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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Thursday 22 May 2025

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Remote Betting and Gaming Duty: Horseracing

1. **Nick Timothy** (West Suffolk) (Con): If she will produce an impact assessment for the proposed remote betting and gaming duty on the British horseracing industry. [904264]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stephanie Peacock): The Secretary of State is in Japan for the world expo conference in Osaka, strengthening UK-Japan relations. I know that she has written to you, Mr Speaker, to explain her absence.

The Government recognise the significant contribution that horseracing makes to the British economy. In that spirit, I pay tribute to Rachael Blackmore. She has had a fantastic impact on the sport and has enjoyed enormous success, and I wish her well with her retirement. His Majesty's Treasury leads on the consultation on the tax treatment of remote gambling. The consultation is open till 21 July, and any impact assessment of any legislative changes will be a matter for that Department.

Nick Timothy: The racing industry is getting a bit tired of the warm words and lack of action. At the last oral questions, the Secretary of State said that

“we need to treat different forms of gambling differently”,—[*Official Report*, 3 April 2025; Vol. 765, c. 412.]

but the Government have since proposed a flat tax on all online gambling, which fails to distinguish between betting on sports like horseracing, which is limited by the number of races and requires knowledge and thought, and online casinos and gaming. However, problem rates for bets on racing are about the same as for lottery scratchcards. Will the Minister commit here and now to making sure that betting on sports like racing is not treated the same as betting on online casinos and gaming?

Stephanie Peacock: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. I am a big supporter of racing, and I appreciate how many jobs it contributes to the economy—according to the British Horseracing Authority, it is 85,000.

I know that racing is really important to rural areas and towns. Of course, the consultation to which he refers is a Treasury lead. It is open till 21 July, but I will reflect his comments to the Treasury.

Sally Jameson (Doncaster Central) (Lab/Co-op): Doncaster racecourse is the jewel in my city's crown, and is home to the iconic St Leger festival. Following on from the question from the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Nick Timothy), can the Minister confirm that she will continue dialogue with the Treasury on the proposed flat rate of tax, recognising that horseracing—which, as she says, brings 85,000 jobs to the country nationally, and is the second largest spectator sport in the UK—is very different from online casinos and games of chance?

Stephanie Peacock: I absolutely will reflect those comments to the Treasury. I have had many a fun time at the St Leger, which is just down the road from me in Barnsley, and I would be delighted to visit again, if I can.

UK Film Production

2. **Lewis Cocking** (Broxbourne) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to help incentivise film production in the UK. [904265]

The Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism (Chris Bryant): We support and incentivise film production in the UK through our range of audiovisual tax reliefs, through support for business rates relief, and through funding directly to the industry.

Lewis Cocking: In Broxbourne, we were meant to be seeing the £700 million Sunset Studios project, which is now sadly not going ahead, in part due to the national insurance increase, new employment regulations and this Government's handling of the economy. Is that what the Government mean by supporting the film industry?

Chris Bryant: What utter nonsense! The hon. Gentleman may only just have arrived in this House in the last year—of course, today is the anniversary of the moment when the former Prime Minister called the election and it rained on his parade. I simply point out that the company suspended its plans in the hon. Gentleman's constituency in 2023, when there was a Conservative Government.

Alistair Strathern (Hitchin) (Lab): We have fantastic film and TV sectors in Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire, and I am determined to make sure that more of our young people can access them. I recently had the pleasure of joining North Herts college to open its fantastic new Purwell Studios, meaning that young people in my constituency can access state-of-the-art training facilities in their area. How is the Minister working with the Department for Education to make sure that more young people can access the fantastic career opportunities that the film sector offers?

Chris Bryant: I am glad somebody is celebrating the film industry. My hon. Friend is absolutely right: we need to make sure that kids from every single constituency

in this land can think of the possibility of working in the film industry. I am delighted that since we introduced our two new tax reliefs in last autumn's Budget, we have already seen a large number of people making applications to the British Film Institute, and I am absolutely certain that that will mean that the British film and television sectors in the UK will be very lively for many years to come.

Grassroots Sports: Cannock Chase

3. **Josh Newbury** (Cannock Chase) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to support the provision of grassroots sports facilities in Cannock Chase constituency. [904268]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stephanie Peacock): The Government know the value of grassroots sports facilities to communities, and the role that they play in getting people active. Sport England invests over £250 million of lottery and Government funding each year in the communities that need it most.

Josh Newbury: I very much welcome the Minister's response. Through the park tennis project, Cannock Chase has benefited from £215,000 of investment from the Government and the LTA Tennis Foundation to revive tennis courts in four of our parks, but the notorious British weather remains a barrier to participation, and many in my towns and villages lack access to covered tennis and padel facilities. With the park tennis project coming to an end, will the Minister consider funding the development of more covered courts to allow my constituents to enjoy tennis, whatever the weather?

Stephanie Peacock: This Government want to ensure that everyone from all walks of life can get active in any way that works for them, come rain or shine. I therefore welcome the Lawn Tennis Association's strategic ambition to grow tennis and padel by making it accessible, welcoming, enjoyable and inspiring, but all future decisions on sports facilities will be considered in the spending review.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Mr Louie French (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con): I welcome the support of the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Josh Newbury) for our investment in his constituency while we were in government. In all seriousness, however, I would like to put on record our condolences to the families of the two Israeli embassy staff killed overnight in Washington.

Grassroots facilities are key to our communities and our sports clubs across the country, which is why we Conservatives invested more than £500 million in the next generation of athletes. However, in just 10 months, this Labour Government have cut the £21 million multi-sport grassroots facilities programme, scrapped the £30 million Lionesses fund and cancelled £57 million of opening school facilities grants. Equally worryingly, they are now trying to remove Sport England's statutory role in protecting sports pitches and playing fields across the country. Is it not clear that only the Conservatives will save our sports pitches from this "say one thing and do another" Labour Government?

Stephanie Peacock: I simply do not recognise the shadow Minister's comments, and I will not take any lessons from the Conservatives on facilities, given that they oversaw a decade of council cuts that left many of our sport and leisure facilities in desperate need of renovation.

UK-India Cultural Co-operation Agreement

4. **Deirdre Costigan** (Ealing Southall) (Lab): What assessment she has made of the potential impact of the cultural co-operation agreement between the UK and India on economic growth in the UK. [904270]

The Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism (Chris Bryant): The programme of cultural co-operation, which the Secretary of State signed earlier this month, creates significant opportunities for the UK's cultural sectors to reach a market of over 1.4 billion people in India. We expect this agreement to create skilled jobs and opportunities for young people from Southall to Kolkata over the next five years.

Deirdre Costigan: The Liberty cinema in my constituency of Ealing Southall, now the Himalaya Palace shopping centre, was the first cinema in the country to regularly show Bollywood films, and Southall has formed the backdrop of many a Bollywood movie since then, so I welcome this agreement to increase co-operation between the UK and Indian film industries for the benefit of both economies. What more can the Government and the Minister do to encourage cultural partnerships, so that the next generation of the British Indian diaspora in Southall can continue to enjoy their vibrant heritage?

Chris Bryant: There could not be a better constituency MP than my hon. Friend to highlight this subject, and to show this symbolic uniting of Indian and British culture. I think British bhangra originally came out of Ealing Southall, and so many Anglo-Indian writers have been quintessential in determining the future of the British language, and will be part of our literary future. I am absolutely delighted that we have this cultural agreement, and we are determined to work with our Indian colleagues on progressing all the ideas that my hon. Friend and others have come up with.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee.

Dame Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con): Whether it is Bollywood, Hollywood or Borehamwood, I am sure the Minister will agree that our British cultural and creative industries are our global economic superpower. While the Secretary of State is AWOL today, rumours abound that the whole Department for Culture, Media and Sport is for the chop. The Minister must see that this sends a terrible message to those sectors about how little their Government value the power of those industries. Will he take this opportunity to put that rumour to bed, and if he cannot, will he take this chance to put on record that it is a horrible idea?

Chris Bryant: If we were to get rid of the Department, one of the worst consequences would be our having to get rid of the Select Committee as well—and, for that matter, all those on the Opposition Front Bench. Oh hang on, maybe it is a good idea.

No, let us be serious. First, the Secretary of State is not absent without leave. She is doing the very important job of building our relationship with Japan. Secondly, I am not going to put this rumour to bed—I am going to bury it. I am absolutely certain that in a year's time we will be able to sing, in the words of Stephen Sondheim from the musical "Follies", "I'm still here".

Covered Tennis Courts: Hartlepool

5. Mr Jonathan Brash (Hartlepool) (Lab): What steps she is taking to help increase the number of covered tennis courts in Hartlepool constituency. [904271]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stephanie Peacock): I am a huge supporter of tennis and the vital role that it plays in getting people active. I enjoyed a fantastic trip to the National Tennis Centre in November, and had the pleasure of meeting staff at the LTA. The Government are committed to ensuring that everyone, regardless of background, has access to and can benefit from quality sport and physical activity opportunities.

Mr Brash: Hartlepool is home to a number of thriving tennis clubs, including Hartlepool lawn tennis club. Founded in 1884, it is one of the oldest active tennis clubs in the world. Despite that history, we do not have access to covered tennis courts, which means that poor weather—common in Hartlepool—often disrupts participation, particularly for those with a disability or a long-term health condition. Earlier this week, top British tennis players called on the UK Government to invest in a new national network of covered tennis courts, and I want one for Hartlepool. Will the Minister consider their request, so that every community can take part in tennis, come rain or shine?

Stephanie Peacock: My hon. Friend is a passionate advocate for his constituency, and it is great to see the passion of the leading players. I wish them all success in their upcoming events, and I am personally very excited to see the return of women's tennis to Queen's—the Queen's Club championships—after 50 years. All future decisions on facilities will, of course, be considered in the spending review, but I am very happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss that further.

Joe Robertson (Isle of Wight East) (Con): Together with the LTA, the previous Conservative Government invested £30 million in park tennis courts—2,500 of them all over the country, including in and around Hartlepool. That is to the benefit of local communities, so why are this Government not continuing that investment?

Stephanie Peacock: As I said, all future decisions are for the spending review. We are a very big supporter of the LTA's work and are really pleased to see it, and would be happy to meet LTA to discuss it.

UK Artists Touring the EU

6. Pete Wishart (Perth and Kinross-shire) (SNP): What progress her Department has made on removing barriers for UK artists seeking to tour in the EU.

[904272]

The Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism (Chris Bryant): I was absolutely delighted that the Prime Minister's EU-UK deal included a direct reference to the importance of touring artists and cultural exchange. I have already been in touch with my EU counterpart commissioner, and I intend to take the matter forward as soon as I can.

Pete Wishart: I am grateful to the Minister for that response, but it is over four years since I first raised this matter in an urgent question in the House of Commons. In that time, nearly half of UK musicians say that they have lost work in Europe and precious income as they confront all the Brexit barriers, visa issues and cabotage restrictions. The Labour manifesto vowed to resolve this, and we were all grateful for the warm words in the reset document, but real action is required. When can we see our wonderful UK artists back in the concert halls and arenas of Europe, travelling freely and without any restriction?

Chris Bryant: That is absolutely our aim and intention, and the hon. Gentleman knows that I am as committed to that as he is. Obviously, the UK-EU deal is very good, but we want to make sure that we pursue all the individual issues that were raised that have not yet been resolved, and this is one of them. As I said, I have already made contact with Commissioner Micallef, and I intend to chase this down as fast as I can. I know the hon. Gentleman does not like being happy, but if I might just quote "Hamlet" to him:

Our doubts are traitors,
And make us lose the good which oft we might win
By fearing to attempt.

