves of the soldiers laid to rest in the Falkland Islands;
- To resume the weekly São Paulo—Falkland Islands flight that stopped once a month in Córdoba, Argentina, as established in 2019.

It was agreed that the formula on the safeguards of sovereignty, in paragraph 2 of the joint statement between the UK and Argentina of 19 October 1989, applies to this agenda and to its outcomes.

The Falkland Islands Legislative Assembly was consulted throughout the negotiations and has issued a statement welcoming this package of co-operation. It has no impact on the UK Government's commitment to defending our sovereignty in the South Atlantic, or on defending the Falkland Islanders' right of self-determination.

The United Kingdom and Argentina will celebrate the bicentenary of diplomatic relations in 2025, and the United Kingdom looks forward to a new era of constructive co-operation, characterised by improved dialogue and confidence-building measures.

[HCWS128]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Investigatory Powers (Amendment) Act 2024: Implementation

The Minister for Security (Dan Jarvis): The first duty of Government is to keep our citizens safe. The UK faces an evolving threat from terrorists, hostile actors and organised criminal groups, and it is vital that our intelligence and law enforcement agencies have the powers and capabilities they need to target these individuals and groups.

The Investigatory Powers (Amendment) Act 2024, which received Royal Assent earlier this year, makes targeted updates to the Investigatory Powers Act 2016, to ensure the UK's investigatory powers framework remains fit for the purpose of protecting our national security. Much of the operational detail is necessarily set out in guidance, rather than on the face of the primary legislation. This is delivered through statutory codes of practice, which are brought into force via secondary legislation, and which public authorities must have regard to when exercising functions to which the codes relate. The secondary legislation to bring the codes into force will be subject to the affirmative parliamentary procedure.

As part of the Home Office's work in implementing the Investigatory Powers (Amendment) Act 2024, today we are launching a public consultation to seek views on the proposed revised codes. The consultation will run over a 12-week period and provides an opportunity for stakeholders to have their say.

The consultation will seek views on three new codes (on bulk personal datasets with a low or no expectation of privacy, third-party bulk personal datasets and the notices regime) and updates to five existing codes (on bulk personal datasets, communications data, bulk communications data, equipment interference, and interception). It will also seek views on a set of draft notices regulations, which will specify what types of changes may be included in the new notification notices, introduce timelines for the review of technical capability, data retention, and national security notices, and amend existing regulations in relation to notice processes with regards to membership of the technical advisory board.

Alongside publication of this consultation, I have also signed the Investigatory Powers (Amendment) Act 2024 (Commencement No. 1 and Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2024. These regulations commence the majority of the 2024 Act's provisions, ensuring that important measures such as additional journalistic protections within the bulk equipment interference regime are commenced as soon as possible. The Home Office will encourage public authorities which exercise functions under the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 to have regard to the new draft codes from this point onwards. This approach is being taken to provide clarity to public authorities, both in situations whereby the existing codes do not make provision for new measures within the 2024 Act (such as those relating to bulk personal datasets where there is a low or no expectation of privacy or third party bulk personal datasets) and in situations whereby the draft codes include important updates to the existing codes (such as on what amounts to lawful authority for acquiring communications data). There will still be scope to amend the draft codes based on responses to the consultation, ahead of final versions being brought into force through secondary legislation. The Home Office will carefully consider responses to the consultation in advance of the introduction of the relevant secondary legislation, which will be progressed when parliamentary time allows.

Certain aspects of the Investigatory Powers (Amendment) Act 2024 have not been included within the Investigatory Powers (Amendment) Act 2024 (Commencement No. 1 and Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2024 and will instead be commenced at a later date. In particular, some of the notices provisions will only be commenced once the consultation has been concluded. Further, commencement of the requirement to have a warrant to examine a third-party bulk personal dataset will be delayed for six months, allowing sufficient time for warrants to be prepared and staggered, thereby avoiding a situation whereby they all fall to expire on the same day.

The Investigatory Powers (Amendment) Act 2024 will bring the investigatory powers regime up to date with the modern age. This approach to implementation will allow for consideration of a wide range of stakeholder views, while providing certainty to public authorities in exercising these powers.

A copy of the consultation and the associated annexes will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and published on www.gov.uk.

[HCWS124]

Use of Animals in Science: Strengthening Regulation

The Minister for Security (Dan Jarvis): My noble Friend the Minister of State, Home Office (Lord Hanson of Flint) has today made the following written ministerial statement:

This Government are committed to partnering with scientists, industry and civil society to work towards the phasing out of animal testing. As we move towards this goal, we recognise that the development of safe and effective medicines, the protection of humans and animals, and the protection of the environment still relies on the limited and strictly regulated use of animals. We are committed to maintaining the UK's history of strong laws and strengthening our regulatory framework to assure protections to animals used in science. Strengthening our national regulator is important to maintain our position at the global forefront of welfare and support the UK's life science sector to innovate and grow.

To this end, the Great Britain animals in science regulator will make reforms to its organisational design to most effectively deliver its purpose of protecting animals through maintaining compliance with the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. Reforms will ensure that the life sciences sector is supported to grow through regulation which is proportionate, targeted, clear, and consistent, as well as robust and effective. The reforms will allow the regulator to be flexible to developments in the scientific and regulatory landscape, so that it is adaptable and resilient over the long-term.

Changes to the regulator's organisational design are focused on ensuring the regulator has the right capacity and capabilities in the right places to meet best practice standards for regulators. The changes are designed to facilitate the regulator in adopting an operating model which has an increased emphasis on data, analysis and quality monitoring, and an improved provision of guidance and communication to the life science sector on how to comply with the law to protect animals. These changes will achieve stronger protections for animals; increase adherence to the principles of replacement, reduction, and refinement; provide an enhanced quality of service for the science sector; and increase assurance to the public of the protections the UK continues to deliver for animals in science.

[HCWS127]

PRIME MINISTER

Attracting Investment

The Prime Minister (Keir Starmer): I am making this statement to bring to the House's attention the following machinery of government change.

In support of the Government's efforts to make the UK a great place to invest, the Office for Investment will be expanded, and will now report jointly into HM Treasury, the Department for Business and Trade and No. 10. A new joint HM Treasury and Department for Business and Trade Minister for Investment will oversee this work.

Accounting officer responsibilities for the Office for Investment remain with the Department for Business and Trade. This change is effective immediately.

[HCWS129]

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