Mr Speaker: I think we've got the return of Sir John Hayes.

Rachel Blake (Cities of London and Westminster) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Minister for his encouraging remarks about the progress of the UK-EU deal. Does he agree that the changes that we are making will support the vitality of London's west end, and provide a strong foundation for tackling the issue of carnets in our future negotiations with the EU, so that we can continue this great work?

Chris Bryant: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The west end of London is very important to not just our film industry, but our tourism. Cultural exchange with other countries in Europe is a really important part of the deal that we have struck, and we want to build on that. The more we can do so over the coming months, the better. Mr Speaker, I do not know if you talk to your counterparts anywhere else in Europe, but if you could raise the matter with them as well, that would be very helpful.

Mr Speaker: Marvellous. We'll talk to Carolyn Harris now. No, I do apologise; I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Max Wilkinson (Cheltenham) (LD): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am pleased to not be forgotten today. [Interruption.] If we are abolished, perhaps we will all be forgotten. There have been previous positive statements on touring performers, but there was no concrete good

news in the UK-EU deal. Touring performers are reliant on this Department to fight their corner, as are the rest of the creative industries, not least on artificial intelligence and copyright, which we are talking about later today. The Minister says he is burying the rumour about the abolition of DCMS, so why do so many people here think it will happen, and why is it being briefed to the press so often?

Chris Bryant: The question I am asking myself is: why on earth is the hon. Gentleman perpetuating daft rumours? Honestly, the Department is not going to be abolished; it would be absolute madness. This Department touches the lives of nearly everybody in the country, every single day of the week, whether through sport—football, rugby, cricket, tennis—broadcasting, or our wonderful creative industries. So many different aspects of what we do touch everybody's lives. I cannot see any way in which the Department will be abolished.

The hon. Gentleman's question was about EU touring. If he talks to all the liberal-leaning Governments in Europe, I talk to all the socialist-leaning Governments in Europe, and the Tories speak to, well, their colleagues in Europe—for that matter, Reform could speak to some of the barmpots in Europe—then we might manage to secure EU touring.

Lower League Football Clubs: Funding

7. **Carolyn Harris** (Neath and Swansea East) (Lab): What discussions she has had with the Premier League on the distribution of funding to lower league football clubs. [904275]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stephanie Peacock): The Government recognise the importance of distribution to the health of English football, and have engaged extensively with football authorities, including the Premier League, to encourage industry to come to an agreement that works for the football pyramid. If industry is not able to solve the issue, we, of course, have the Football Governance Bill, which gives the independent football regulator the power to ensure that such an agreement is made.

Carolyn Harris: English Football League clubs like my local team, Swansea City, are struggling. In fact, according to the accounts for EFL championship clubs covering the season ending May 2024, all but four clubs were making a loss, with an average loss of £17.5 million for the period. What more can we do to speed up a deal between the Premier League and lower-league clubs to ensure that funds are fairly distributed, and to help so many local teams survive?

Stephanie Peacock: Continued delays to a potential new distribution deal serve no one, and we understand the uncertainty and instability that they can cause many clubs, including Swansea City. We are backing the football regulator, which is what I encourage Members to do. The Government are keeping our manifesto commitment.

Mr Tom Morrison (Cheadle) (LD): Last week, I met Nick from Cheadle and Gatley football club, a fantastic organisation that works to help youth football, in particular, in the area. The club is struggling, particularly with energy prices, which are impacting a huge amount of

grassroots football across the country. What more can the Government do to get the Premier League and the larger clubs to support lower-league and grassroots clubs, in particular with energy prices?

Stephanie Peacock: I know from my constituency the huge benefit that grassroots club bring. Of course, the Premier League sends a huge amount of money down through the pyramid. We are introducing the football regulator, which will be able to help secure a deal if a voluntary deal cannot be reached; we also have the Football Foundation, which works with the Premier League to put money into grassroots football. I would be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss the matter further.

Sonia Kumar (Dudley) (Lab): I wholeheartedly support the Football Governance Bill, which is about to begin its Committee stage in this place. It is crucial that we support football at all levels of the football pyramid. What work is the Minister doing to ensure that an adequate number of 3G and 4G pitches are available in areas like my constituency?

Stephanie Peacock: My hon. Friend is a strong champion for her area, and I have met her to talk about grassroots facilities in Dudley. We are working with the Football Foundation to ensure that we invest up and down the country in our grassroots facilities.

Mr Peter Bedford (Mid Leicestershire) (Con): Can the Minister give assurances to football fans in my constituency that with the burdens of the Employment Rights Bill, the hike in national insurance contributions and the introduction of yet another regulator, there will not be a hike in ticket prices?

Stephanie Peacock: I simply do not recognise the premise of the hon. Gentleman's question. The Government are committed to our manifesto commitment. The Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism reminds me that it is a year since the general election; prior to that, the right hon. Member for Daventry (Stuart Andrew) and I were on the previous Football Governance Bill Committee, where we spent many hours together. This Government have strengthened that Bill, and fans will now be consulted on ticket pricing.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Stuart Andrew (Daventry) (Con): The nominee for the chair of the football regulator continues to raise serious questions. During the Select Committee hearing, it was revealed that the candidate had donated to both the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister's leadership campaigns, something I do not recall being declared on Second Reading. The Secretary of State has now, rightly, been forced to recuse herself from the process. Given that it is likely that there will be a prime ministerial interest in the appointee, will the Prime Minister do the same?

Stephanie Peacock: There is no suggestion of wrongdoing. Indeed, David Kogan was approached under the right hon. Gentleman's Government for the role. We have full confidence in him; he was endorsed by the cross-party Select Committee.

Stuart Andrew: May I gently point out that the gentleman in question was approached not by me or by any other Minister, but by the permanent secretary who is not a political appointee. I know that the Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism has been on a long audition for the role of Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, so his comments on the rumours about the abolition of the Department are reassuring. However, I gently point out that most of these briefings seem to be coming from No.10, so will the Secretary of State speak to people in No.10 to reassure all of those sectors that this Department will remain for the years ahead?

Stephanie Peacock: David Kogan was appointed to the board of Channel 4 under the previous Conservative Government. He has been welcomed across this House and across the media and footballing world. My hon. Friend the Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism has dismissed those rumours. Let us not believe everything that we read in the papers.

Sports Facilities: Areas of Housing Growth

8. **Olly Glover** (Didcot and Wantage) (LD): What discussions she has had with Cabinet colleagues on the provision of sporting facilities in areas of housing growth. [904279]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stephanie Peacock): Access to places and spaces to be physically active, including in high-quality sports facilities, is vital for all local communities across the country. That is why we are investing £100 million via the multi-sport grassroots facilities programme to provide access to high-quality facilities and support more players getting on to the pitch wherever they live.

Olly Glover: In my Oxfordshire constituency, local authorities want to support the provision of major leisure facilities for our growing population, including in the new estates in north-east Didcot, Valley Park and Wantage Kingsgrove. However, they have not found it possible to secure enough funding from developers via section 106 agreements. Will the Minister meet me to discuss a more strategic approach to leisure provision to help us create healthier and happier communities?

Stephanie Peacock: Leisure facilities are vital to getting people active, and I would be delighted to meet the hon. Member.

Rachel Taylor (North Warwickshire and Bedworth) (Lab): In my hometown of Atherstone, the leisure centre and swimming pool is beyond its useful life. That is the case for more than 50% of swimming facilities up and down this country. When we talk about building new homes, we need to make sure that we are building accessible communities with facilities for people to enjoy sports. As we look forward to a fantastic summer of tennis, I would also like to put in a plea for covered tennis facilities, because half of the time it is raining, and people cannot play tennis in the rain.

Stephanie Peacock: We have had some very cheery messages about tennis. The Lawn Tennis Association has done a very good job ahead of these questions.

We are committed to building 1.5 million new homes, but we want to make sure that they are communities. I agree with what my hon. Friend has said, and I would be delighted to discuss it further with her.

Creative Industries: Wales

9. **Catherine Fookes** (Monmouthshire) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to support the growth of creative industries in Wales. [904280]

The Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism (Chris Bryant): Our primary support for the creative industries in Wales is through the tax reliefs available to video games, the audiovisual sector, theatre, museums and orchestras, and also through the screen industry's research and development firm Clwstwr, which is based in the Cardiff region.

Catherine Fookes: A musician, an animator and a horror writer are among the many constituents who have written to me recently to express their concerns about generative AI being trained on their work without compensation and without their consent. They need action now, not in 18 months when the damage will have been done and their work will have been scraped. What will the Minister do with the opportunity before us this afternoon in the Data (Use and Access) Bill to ensure that our fantastic creative industries have their copyright protected and can grow?

Chris Bryant: The UK is a creative content superpower and we should do nothing to undermine that. In my hon. Friend's constituency, there is a famous gallery that produces blue plaques, which celebrate many of the creative industry heroes around the country—I launched the one for Cary Grant in Bristol not long ago. I am keen that we make sure that we protect those industries and enhance them for the future. She basically asked whether we could have a debate later today on the data Bill, and we are going to have one.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The creative industries in Wales are incredibly important, but it is also incredibly important to have creative industries everywhere in this United Kingdom. There is an opportunity for those in Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England to have creative industry exchanges. Is that something that the Minister has considered, so that the benefits from Wales can come to Northern Ireland, Scotland and England and we can all gain?

Mr Speaker: Yes, very creative.

Chris Bryant: Very creative indeed—all the way from Monmouth to Northern Ireland. All our creative industries function across the whole of the UK. Making those links between different parts of the UK is a really important part of ensuring that we prosper into the future. I visited Bad Wolf studios in Cardiff a couple of weeks ago to see the phenomenal filming work that is being done there. Obviously, Dr Who has been filmed there. I know that many of the people who have worked in Cardiff will also work in Northern Ireland, which has a very lively high-end television sector as well.

Creative Industries: Bedford

10. **Mohammad Yasin** (Bedford) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to support the growth of creative industries in Bedford constituency. [904281]

The Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism (Chris Bryant): The most important thing we have done for Bedford is secure the Universal Studios theme park, which will be the biggest theme park in Europe and one of the biggest investments in the UK for many years.

Mohammad Yasin: Huge congratulations to the Department on securing the Universal Studios park—it is a major investment in Bedford. With the creative industries rightly a priority for growth, does the Minister agree that this success must also support grassroots venues such as Bedford's iconic Esquires, which is now seeking community ownership through the Music Venue Trust's "Own Our Venues" campaign? Will the Minister back efforts to protect the local institutions that nurture talented community identity?

Chris Bryant: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; it is great that the theme park is coming. The shadow Secretary of State says that it was all down to him, but he did not get it across the line. The whole point of a deal is that it is not a deal until you actually get it across the line, which we did. My hon. Friend is also right that we do not just need to develop massive theme parks; we also need small venues such as the one he refers to, where I think George Ezra has performed and where Coldplay have performed twice in the past. That is one reason I am really glad that we have now managed to get over the line a levy on arena tickets to help fund small music venues across the whole of the UK.

Topical Questions

T1. [904282] **Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes) (Lab): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism (Chris Bryant): Since the last Question Time, we have closed the deal on a multibillion-pound investment in a new Universal Studios theme park, and the Secretary of State has signed a cultural co-operation agreement between the UK and India, which helped underpin the free trade agreement that we concluded this month. I have been working with colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care to deliver a solution to the ongoing uncertainty facing the advertising and broadcasting sectors, as will be reported today in a written ministerial statement. The Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley South (Stephanie Peacock), the whole of the Department and the Secretary of State worked hard with thousands of others, including the Royal British Legion, to deliver an 80th anniversary of VE Day that we can all be proud of.

Mr Speaker, I should just say that today's Order Paper, as you know, refers to Members of Parliament who gave their lives during the second world war, which is actually an idea I came up with many years ago. However, there is a little mistake in it today. It refers to Major John Cartland, but it was actually Major Ronnie

Cartland who gave his life in the war. He was one of the bravest people, and he protected thousands of others by giving his life in the retreat to Dunkirk.

Mr Speaker: I am glad you had a good idea, and I am glad I could fulfil your idea.

Melanie Onn: Congratulations, Mr Speaker.

GrimFalfest is part of Grimsby's brilliant award-winning Viking festival. It launched in 2022, attracting more than 20,000 visitors, and now talented local producer Julia Thompson is developing the concept and turning Grimsby into the destination of Havelok's kingdom. What support can the Minister offer for heritage-led tourism projects, which create economic opportunities in places such as Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes?

Chris Bryant: I have looked at some of the material for Havelok's weekend—I think he is getting a weekend. I did not know the story of Grim, the fisherman who saved the young Prince Havelok, but it is a great story. It is also good to see that there is a new artwork to modernise the old artwork outside the Grimsby Institute. My hon. Friend is right that we need to do more for our coastal communities.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Saqib Bhatti (Meriden and Solihull East) (Con): The Minister will know that our creative sectors, including our artists, writers, publishers and the fashion industry to name a few, are all fighting for their professional lives as artificial intelligence companies use their intellectual property for AI models. Why will the Government not put an end to the AI copyright issue and back the amendments from the Lords, which have such overwhelming support?

Chris Bryant: For a start, we will have that debate this afternoon. I am determined that through this whole process we will get to a place where creators of every different kind, whether in music, word or images, will be able very easily to protect their copyright and gain remuneration. I also want to get to a place where AI companies will pay for the work that they look at and use to create their systems. I note that the Conservatives are all over the shop on this issue. They have had a free vote, a vote on one side and a vote on the other side, and we will see whether even their Front Benchers vote this afternoon.

T2. [904283] **Catherine Fookes** (Monmouthshire) (Lab): Recently I have been contacted by constituents with concerns that breaking into the arts and creative industries, and staying in those industries, is incredibly difficult for those from lower-income backgrounds or those living outside major cities and media hubs. As the Minister knows, having visited Monmouthshire many times, we have no cities—only small towns. What actions are the Government taking to create more opportunity for talented people to enter and stay in the arts industries, regardless of their background?

Chris Bryant: My hon. Friend makes a good point. One of the things that worries me about the creative industries in the UK is that often the only people who conceive of them as a possible career are those whose parents worked in them. I do not want the creative industries to be hereditary; I want everybody to have a chance, whatever their background. That is partly about

making sure we champion the creative industries, which are our economic future. We must embrace them and ensure that everybody gets a decent chance in life.

T3. [904284] **Richard Tice** (Boston and Skegness) (Reform): Apart from the sensational ice cream, I am sure the Minister will join me in congratulating Skegness on being awarded the prestigious blue flag for the quality of its beach. I am concerned that not enough people can enjoy that, however, because of the lack of direct public transport from London. National Express has not restored its coach service since the pandemic and there is no direct train from London to Skegness. Will he work with me and the Department for Transport to try to improve direct transport links?

Chris Bryant: That is a bit transporty for me. First, the best ice cream in Britain is produced in the Rhondda by Subzero, and I am happy to have a contest with the hon. Member any day of the week on that front if he wants. Secondly, I suggest gently to him that one of the reasons the beaches in the UK improved was that we joined the European Union. Before our membership of the European Union, all our beaches were filthy and covered in tar.

Mr Speaker: And obviously Frederick's ice cream in Chorley.

T4. [904285] **Patrick Hurley** (Southport) (Lab): Earlier this week, I attended the launch of the Independent Venue Community, which is a charity aiming to bring community activity into night-time music venues when they are usually closed. Does the Minister agree that such innovative thinking is beneficial to health and wellbeing, the arts sector more generally and town centre renewal? What support can the Department offer to see such schemes rolled out nationwide?

Chris Bryant: All I really want to say is yes, because I agree with everything my hon. Friend said. Since you like brevity, Mr Speaker, and brevity is the soul of wit, I am just going to say yes.

T5. [904286] **John Glen** (Salisbury) (Con): One of the best experiences I had as a Minister in DCMS several years ago was visiting 114 places around the country. I extend an offer to the Minister to come to Salisbury to see the work of Wiltshire Creative. Salisbury international arts festival is starting this weekend, and we would welcome his insights on how collaboration to maximise investment in cultural growth in south Wiltshire can be facilitated.

Chris Bryant: I get a lot of invites. *[Interruption.]* Yes, I honestly do get a lot of invites—and some of them I take up. I am a bit Ado Annie:

I'm just a girl who cain't say no

I'm in a terrible fix

I always say "come on, let's go"

Just when I orta say nix.

T6. [904287] **Josh Newbury** (Cannock Chase) (Lab): Cannock Chase is home to many fantastic dance schools such as the Crystal Academy in Hednesford, which has been crowned dance school of the year. Dance can empower people from all backgrounds, but a third of schools are not teaching it, despite its being on the national curriculum. A varied, high-quality sports offer

should not be only for a privileged few. What steps are the Government taking to ensure that all schools can inspire their students through dance?

Chris Bryant: I think my hon. Friend asked what steps I am taking to promote dance. Well, it takes two to tango, and we are working with the Department for Education to try to ensure that creative education is a really important part of everything we do in all our schools. The fact that fewer kids are now studying creative subjects is a problem, and we need to rectify it.

T7. [904288] **Pete Wishart** (Perth and Kinross-shire) (SNP): I heard the Minister mention this in passing, but would he not concede that the voluntary grassroots music levy is not making the progress we had all hoped for? The Music Venue Trust has revealed that almost 95% of arena and stadium shows do not have any levy at all. We need that income to rejuvenate grassroots venues; the Minister knows that. Surely it is now time to think of a formal levy and even legislation, if required.

Chris Bryant: I have said that we will make the levy statutory if we need to do so, but we are making progress. I had wanted us to have made substantial progress by the first quarter of this year. The levy has already been applied to half a million tickets and I want to get to much bigger numbers by the end of the year. The Culture, Media and Sport Committee did a really good job in coming up with the idea and we are determined to push it forward. If the hon. Member could be less grumpy, that would help. If he could ring everybody he knows in the industry and persuade them to sign up to the levy, that would be great.

T8. [904289] **Josh Dean** (Hertford and Stortford) (Lab): As this Labour Government deliver a national youth strategy and open a network of Young Futures hubs, what assurances will the Minister give that the Department will learn from the best practice of charities such as the Thirst Youth Café and FUTUREhope in my constituency? Will she join me to meet them and find out more about how they deliver for young people in Hertford and Stortford?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stephanie Peacock): The Government value youth services and we know the vital role they can play in young people's lives. I have had a number of cross-Government meetings on this issue in the last few weeks. We continue to work on our national youth strategy, and if my diary allows, I will be delighted to visit.

Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con): I will enter the great parliamentary ice cream competition and say that Cheshire, of course, does the best ice cream.

Given the huge riches in the Premier League, should there not be a greater expectation that more money flows down into grassroots football and non-league clubs such as Knutsford FC and Witton Albion in my constituency, which work unbelievably hard just to stay afloat? I say that especially as so many Premier League footballers live just up the road from the two clubs.

Stephanie Peacock: The hon. Lady makes an important point. It is not for Government to decide that, but I know from my own experience that grassroots clubs

play a huge role in communities. The Premier League contributes a lot. It is up to the Premier League to decide how much money it puts down the pyramid.

Dame Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): The issue of copyright and creatives is big in the news because of artificial intelligence, but it has also been a long-running issue and it is good that the spotlight is on it. Will the Minister look into a levy on IT equipment, so that people who provide their creative material on that receive some effective royalties, as happens under the book lending scheme? This is an early idea, but if he starts talking about it now in government, we might get some success.

Chris Bryant: I am happy to look at anything, but we are reluctant to start putting levies on things that close down the British business. My hon. Friend makes a good point about trying to make sure that people have an opportunity to make a career and a living out of the creative industries. It strikes me that with more than 50% of people working freelance in the industry, that is one of the things we definitely have to look at, and I know that my hon. Friend has a large sector in her constituency.

Sarah Dyke (Glastonbury and Somerton) (LD): Somerset is home to some iconic film locations such as Glastonbury Tor, which featured in “The Kid Who Would Be King”; Montacute House, which featured in “Wolf Hall” and “Sense and Sensibility”; and Wells, where “Hot Fuzz” was filmed. What steps is the Minister taking to ensure that the film industry in the UK thrives and continues to use our iconic locations?

Chris Bryant: The hon. Lady is right: one of the things that brings a lot of people to the UK as tourists—we want to reach 50 million international visitors by 2030—is seeing places where things were filmed. I went to Bath recently and saw many different places where there has been filming for “Bridgerton” and lots of different movies. It is an important part of our business and sometimes we need to make sure that local authorities take up such opportunities.

Amanda Hack (North West Leicestershire) (Lab): There has been rapid expansion of new homes in my constituency. However, the development of sports facilities in areas such as Ashby-de-la-Zouch are not keeping pace, and in Hugglescote we see a fight to save the rec. How will the Minister ensure that when new homes are created, we protect and develop new sports facilities in parks for local people?

Stephanie Peacock: This Government are committed to grassroots sport. That is why we have invested over £100 million this year. However, I will reflect my hon. Friend's comments in discussions with the relevant Department.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Billinghay swimming pool in my constituency is a much-cherished local facility, which has sadly fallen into disrepair and been unable to open for the community this year. A very good local group is trying to raise funds to restore it. What can the Minister do to help?

Stephanie Peacock: Local authorities suffered huge cuts under the previous Government, and that is why many swimming pools have fallen into disrepair. I will

look into the issue for the hon. Lady. I also understand that there is a Westminster Hall debate on a similar subject the first week back after recess.

John Slinger (Rugby) (Lab): The bands I played in never quite got to a European tour—[*Interruption.*] Artists tell me how much they and their teams have suffered in the disastrous post-Brexit landscape for touring artists. We have the best bands and artists in the world and they bring huge joy to us here. They want to share the love abroad and in so doing bring a lot of money to the UK economy. Will my hon. Friend assure me that he is acting with haste? As Shakespeare said,

All the world's a stage,

And all the men and women merely players;

They have their exits and their entrances.

Let us open more doors for them.

Chris Bryant: And,

“one man in his time plays many parts”.

Clearly, my hon. Friend is one of those people. We are determined to sort this out. I know that there are many of us who fear that we lost many things when Brexit happened. However, there are other wise words from Shakespeare. As Queen Margaret in “Henry VI” said: “wise men ne'er sit and wail their loss, but cheerily seek how to redress their harms”.

Josh Babarinde (Eastbourne) (LD): The amazing dancers at Eastbourne's Shining Stars Dance Academy have qualified for the dance world cup in Spain this July. It will cost thousands of pounds to get them there, though, so they have launched a crowdfunding campaign. Will the Minister back their campaign to get to the world cup and congratulate them for their achievement?

Chris Bryant: Yes, and if the hon. Member sends me a link, I will contribute myself.

Sally Jameson (Doncaster Central) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Please accept my apologies because, in my haste to stand up for British horseracing, I forgot to refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests detailing an event I attended at Doncaster racecourse in my constituency last year.

Mr Speaker: That corrects that.

Just to add, I thank the hon. Member for Rhondda and Ogmore (Chris Bryant)—the author of a good book about certain gay MPs—for his earlier point.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Battersea, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Same-sex couples: Church Blessing Services

1. **Steve Race** (Exeter) (Lab): What steps the Church is taking to roll out stand-alone services to bless same-sex couples. [904305]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Marsha De Cordova): A proposal to enable churches to opt in to the use of prayers of love and faith in stand-alone services is out for consultation and will come back to the House of Bishops in October.

Steve Race: Does my hon. Friend agree that the next Archbishop of Canterbury should be someone who can show leadership on this issue, both for congregants and clergy who would want to participate in such a service, and ensure that the Church of England finally treats LGBT Anglicans in Exeter and beyond equally within the church?

Marsha De Cordova: I am sure my hon. Friend will understand why I cannot comment on who the next Archbishop should be. The process is well under way, and I am sure that hon. Members will join me in holding them in prayer as they go about this important work. This issue affects many people, and people have deep feelings about it. If the House of Bishops approves the proposals to enable prayers of love and faith in stand-alone services, the business committee of the General Synod could timetable this issue for a debate in February 2026.

Occupied Palestinian Territories: Christians

2. **Mary Glindon** (Newcastle upon Tyne East and Wallsend) (Lab): What support the Church of England is providing to Christians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. [904307]

4. **James Asser** (West Ham and Beckton) (Lab): What support the Church of England is providing to Christians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. [904309]

Marsha De Cordova: In October 2023, the Archbishops of Jerusalem and Canterbury launched an emergency appeal for the diocese of Jerusalem, and it receives donations from international partners, including the UK. The fund supports people throughout the Holy Land and has supported medical services for vulnerable out-patients in al-Ahli hospital in Gaza, St Luke's hospital in Nablus and the Penman clinic in Jenin.

Mary Glindon: Thousands of Palestinians, including children, are detained by the Israeli military. Reports of mistreatment and torture date back to UNICEF's 2013 report on children in Israeli military detention. Last year, the UN special rapporteurs highlighted the escalating use of torture against Palestinian detainees with people raped, electrocuted, waterboarded, suspended from ceilings, tied to beds, blindfolded and made to wear nappies. What can the Church do to help end this appalling cruelty?

Marsha De Cordova: The Church unequivocally condemns all forms of violence and torture, and I know I speak for many when I say impunity for abuse against Palestinian detainees must end. But there is a hard limit on what the Church can do while the Israeli military continues to oppress Palestinians in the west bank and Gaza. We need an end to the occupation, a return of all Israeli hostages and Palestinian detainees without charge, an immediate ceasefire and all essential aid allowed into Gaza.

James Asser: We have seen increasing settler violence in the west bank, and Palestinian Christians were restricted and prevented from worshipping over Easter. I ask my hon. Friend to use her good offices to encourage the Church of England to do all it can, including working with other Churches and across faiths to protect the rights of the Palestinian people and ensure freedom of worship across all faiths in the face of increased harassment and violence.

Marsha De Cordova: We can all agree that the mass atrocities in Gaza and the attacks on civilians in the west bank have been repeatedly raised at Church Commissioner questions—indeed, by my hon. Friend on previous occasions. I have written to my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on this issue. I can assure my hon. Friend that bishops of the Church of England have regularly visited Palestine to hear from Christians on the ground, but it is clear that to see an end to military and settler attacks on Palestinian worshippers, we need to see an end to occupation. The Church was deeply concerned that worshippers were restricted from worshipping during the Easter period.

Mr Speaker: I call the Father of the House.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): This week I met Rana Musa of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate. Under the traditional status quo, the Israeli authorities levied *arnona*—the property tax—only on Church-owned business properties, but they are now levying it on Church properties used for religious purposes. That is an existential crisis for the Christian churches in Jerusalem. It is part of a pattern of intolerable pressure that has resulted in a reduction of the Christian population in the west bank to just 45,000 people. That must stop. I beg the Church of England, the Catholic Church, all Christians in this country and everybody else to shout at the top of their voices that Christians in the Holy Land deserve to be treated with respect.

Marsha De Cordova: I thank the Father of the House for his question. He makes a truly important point: everybody should have the freedom to worship and nobody should be allowed to prevent that with impunity. As he rightly says, it is up to us—the Church of England, the Catholic Church and all people of faith—to use our voices for the voiceless. People should not be prevented from worshipping.

Richard Foord (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): Open Doors reported earlier this year that about three quarters of houses belonging to Christians in Gaza have been damaged or totally destroyed. Given that that is true for people of all faiths in Gaza, does the hon. Lady accept that it is incumbent on the Church, the Government and all of us to support them?

Marsha De Cordova: The hon. Member raises another crucial point. This is not just for the Church; everybody has a responsibility to support the efforts to bring about a ceasefire and peace in the region and to allow aid in unimpeded. As we all know, aid has been prevented from getting into Gaza. We need it to be allowed in.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The hon. Member for Arbroath and Broughty Ferry, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—

Local Government Boundary Commission for England

3. **Blake Stephenson** (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con): If he will make an assessment of the adequacy of the resources available to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to deliver electoral arrangements under the "English Devolution" White Paper. [904308]

Stephen Gethins (Arbroath and Broughty Ferry) (SNP): The commission's approach to managing its work programme supports it with accommodating work arising from the "English Devolution" White Paper while still delivering periodic electoral reviews. The committee has agreed to some additional resourcing for the commission for this financial year. That will help to respond swiftly and effectively to any request for assistance in relation to the development of electoral and boundary arrangements for newly established unitary authorities.

Blake Stephenson: I declare an interest: I am a Central Bedfordshire councillor.

It is important that the boundary commission delivers electoral arrangements that provide strong local representation throughout English devolution. Will the hon. Member assure the House that resources available to the commission will be sufficient to ensure that representation is not sacrificed on the basis of arbitrary timelines for devolution?

Stephen Gethins: The hon. Member raises a good point and has some good inside information. Some £500,000 has been allocated, but the committee will keep that under periodic review in co-operation with the commission.

Dame Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): It is right that we have properly resourced boundary commissions, but we have more than one in England: the Boundary Commission for England and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England. Have there been conversations at the Electoral Commission or elsewhere about amalgamating those two commissions or pooling resources in order to save taxpayer money?

Stephen Gethins: I am not aware of such conversations at the moment, but I will raise that with the commission on her behalf.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Battersea, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Interfaith Cohesion

5. **Jas Athwal** (Ilford South) (Lab): What steps the Church is taking to help increase interfaith cohesion. [904310]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Marsha De Cordova): The Church is a presence in every constituency across the country, working alongside all faiths. Interfaith advisers work closely with local faith leaders, local authorities and other public bodies to foster better relations and understanding of different faith communities. Many churches, including in my Battersea constituency, take part in an annual interfaith peace walk and other events.

Jas Athwal: I thank my hon. Friend for the work she is doing representing the Church Commissioners on this matter. Ilford South is one of the most diverse constituencies in the country. In central Ilford we have a mosque, a mandir, a church and a gurdwara just down the road. Our faith groups build community resilience and exemplify the very best of humanity—they are our bedrock. Will my hon. Friend join me in celebrating the diversity of our faith groups in Ilford South, and what

conversations she has had with the Church Commissioners on how the Church continues to strengthen this interfaith work?

Marsha De Cordova: It is a pleasure to congratulate the work of faith groups in my hon. Friend's constituency, where there are good examples of different faith organisations coming together. The Archdeacon of West Ham informs me that local churches are closely engaged with the London Boroughs Faiths Network, and local clergy work alongside local rabbis and imams to build closer links. The local faith forum is hosting a walk of peace in my hon. Friend's constituency on 1 June, and I hope he will be able to take part.

Martin Vickers (Brigg and Immingham) (Con): Interfaith work is vital to our local communities up and down the country. Does the hon. Lady agree that leadership is important and that if the Church of England were to follow the Roman Catholic Church and appoint its leader in days rather than months, it would give a great boost to interfaith work?

Mr Speaker: Marsha, chair the conclave! [*Laughter.*]

Marsha De Cordova: If only, Mr Speaker—though I do have the right colours on this morning.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge) (Con): The Cardinal for Battersea.

Marsha De Cordova: Oh my goodness! The hon. Member for Brigg and Immingham (Martin Vickers) makes a really important point about the importance of interfaith working, and it happens at all levels—we have our local clergy but also faith leaders and advisers working across all different faiths to bring us together. What happened last summer during the riots was a good example of how interfaith leaders work together.

National Church Institutions: Safeguarding

6. **Luke Myer** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): What progress the National Church Institutions have made on improving safeguarding. [904311]

Marsha De Cordova: I thank my hon. Friend for continuing to rightly hold the Church to account on this issue. As he knows, in February the General Synod voted to adopt a partially independent safeguarding model that includes an external scrutiny body and a commitment to carry out further work to identify the legal and practical challenges of moving towards a fully independent safeguarding model.

Luke Myer: Next month I will meet the Safeguarding Minister alongside my constituent and a group of survivors of abuse and safeguarding failure within the Church. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) for the work she has been doing to push the case for fully independent safeguarding processes. Will she continue to impress upon colleagues the need for full independence in terms of operations and oversight within the Church?

Marsha De Cordova: I reiterate that it is really important that Members, including my hon. Friend, continue to raise this issue and hold the Church to account. The Church

is undertaking detailed work to look towards seeking to go with a fully independent model. In the meantime, the Church is getting on with setting up the external scrutiny body, which is likely to be on a statutory basis, in order to give it depth and may require legislation. As I have said on many occasions in Church Commissioners questions, it is so important that the Church seeks to restore and rebuild trust, and that begins with ensuring that we have a credible model for safeguarding.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Second Church Estates Commissioner for her response. The churches should always be a place for those who seek help, assistance, support and comfort whenever things have happened that are completely against the teachings of the Bible. For those who carry out these heinous crimes, there must be no excuses and no apologies; they must go to court to face the allegations that are made against them, and then when the crimes are proven, they must be sent to jail. The Church's foundation is God and the teachings of the Bible. Those who carry out those crimes deserve absolutely no help within the Church whatsoever.

Marsha De Cordova: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Justice must be served regardless of the institution a crime is committed in.

Leasehold: Value for Money

7. **Rachel Blake** (Cities of London and Westminster) (Lab/Co-op): What steps the Church Commissioners are taking to ensure value for money for leaseholders. [904313]

Marsha De Cordova: The Church Commissioners property team regularly meets and engages with residents associations, as part of its programme of support for its tenants, to ensure best value for money for leaseholders.

Rachel Blake: I thank my hon. Friend for the time she spent with me and my constituents of the Hyde Park estate to discuss tackling some of the high service charges they are facing. Does she agree that it is vital that the Government continue to make progress on the regulation of managing agents so that these high costs are clamped down on and there is more accountability for leaseholders?

Marsha De Cordova: I commend my hon. Friend for all the work she is doing on this important issue, which affects many constituencies, and it was a pleasure to meet her and members of that residents association. We all know that many managing agents behave in ways that are not fit for purpose. It is absolutely right that we need legislation to deal with unscrupulous managing agents, because things cannot continue in the current vein. I thank her for all the work she is doing.

Safeguarding

8. **Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): What assessment the Church has made of the potential merits of implementing an independent safeguarding process. [904314]

Marsha De Cordova: At the General Synod in February, I called for a fully independent model for safeguarding. Synod did not adopt that approach but did commit to undertaking some detailed work that would ensure it

could work towards that sort of model. As I said earlier in my responses, it is vital that the Church seeks to begin to restore and rebuild trust and confidence in it.

Wera Hobhouse: I thank the hon. Lady for that answer. Horribly and tragically, one of my constituents was a victim of abuse in the Church of England. We must never forget that there are victims and survivors involved here, and they were dismayed when earlier this year the Church of England's governing body rejected a fully independent safeguarding model to deal with abuse cases. The Church should not fall behind other organisations on safeguarding. The hon. Lady has given me her answer already, but can she reassure me that she will continue to push for a fully independent body, as that must be our goal?

Marsha De Cordova: Absolutely. I was at that meeting of Synod and it was disappointing that my preferred model of full independence was not adopted. We owe it to those like the hon. Lady's constituent, who was a victim and is now a survivor, to ensure that the Church works at pace towards a fully independent model for safeguarding.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

The hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent and Rhymney, representing the House of Commons Commission, was asked—

“For Women Scotland” Supreme Court Judgment

9. **John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): Whether the Commission is taking steps to comply with the Supreme Court judgment in the case of *For Women Scotland v. the Scottish Ministers* of 16 April 2025. [904315]

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent and Rhymney): The House of Commons Commission is always concerned to comply with the law. The policies and guidance of the House have been reviewed and it does not appear that any immediate changes are required as a result of the judgment. However, we are keeping this under consideration. We will be looking at the updated Equality and Human Rights Commission guidance following its publication in draft just two days ago.

John Lamont: I am grateful to the hon. Member for his response, but the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has said that we “can and must” uphold the “rights, the freedoms, the spaces for women as sex-based rights”. I am therefore extremely concerned to hear reports that the House of Commons is not following the EHRC interim guidance that biological men should not be allowed to use women's facilities. Does the hon. Member agree that the protection of female Members and women who work here is vital, and that the law, as clarified by the Supreme Court ruling, must be followed immediately?

Nick Smith: I thank the hon. Member for his question and can assure him that officials have reviewed the guidance and the policies of the House and consider that the Commission is complying with the law. But we will review the positions once the final EHRC guidance is produced.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Battersea, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Church Assets: Historical Link to Slavery

10. **Ms Diane Abbott** (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): Whether the commissioners have made an estimate of the proportion of the Church's assets that may have a link to historical involvement with slavery. [904316]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Marsha De Cordova): The forensic accounting research published in 2023 revealed that Queen Anne's Bounty was linked with African chattel enslavement in two main ways: significant investments in the South Sea Company; and benefactions received from individuals whose income may have derived from slavery. The fund for healing, repair and justice is the Church Commissioners' response to these findings.

Ms Abbott: My hon. Friend will be aware that there is a lot of interest in the relationship between the Church and the slave trade. Is she able to say over what period the

Church made profits from the slave trade? Is she able to specify the names of the companies that the Church invested in, or even the names of the slave plantations? Is she able to quantify exactly how much money the Church made over the period when it was involved in the slave trade? And is she able to say whether the Church's profit from the slave trade is still part of its income today?

Marsha De Cordova: I thank the Mother of the House for the seven or eight questions that she has asked—she will forgive me if I write to her in response to many of those points. To reiterate, the Church received benefaction from individuals who profited from enslavement and invested in the South Sea Company, which was deeply linked with the slave trade. The Church Commissioners have been investigating the Church's historical links in this area since 2019, and published a full and transparent report in January 2023. I am happy for that document to be shared with my right hon. Friend and it can be placed in the House of Commons Library, if that is helpful. I will write to her, but I am also very happy to meet her, because she shows a keen interest in this area.

School Teachers' Review Body: Recommendations

10.35 am

Laura Trott (Sevenoaks) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement on whether the Government will be accepting the school teachers' review body's pay recommendation for 2025-26.

The Minister for School Standards (Catherine McKinnell): May I start by thanking our teachers, school leaders and school staff for all they are doing right now to ensure a successful exam season for students, and indeed for all their hard work throughout the year?

Rather than scaremongering with fantasy statistics, the Government are getting on and delivering. We are already seeing positive signs that our plan for change is working. Teacher recruitment is up, with 2,000 more people in training than last year. Teacher retention is up, with thousands more teachers forecast to stay in the profession over the next three years. This Labour Government are getting on and delivering. Unlike the Opposition, who last year sat on the STRB report, hid from their responsibility and left it to Labour to sort out, this afternoon we will announce the teachers' pay award, which will be the earliest announcement for a decade.

We understand the importance of giving schools certainty, giving them time to plan their budgets, and ensuring that they can recruit and retain the expert teachers our children need. The Secretary of State's written ministerial statement will be coming out this afternoon—[*Interruption.*] It will show once again that this Labour Government—

Mr Speaker: Order. I have granted the urgent question, so please will Members on the Opposition Front Bench wait for the Minister to finish her answer. I do not want you, Ms Trott and Mr O'Brien, to be a bad example of this school class.

Catherine McKinnell: The written ministerial statement is laid before the House and will be coming out this afternoon, showing once again that this Labour Government are getting on and delivering on our plan for change.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Laura Trott: Mr Speaker, this is absolutely outrageous. It is astonishing that we have had to summon the Government to the House today, but the Minister cannot even tell us what pay rise teachers will get and whether it is going to be funded. That does not allow us to scrutinise the matter in this House.

The Government said that they would tax private schools to fund 6,500 more teachers, but the reality is that state schools have not got any of that money. Instead, we have had broken promises on compensating schools for the jobs tax, confirmation from the Department for Education itself that there will be a shortfall in teacher pay funding, which we are not allowed to discuss here today in this urgent question, and uncertainty as to what the actual pay rise for teachers will be. That is a disgrace, and it is the opposite of what people who voted for Labour expected.

All that is in the final two weeks when headteachers up and down the country have to decide whether to make teachers redundant in time for September—in fact, sadly, many schools will already have made the difficult decision to let good teachers go. These are job losses on the Minister's watch, due to her inability to provide schools with the clarity that they need. Do not just take my word for it. Dan Moynihan, from the Harris Federation, says that it proposes to make 40 to 45 teachers redundant. Jon Coles, the chief executive of United Learning, which runs 90 state sector academies, said that the trust has been left with £10.5 million a year of unfunded costs. He said:

"It's no good Treasury waving their hands and saying 'efficiency'—that would be 400 job losses. Sector wide, that would extrapolate to ruinous harm in the one well-functioning public service: tens of thousands of redundancies."

Simon Pink, the finance director at the Elliot Foundation, which has 36 primaries, said:

"This is the toughest budget...in a generation."

One secondary school headteacher has already had to cut two teaching assistant posts and a teacher role due to rising national insurance and anticipated wage rises.

What is the pay rise that the Government recommend for teachers? The Prime Minister's spokesman said on 28 April:

"There'll be no additional funding for pay."

Yesterday, the Government started to U-turn on the winter fuel allowance. Will the Minister now fully U-turn and fund the national insurance rise and agree to fully fund the pay increases, whatever they are?

Catherine McKinnell: Neither I nor any Minister in this Government will take lessons from Conservative Members, who, after 14 long years in power, had still not restored real-terms spending in our schools to the level that they inherited. The brass neck of the Opposition is quite extraordinary. Conservative Members would also do well to remember the difficult decisions that this Government have had to take because of the utter mess that they left behind. The right hon. Lady was in the Treasury, creating the mess—she knows very well what happened.

Recruiting, retaining and supporting expert teachers is central to our vision for delivering high and rising standards in our schools. Despite the challenging financial context and years of missed recruitment targets under the previous Government, this Administration are prioritising education and ensuring that every child has access to a high-quality teacher. We are working at pace to ensure excellence for every child. That is why we remain committed to our manifesto pledge for 6,500 teachers and to ensuring that it responds to the demand in secondary schools, special schools and further education.

We know that high-quality teaching is the in-school factor that has the biggest positive impact on a child's outcomes, breaking down barriers to opportunity for every child, so recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers is clearly absolutely central to our vision for delivering high and rising standards. That is why, despite the challenging financial context and years of missed recruitment targets, we are getting on and delivering on our plan for change. The right hon. Lady will have to wait, like everybody else, for the statement that she knows is coming this afternoon.

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

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): Teacher pay is absolutely vital for the status of the profession, for the quality of life of teachers and for recruitment and retention of the vital skilled and qualified staff who are the backbone of our education system. It is really important that the Government's response this afternoon begins the work of restoring teacher pay after the last 14 years, when we saw, by any objective measure, a shocking erosion in teacher pay under the previous Government. That has affected recruitment and retention and had a devastating impact on teacher morale. Those on the Conservative Benches should take note of that, because we would all benefit from a little more humility in the context of the legacy that they left behind.

Can I press the Minister on the extent to which the pay award will be funded? We know that there are already extensive pressures on school budgets, and schools are very anxious about that matter. Also, will this afternoon's statement include support staff pay, and will it begin the process of restoring that pay? We know how vital our teaching assistants and other support staff in our schools are.

Catherine McKinnell: I thank my hon. Friend for her thoughtful contribution. I find it somewhat disconcerting that she is being barracked by Conservative Members, when she performs a really important function for this House and is very assiduous in holding the Government to account—rightly so, as that is her role. She was right to reflect on the degradation of teachers' pay over the past 14 years; indeed, the first thing this Government did was get last year's STRB recommendation out of the drawer and process it—a recommendation that the last Government hid and, frankly, ran away from.

We implemented the 5.5% pay award. We absolutely recognise that pay is a really important part of ensuring we have the high-quality teachers that we need. The starting salary for teachers is now at least £31,650 outside of London and at least £38,766 in inner London. We are making progress; we are seeing the green shoots of more teachers joining the profession and staying in it, and we will continue to support that trajectory in any way we can. My hon. Friend has also rightly highlighted the vital work of support staff in schools. The Government's approach in that regard will be confirmed in this afternoon's written ministerial statement, as will all the details that my hon. Friend so keenly anticipates.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): Each and every week, I hear from teachers and school leaders in my constituency and across the country. In my time in this place, never has their outlook been as gloomy as it is right now. After years of underfunding and neglect from the Conservatives, schools now face a double blow of underfunded national insurance increases and unfunded teacher pay rises, if the reports are to be believed. Together, these represent massive cuts to school budgets. Frankly, schools expected better from Labour.

School governors in my constituency recently told me that they are all setting deficit budgets, which one described as "beyond imagining". That is why teachers are so desperately worried. Parents are, too, because

ultimately it is our children who will suffer—and the most vulnerable, at that. The Government's claim that schools can find the money through efficiencies simply does not stack up; budgets are already cut to the bone, with schools relying on parents to buy them the basics, such as glue sticks, through Amazon wish lists. They are already cutting back subjects, cancelling trips and cutting back on teaching assistants—meaning that children with special educational needs and disabilities will suffer the most—and now they are planning redundancies. Budget decisions for next year are already being made. We need urgent clarity about whether the pay rise will be funded, so will the Minister tell schools across the country where exactly they are expected to find this money?

Catherine McKinnell: There was an awful lot of imagining in the hon. Lady's question, and understandably so—less understandable, though, in relation to some of her comments. The statement is due today, and the hon. Lady will have to await it, as will all Members of this House and those who are keenly looking at their schools' budgets to ensure they can provide the best education possible. I know that is what schools are rightly focused on doing, and we are focused on supporting them to do that.

I gently remind Opposition Members that this is the earliest STRB announcement in a decade, because we recognise how important budgeting is for schools and how important it is that they have this information in a timely way. That was not respected under the previous Government. We want to provide this information in good time and give notice as early as possible, so that schools can plan the excellent outcomes for children that I know they are striving for. We will also support them to use their funding as efficiently as possible. The Department has worked on a whole suite of productivity initiatives, as well as support for schools to manage energy costs and banking costs and to minimise any expenditure that is not on the frontline, supporting children. That is what we will continue to do.

Mark Swards (Leeds South West and Morley) (Lab): I reiterate what the Chair of the Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), said: teaching assistants are the glue that keep our classrooms together and they should be paid adequately. I am pleased to hear the Minister state that retention is up, with 2,000 more teachers in training. As a former teacher, I understand that workload is often cited as a reason that we do not retain teachers. Marking, lesson planning, admin and data entry all keep teachers away from spending time with their students. Can the Minister update us on what work her Department is doing with respect to artificial intelligence and its roll-out in our classrooms to reduce teacher workload and get them in front of students?

Catherine McKinnell: I welcome the constructive nature of my hon. Friend's question, because regardless of any announcement this afternoon, we know that schools are working hard to deliver for children. As a Government, we need to work our hardest—and we are—to support them to do so. That means a whole range of productivity measures to support teachers with their workload, to support schools with their costs, and to ensure we grab the opportunity of technological developments so that

any teacher's time is maximised with children in the classroom, helping them with their learning and being supported with technology to maximise children's outcomes. We will continue to work; we are very much looking forward, and unfortunately those on the Opposition Benches seem constantly to be looking back.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): For the Government to come here today, fulling knowing their pay rise intentions but refusing to say so until this afternoon to avoid scrutiny, is disrespectful to this House, to every Member, to every constituent and to every teacher. If I may say so, it is somewhat cowardly. Schools across my constituency find themselves short of money to cover national insurance bills. Five schools in my constituency that have approached me are £176,000 short between them. Does the Minister know how many schools are short of money to pay their national insurance bills?

Catherine McKinnell: On the hon. Lady's initial comments, let me say that there are processes and procedures in this House that we respect. We respect this House, and we will continue to do so. There is a process by which this statement and these announcements will be made. She will have to wait, alongside everybody, for the process that we adhere to in this House to be administered.

In response to the hon. Lady's second question, as she should know, our funding system is not designed so that every school and college receives funding that necessarily fully matches their precise spending, as that—including NIC costs—varies from institution to institution because of the decisions that each school makes on staffing. We are providing schools and high-need settings with more than £930 million in 2025-26 to support them with their increased national insurance costs. That is in addition to the £2.3 billion increase to core schools funding announced at the autumn Budget in 2024. That means that the core schools budget, which includes the core revenue funding for schools and high-need settings, will total more than £64.8 billion in 2025-26. We will continue to support schools to spend that money in the most effective and productive way possible to maximise outcomes for children, which are our priority.

Dame Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): I spent most of the last Government's time in office scrutinising public spending, and grew weary of promises of pay or other Government decisions not being matched with budgets for schools, hospitals and so on. When things like changes to national insurance and pay increases are made, I hope that this Government will be very honest about the impact on school budgets, and not have headlines that are not balanced with funding. I therefore hope the Minister is making good arguments in the spending review. Could she make sure that she really leans into the issue of falling rolls in London's schools? Any hoped-for pay rise, which is much deserved by teachers, will be a double whammy for schools in London, because rolls are falling and their income is therefore much lower; that will have an extra impact on staffing decisions.

Catherine McKinnell: I thank my hon. Friend for her question, and for the work that she has done in this House over many years in scrutinising Government budgets and holding Governments to account. We have

the highest respect for schools, for school leaders, and for the teachers and support staff who work in schools. We recognise the challenges faced across the public sector to make sure that every penny of public money is spent in the most efficient way possible and maximises the public benefit. We are working incredibly hard in the Department, as I know we are across Government, to get maximum output for public money. Frankly, the public sector was neglected by the previous Government over 14 years. We are picking up the pieces of that, and we will continue to work hard to do so.

Sir Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con): I do have some sympathy for the Minister, for whom I have a great deal of respect, but surely she must feel embarrassed to come before this House knowing all the answers to these questions and not giving them, simply because No. 10 will not let her. In my constituency, schools are already facing a double whammy from an increase in costs from the national insurance rise, which is not fully funded, and the pressure on places. If the teachers' pay settlement is not funded in full, surely she will admit that it amounts to a cut. Whenever this happened when we were in government, the first thing Labour Members would say was, "Are you matching it with funding?" If we were not, they would scream blue murder that it amounted to a cut. Will she just admit that if it is not funded, it is a cut to schools?

Catherine McKinnell: The right hon. Gentleman is rather getting ahead of himself. He was in the last Government, and we were left with an appalling inheritance. We are taking tough decisions to fix the foundations and to bring back stability, because education is a priority for this Government. That is why we are rebuilding the crumbling schools that the Conservatives left. *[Interruption.]* Fiction? Crumbling schools? I suggest Opposition Members speak to the schools that are dealing with the consequences. We are rolling out free breakfast clubs, opening up school-based nurseries and, yes, providing £8 billion to give every child the best start in life through the high-quality early years and family services that the previous Government promised but provided no money to deliver. While those on the Conservative Benches continue to try to work out what they think, we are getting on with delivering real, positive change in our country.

James Naish (Rushcliffe) (Lab): As the Minister says, we inherited a recruitment and retention crisis in the teaching industry. Data from the National Association of Head Teachers shows that one in three teachers leaves within five years, and that around one in three headteachers no longer continues as a head within five years. That is the situation we have inherited, not created. What is the Minister doing to turn the tide on the recruitment and retention crisis?

Catherine McKinnell: We did inherit a dire situation. Children were not being taught by the expert teachers they should have been taught by, and teachers were stretched to the limit. That is why the first thing we did was to reset the relationship between the Government and schools, which for years had resembled some sort of combat.

We want to work with schools. We recognise how hard they are working to deliver for children, and we want to work with them to support them in any way

[Catherine McKinnell]

we can. That means having high-quality teachers and good-quality teacher training. It means supporting every teacher to be trained to meet the needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities. It means maximising every pound so that it can get to the frontline—to the children—by reducing other costs in schools. We will continue to work with schools to do that, so that we can ensure that every child has the expert teacher they deserve and will not be let down any more, as they have been for the last 14 years.

Caroline Voaden (South Devon) (LD): I think we would all agree that education is the best investment that any Government can make; it raises people out of poverty, improves social mobility and improves health outcomes. Sadly, it was not a priority for the last Government, and I welcome the change in tone from the new Government, although I think it will take more than breakfast clubs to fix the problem.

The Devon branch of the National Association of Head Teachers has said, "We're on our knees." Primary schools are consolidating classes because they are having to cut spending, and one secondary school in my patch will have to pay £95,000 extra for every 1 percentage point rise in pay that is not funded. If the pay award is not fully funded, can the Minister explain exactly where schools are supposed to find this extra money?

Catherine McKinnell: The hon. Lady is—understandably so, given the calling of this urgent question despite a statement being due imminently—getting ahead of herself, and we are doing an awful lot more than breakfast clubs. I have listed just some of what we are doing, but we are working incredibly hard across the board.

Schools will work very hard to make sure that their budgets maximise the outcomes for children, and we will continue to support them to do that. That means having a Department that steps up. It does not stand back and criticise; it steps up. It means supporting the buying that schools do, and making sure they are getting the best value for money in all the purchasing they do. It means supporting them with their maintenance and management. It means supporting them with energy costs. We know that expenditure on energy is a big cost for schools, and the Department can provide support with good contracts that get much better value for money. It is similar with banking and with teacher vacancies. Schools can save a significant amount of money using the products available from the Department for Education, which we are continuing to provide, and they can use the tools available to see how they are doing and also what other schools are doing well. We will continue to support schools to maximise—

Mr Speaker: Order. This is like having a second statement. The answers are getting longer and longer, but I have to get through this urgent question as we have a lot of other business. It is important that questions are answered quickly, but also that the rest of the questions are asked. We will now have a good example of a brief question from Laurence Turner.

Laurence Turner (Birmingham Northfield) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. There has clearly been some learning loss among the Conservatives, because they were late in

submitting evidence for seven years in a row, causing chaos in schools' budgets; they announced the outcome of the School Teachers Review Body process through written statements to this House; and, shamefully, they scrapped the school support staff negotiating body. Does the Minister agree that the protestations from the Opposition will come across to teachers as false and hypocritical, because they are?

Catherine McKinnell: I think my hon. Friend has put it very well.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge) (Con): One of the things I think we should be proud of in England is the success of English schools over the last 10 to 14 years. Frankly, the differences in outcomes in England from those in Labour-run Wales or SNP-run Scotland have been very striking, demonstrating that, while for sure there are brilliant teachers across the United Kingdom, the different system in England has enabled its schools to flourish.

While I welcome the fact that the Minister is bringing the statement out early and I appreciate the work the Government have done on it, I am afraid that I do share the frustration of my right hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Laura Trott) and my hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson), who is no longer in her place. The Minister must appreciate that frustration, given that she was sitting on the Opposition Benches only a few months ago, as no doubt she will be again in only a few years' time.

The reality is that it is very difficult to represent those who send us here if we are not given information. I was sent a letter by Simon Beamish, who runs the Leigh Academies Trust, and he told me that schools in my area of west Kent are already going to have redundancies or are going to make choices based on the unfunded pledges that have been given. Will the Minister make a commitment that the next pledges will be funded?

Mr Speaker: That was a very long question.

Catherine McKinnell: It was a very long statement that managed almost entirely to look backwards, while fantasising about the future. The right hon. Member will receive the information, as will everybody else, when the statement is published at the announced time this afternoon.

Peter Swallow (Bracknell) (Lab): I declare an interest, as I was a primary school governor right up until the election and I am the chair of the all-party parliamentary group for schools, learning and assessment. It is quite shocking to hear Opposition Members' protestations about school funding, given the absolutely dire state in which they left school funding after 14 years of Conservative government. When I speak to school leaders in my constituency, they tell me about their real and lasting struggles to balance their budgets. I understand that the Minister cannot speak today about the outcome of the review until the statement, but can she give us information more broadly about conversations she has had as part of the spending review, so that we can get the funding we need to invest in schools and turn around the dire situation we inherited?

Catherine McKinnell: I would like to take this opportunity to put on record my thanks to school governors. My hon. Friend mentions that he was a governor up until

the election. We really are grateful to school governors for everything they do on a voluntary basis to support schools to be as good as they can be. As a Government, we will always work with them and schools to support improving outcomes for children.

The Department will do everything it can within the incredibly tight fiscal constraints we inherited. As a Government, we are committed to our public services, which we know will transform the lives of children and everybody in this country. We will continue to do that.

Marie Goldman (Chelmsford) (LD): The Minister, in her response to my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson), referred to imaginings, but I do not think it is an imagining to suggest that the Secretary of State, in her response to the STRB, said that some efficiency savings would have to be found in schools to meet the additional costs. Earlier this week, I had a roundtable with headteachers from my constituency and beyond. The Minister also talked just now about “fantasising about the future”. Is she really telling me that those headteachers were fantasising about the future when they told me that they were already having to make cuts to staffing numbers for next September? One headteacher told me that just one or two more things need to go wrong and that they are on the brink of collapse. Is the Minister saying that they are fantasising about the future?

Catherine McKinnell: No. We recognise how important it is for schools to plan their budgets and we know that they are keenly awaiting the announcement this afternoon. That is why we have made the announcement as quickly as possible, and much quicker than at any point over the past 10 years. We will continue to work with schools to help them deliver for the children in their care. We know that that is their priority and it is our priority, too.

Chris Vince (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): For 14 years, I saw my profession treated like dirt by the Conservative party: undervalued, underpaid and undermined at every single turn. Does the Minister agree that not only should we be paying our teachers fairly, but we should be treating them with respect, and that the only decent teacher recruitment the Conservative party did was to recruit former teachers to the Labour Benches?

Catherine McKinnell: My hon. Friend rightly remarks on his service as a teacher. It is incredibly valued. The one message we want to send to the school system is about the extent to which we value the teachers and the headteachers who support their schools to thrive, and the extent to which we support the support staff who are the beating heart of schools in every community. We will continue to do so.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): The schools in my constituency tell me that any efficiencies they could possibly make have already been made. Therefore, the result of what the Minister is announcing—the national insurance increase that is underfunded and this welcome but unfunded increase in teacher pay—can only be that teacher numbers are cut. As the father of a primary school teacher who works really hard and is absolutely committed, that impacts on me personally, and it will impact on every child and every parent in my

constituency. Is that not the reality, and should the Government not be up front and admit that this will mean that teachers will lose their jobs?

Catherine McKinnell: The right hon. Gentleman will have to wait for the statement this afternoon for the details of what the Government are proposing. He really should have more awareness of the situation that teachers and schools, and indeed our entire public sector, have faced over the past 14 years. We are working hard to clean up that mess, and we will continue to do so.

Mr Bayo Alaba (Southend East and Rochford) (Lab): I declare that I am also a school governor. I have spent many months in my constituency meeting teachers, governors and stakeholders within the community, so I welcome the Government's announcement of 2,000 additional teachers. Can the Minister tell us how the Government are turning the tide in the teacher recruitment and retention crisis, which reached unprecedented levels over the past decade?

Catherine McKinnell: This is a key priority for us. We want to ensure that we have the teaching workforce that children deserve, but that teachers deserve, too—they deserve to have a full fleet of teachers teaching the specialist subjects that they love, are committed to and are trained to teach. We know that key to unlocking the outcomes for children is having good, qualified teachers in every classroom, which is what we are legislating to achieve. It is also key for children with additional learning needs or disabilities that we ensure that every teacher is a teacher for special educational needs and disabilities, so that more children can be educated in their local school with their peers and get the outcomes they deserve.

Calum Miller (Bicester and Woodstock) (LD): I was a school governor for 13 years and served as a finance governor, so I know these issues well. I want to draw the Minister's attention to the plight of small, rural primary schools. There are many such schools in my constituency, and they are really up against it with the costs that they face. In the school that I served, 86% of the budget was spent on staffing, so a significant unfunded increase in staffing costs, whether through national insurance or salary contributions, has a huge impact. Will the Minister meet me to discuss sparsity funding and the equalisation of per capita funding so that primary schools in small, rural areas are not so serially disadvantaged?

Catherine McKinnell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his thoughtful question and for his years of service as a governor. I cannot reiterate enough how much we value the work that governors do in schools, and we need more people to step up and take the rewarding opportunity to support schools in that capacity. He rightly raises the challenges, which we know differ across schools, and that is why school funding is not uniform across schools; it varies according to circumstances. We are looking at the funding formula to ensure that it does allocate resource where it is most needed and where it can give the greatest outcome and the greatest benefit.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Rather than the synthetic outrage from the former Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the right hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Laura Trott), who served in a Government that brought

[*Rachael Maskell*]

cuts to schools, I really welcome that the Government are serious about addressing the regression teachers faced in their pay, as well as the fact that support staff were pushed on to the minimum wage. I trust that in the statement there will be sufficiency in the funding for schools, but will the Minister also get a grip of escalating chief executive pay, which is doubling, meaning they have six-figure salaries? It is really important that they are not taking more out of the funds that should be invested in children's education.

Catherine McKinnell: My hon. Friend speaks with great insight; I know she cares passionately about maximising outcomes for children. I know that every school leader—indeed, those at any level within a school, but particularly those at the senior level—will want to ensure that in any decisions they make on pay, they are prioritising outcomes for children.

Ben Obese-Jecty (Huntingdon) (Con): Schools in my constituency tell me they are struggling. Serious pressure is being put on their staffing budgets by the national insurance contributions increase, and that is exacerbated by the appallingly slow approval rate of special educational needs inclusion funding and education, health and care plans by the now Lib Dem-run Cambridgeshire county council. What is the Minister doing to address that extra strain on staffing costs and to ensure that schools are properly resourced for the right level of staff in order to allow teachers to give all children the best education, rather than forcing efficiency savings on them that will make the job even harder, and possibly even ultimately put children at risk?

Catherine McKinnell: The hon. Gentleman raises an important matter and does so thoughtfully and constructively. Although there is synthetic outrage from some Members on the Conservative Benches, we recognise that schools are grappling with the challenge of ensuring that they achieve the greatest outcomes from their budgets. That is a challenge that they rise to year on year, and a challenge that we will continue to set, because we will not shy away from ensuring that every penny of public money that is spent delivers on the frontline for children and teachers. We need to ensure that we have the right teaching capacity in schools, and that teachers are trained to support children with special educational needs. We are determined to ensure that more children are educated with their peers, but we recognise that schools need support to deliver that, and we are working on reforms at pace. We are also getting on with delivering a whole range of interventions to support schools in making progress.

Luke Myer (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): I had not planned to ask a question, but I have to say that I was pretty surprised by the tone that the Opposition struck. I did a postgraduate degree in education, and I will never forget finding one of my professional mentors, who had been a teacher for years, crying at her desk because of the pressure that the then Government had put on her and other teachers. Is it not the case that the Conservatives left our teachers overstretched and undervalued, and this Government are taking a different approach?

Catherine McKinnell: I could not have put it better myself.

Claire Young (Thornbury and Yate) (LD): The Minister has admitted that not all schools will be fully funded, but blames that on the choices that schools have made about their staff. Does she accept that schools cannot fully control the profile of their staff, and that in some cases—I make this point in a letter to the Minister—schools choose to pay people in higher bands because of the increasingly high needs that they are expected to support? Will she meet me to discuss how she will protect schools with particularly high staffing budgets from having to make excessive cuts?

Catherine McKinnell: I am not really sure about the premise of the hon. Lady's question, or what she thinks may or may not have been said ahead of publication of the written ministerial statement, which is due at 1 pm today. I have made it clear that schools are funded not in a uniform manner, but according to a whole range of requirements that they may have within their school population and their area. It is a complex formula that is intended to ensure fairness across the school funding system. Indeed, we are looking at the system to ensure that it is as fair as it can be, but it is not without its complexities, so we are taking the time to get this right. We will continue to do so, because we recognise that schools need the autonomy to decide how they spend their budget, how they best deploy their resources, and how they maximise the outcomes for children, using the resources allocated by the Government. We also recognise that schools need support to do that, and we will continue to ensure that they have the tools to maximise the outcomes for children.

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough and Thornaby East) (Lab): May I declare my interest as the very proud father of Rosie, a foundation stage teacher? This Government showed what Labour is about when they came in and immediately awarded an above-inflation 5.5% pay rise to teachers, to start clawing back after the demeaning and disrespectful public sector cuts of around 20% in real terms delivered by the Tories. The Government's 2.8% submission to the pay review body is below inflation, and that increase would not be funded through additional finance; it would come at the expense of other provision. It has been reported that the School Teachers' Review Body is recommending close to 4%, so will the Government commit to a long-term plan of restoring teachers' pay in real terms, and to addressing the recruitment and retention crisis in education?

Catherine McKinnell: My hon. Friend tempts me down all sorts of paths, in ways that would anticipate the statement that is due later today, but he rightly states the importance of ensuring that teachers are recognised, valued and rewarded, that we have sufficient teachers, and that we have an attractive profession that bright people like Rosie want to join and contribute to. We will continue to work to deliver that for the children and schools in this country.

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): One of the biggest drivers of satisfaction in any profession is settlements in line with inflation and expectations of inflation. Will the Minister assure the House that the settlement to be

announced later today will take account of the fact that inflation is vastly higher than was anticipated when the settlement was reached?

Catherine McKinnell: I am afraid that the right hon. Member will have to wait for the statement this afternoon. I appreciate that it is keenly anticipated. We are committed to ensuring that schools can deliver for children. That is our top priority.

John Slinger (Rugby) (Lab): I am proud to declare an interest as the son of a teacher. While the Tories often wax lyrical about how business adds value to our economy, which of course it does, they often omit to say that it is our teachers who educate those who go on to work in business. Teachers add huge value, and teaching should be the most esteemed of professions. Can the Minister explain how Labour is overturning the teacher recruitment and retention crisis that we inherited from the Tories?

Catherine McKinnell: My hon. Friend is right to say that we inherited a teaching profession in crisis. Immediately on entering Government, we instituted a 5.5% pay award. We continue to help schools to find ways to support teachers in managing their workload and wellbeing, and in making teaching the attractive profession that it should be. As my hon. Friend rightly points out, teaching is the springboard to so many bright futures for children. We want to ensure excellence for every child, not just some children, as we saw over the last 14 years.

Mr Richard Holden (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): In Education questions, I raised the concerns of headteachers in Basildon and Billericay about school funding, and I directly asked about school support staff, who are already being told that they are being made redundant because of the national insurance jobs tax. Can the Minister explain to those staff and me why the Government have gone back on their promise to cover all the costs of the jobs tax?

Catherine McKinnell: As I have already set out, the Government have given a significant settlement in recognition of the national insurance costs. We will continue to work with schools to ensure that they can deliver for children in their areas, and we will continue to listen to the sector to ensure that we work in partnership to deliver for children—a partnership that was sadly lacking in the last 14 years. The right hon. Gentleman was very much part of the Government who delivered the desperate situation in which we found schools and teachers, and that we are working very hard to turn around.

John Milne (Horsham) (LD): Over the last six months, I have visited most of the schools in my constituency, and the message I am getting loud and clear is that they are on the brink, especially over special educational needs and disabilities provision. That threatens to throw into sharp reverse any progress on educational standards. I ask the Government to be honest about the real state of funding, and not to make statements that are not fully funded. That applies to statements on existing services, such as SEND provision, and on the cost of school dinners. I hold the new Government to a higher standard, and I ask the Minister to be completely honest about the real state of affairs.

Catherine McKinnell: I recognise the challenges that the hon. Gentleman sees in the school system. We did, without doubt, inherit a SEND crisis. It was described by the previous Secretary of State for Education as “lose, lose, lose”, and she was not wrong. We are working at pace to fix it, and we recognise that schools are grappling with many challenges. We will continue to work at pace, because that is how we deliver for children in this country, which we are committed to doing.

Mr Speaker: Order. The right hon. Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) has just walked right across the Floor of the House while the Minister was answering. I cannot believe it. *[Interruption.]* We are not going to have an argument. I would have hoped that you, as a member of the Panel of Chairs, would respect the rules of the House better.

Greg Smith (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): I am full of admiration for all the hard-working teachers across my constituency, and indeed the whole country, and my sister-in-law is a secondary-school English teacher, but I have no doubt that every teacher and headteacher watching our proceedings, either live or later, will have had their jaw on the floor when they heard the Minister say that she wants to give them time to plan, but will not tell them what funding they will get to pay for this. It is inconceivable that she does not know the answer to that question, given that a statement on the issue will be published at 1 o'clock. Is she not giving the answer because, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Sir Oliver Dowden) said, No. 10 has told her not to? Better still, is it because the Department is in a live negotiation—some might say a row—with the Treasury to get that settlement for our teachers?

Catherine McKinnell: What a ridiculous question. As the hon. Member has a family member who is a teacher, he should have more respect for the profession and the work that teachers do. He should acknowledge that the time we give schools to plan their budget is way beyond anything that his Government delivered in the last 10 years.

Charlie Maynard (Witney) (LD): The Minister and many hon. Members have mentioned teaching support staff, who make up half the school workforce but have no statutory pay body to represent them. Many support staff are left without a voice in discussions on their pay, terms and working conditions; I hear that time and again in schools throughout my constituency. Will the Minister give assurances, through the written ministerial statement, that school support staff will get a fair pay deal?

Catherine McKinnell: Pay negotiations for support staff are done through the National Joint Council for Local Government Services. We recognise the challenge that the hon. Member identified, and the strong role that support staff play in our schools. We have legislated for the school support staff negotiating body, which the last Government abolished, to be re-established, to ensure that they have a strong voice in these conversations.

Shockat Adam (Leicester South) (Ind): May I raise concerns about our further education college teachers? There is a real shortage of skilled workers in this

[Shockat Adam]

country, and one of the reasons for that is that we have undervalued and under-invested in our FE college teachers, who are paid £9,000 less than their peers. No wonder 50% of them leave within the first three years of employment. Does the Minister recognise the vital role of FE college teachers in our education system? Will they be in the Government's plans for a fairer and better future for everybody?

Catherine McKinnell: We absolutely recognise, respect and value the vital role of all those who work with 16 to 19-year-olds and people of all ages, whether in a school, college or FE setting; they provide that springboard to launch people into their future careers. We will continue to recognise and support the sector.

Richard Foord (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): The Minister mentioned maintenance contracts and Department for Education support. Schools have seen steep increases in the cost of sustaining themselves. One school leader in Devon whom I spoke with said that the cost of maintaining grounds, bins and toilets grew by 69% over the last four years. Given that schools' budgets have barely grown over that period, does she really expect that staff pay rises will come out of existing school budgets?

Catherine McKinnell: The hon. Gentleman tempts me into issues that may well be addressed in the statement that is due very shortly. He recognises that schools have a whole range of costs to manage. As a Department, we want to maximise every penny that schools have, and to minimise outlays that do not reach children or the frontline—those who work with children. We will continue to do that. There is a whole range of tools available at the Department. We really encourage schools to use those tools in any way they can in the management of their budgets, and to support really smart accounting to maximise the impact of their budgets for their children.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for her answers to the urgent question. Nobody can doubt her commitment to the change that is necessary to keep schools working and teachers in place. I always

try to be helpful in the Chamber. Northern Ireland has come through a period of teacher strike action, which led to years of no school inspections, and to altered classroom practices, so there is a need to re-engage with teachers. The Minister knows well that engaging with teachers at all stages is essential, or the losers will undoubtedly be the parents and, of course, the pupils. How will she ensure a spirit of co-operation to ensure in-depth education? We all hope that co-operation will be reciprocated by unions and senior leadership teams in all schools.

Catherine McKinnell: The hon. Gentleman is always helpful and thoughtful in his contributions. As a Department, we inherited a school system that was in crisis: school buildings crumbling, teachers leaving in their droves and children not getting the start in life that they deserve. We are working on a number of fronts, but we recognise that the outcomes are not ones that the Government alone can deliver; we need to deliver them in partnership with schools, teachers and those who represent them. We speak and work regularly right across the board to maximise those outcomes for children, and I know the hon. Gentleman shares our determination to see that across the country.

Neil O'Brien (Harborough, Oadby and Wigston) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Is it relevant to this UQ?

Neil O'Brien: It is, Mr Speaker. Earlier, the Minister said that funding had remained below 2010 levels. I am sure that was an innocent verbal slip. However, according to the widely respected Institute for Fiscal Studies,

"Coming on the back of an 11% real-terms increase in spending per pupil between 2019–20 and 2024–25, this allows spending per pupil to return to, and exceed, its previous high point in 2010."

How can we encourage the rapid correction of the record when innocent mistakes are made?

Mr Speaker: I think you have just corrected the record; that is not a point of order. We can leave it at that, unless the Minister wants to come in.

Catherine McKinnell *indicated dissent.*

Independent Sentencing Review

11.31 am

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Shabana Mahmood): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement on sentencing in England and Wales. As the House will be aware, the independent sentencing review was published today. It was chaired by David Gauke and his panel comprised experts, including a former Lord Chief Justice, and representatives from the police, prisons, probation and victims' rights organisations. The Government are grateful for the review's recommendations, and I will ensure that a copy is deposited in the Libraries of both Houses. Today, I will set out our in-principle response.

First, however, it is essential that we set the review in its proper context. A year ago today, the Conservative party called an election. They did so because they were confronted by the prospect of prisons about to collapse. Rather than confront their failure, they chose to hide it and hoodwink the public into re-electing them. It did not work, but their legacy lives on.

Our prisons are, once again, running out of space and it is vital that the implications are understood. If our prisons collapse, courts are forced to suspend trials, the police must halt their arrests, crime goes unpunished, criminals run amok and chaos reigns. We face the breakdown of law and order in this country. It is shameful that, in this day and age, we are confronted by this crisis once more. The reasons are clear. The last Government added just 500 places to our prison estate, while at the same time, sentence lengths rose. As a result, the prison population is now rising by 3,000 each year and we are heading back towards zero capacity. It now falls to this Government to end this cycle of crisis. That starts by building prisons.

Since taking office, we have opened 2,400 places. Last week, I announced an additional £4.7 billion for prison building, putting us on track to hit 14,000 places by 2031, in the largest expansion since the Victorian era. That investment is necessary, but not sufficient. We cannot build our way out of this crisis. Despite building as quickly as we can, demand for places will outstrip supply by 9,500 in early 2028, and that is why I commissioned the sentencing review. Its task was clear: this country must never run out of prison places again. There must always be space for dangerous offenders.

At the same time, the review was tasked with addressing the fact that our prisons too often create better criminals, not better citizens. Instead of cutting crime, they are breeding grounds for it. The reviewers have followed the evidence and example of countries across the world. Today I present an initial response, with further detail to follow once legislation is placed before the House.

Let me start with the report's central recommendation: the move to a three-part sentence called the earned progression model, which the Government accept in principle. Under the model, an offender will not necessarily leave prison at an automatic point. Instead, their release date will be determined by their behaviour. If they follow prison rules, they will earn earlier release; if they do not, they will be locked up for longer. That echoes the model I witnessed in Texas earlier this year, which cut crime and brought their prison population under control.

Under the new model, offenders serving standard determinate sentences with an automatic release of 40% or 50% will now earn their release. The earliest possible release will be one third, with additional days added for bad behaviour. The review suggests a new maximum of 50%, but for those who behave excessively badly, I will not place an upper limit. For those currently serving standard determinate sentences with an automatic release point of 67%, their earliest possible release will be 50%. Again, for those who behave excessively badly, I will not place an upper limit.

David Gauke also suggests that those serving extended determinate sentences should also earn an earlier release. This we will not accept. Judges give extended sentences to those they consider dangerous, with no Parole Board hearing until two thirds of time served, and I will not change that. I can also confirm that no sentences being served for terror offences will be eligible for earlier release from prison.

In the second part of the progression model, offenders will enter a period of intensive supervision. That will see more offenders tagged and close management from probation. The Government will therefore significantly increase funding: by the final year of the spending review period, an annual £1.6 billion will rise by up to £700 million, allowing us to tag and monitor tens of thousands more offenders. If offenders do not comply with the conditions of their release, the sentencing review has suggested that recall to prison should be capped at 56 days. We have agreed to this policy in principle, though the precise details will be placed before the House when we legislate. In the final stage of the three-part sentence, offenders could still be recalled if a new offence is committed, and I will also ensure that the most serious offenders continue to be subject to strict conditions.

The review also recommends a reduction in short prison sentences. A compelling case for doing so has been proposed in this House many times. In the most recent data, nearly 60% of those receiving a 12-month sentence reoffended within a year. With reoffending rates for community punishment consistently lower, we must ask ourselves whether alternative forms of punishment would make the public safer. It is important, however, to note that the review recommends a reduction in short sentences, not abolition. It is right that judges retain the discretion to hand them down in exceptional circumstances. In considering exceptional circumstances, we will continue to ensure that courts have access to thorough risk assessments for domestic abuse and stalking cases, and breaches of protective orders linked to violence against women and girls will be excluded.

The review also recommends an extension of suspended sentences from two to three years. In this period, the prospect of prison time hangs over an offender should they break any conditions imposed upon them, and we accept that recommendation.

The recommendations set out above will see more community punishment. For that reason, it is essential that it works. The review recommends a series of measures to make community punishment tougher and force offenders to pay back to those they have harmed. We will consider new financial penalties, which could see offenders' assets seized, even if they are not knowingly linked to crime, and expanded use of punishments such as travel and driving bans that would curtail offenders' liberty.

[Shabana Mahmood]

We accept a recommendation to expand intensive supervision courts. Those impose tough conditions, including treatment requirements, that tackle the root causes of prolific offending. Offenders are brought before a judge regularly to monitor compliance, and the prospect of prison hangs over them like the sword of Damocles.

However, I believe community punishment must be tougher still. Unpaid work must pay back, so I will shortly bring together business leaders to explore a model whereby offenders work for them, and the salary is paid not to the offender but towards the good of victims. I will also work with local authorities to determine how unpaid work teams could give back to their communities, whether by filling potholes or cleaning up rubbish.

I invited David Gauke to consider cohorts of offenders who this Government believe require particular focus. I welcome his recommendations on female offenders. Approximately two thirds of female offenders receive short sentences. Around the same number are victims of domestic abusers. I am pleased to say that the review's recommendation on short, deferred and suspended sentences will reduce the number of women in prison.

I asked David Gauke to consider how we tackle foreign national offenders. Today, our deportation rate is ahead of the last Government's. I welcome the recommendations to make it quicker and easier to deport foreign criminals. Under the existing scheme, they are sent back to their country of origin after serving 50% of the custodial sentence. We will bring that down to 30%. We will also conduct further work with the Home Office on how we can deport foreign prisoners serving less than three years as soon as possible after their sentencing.

I also asked the review to consider how we manage sex offenders. The review has recommended we continue a pilot of so-called medication to manage problematic sexual arousal. I will go further, with a national roll-out beginning in two regions, covering 20 prisons. I am exploring whether mandating the approach is possible. Of course, it is vital that this approach is taken alongside psychological interventions that target other causes of offending, such as asserting power and control.

When discussing sentencing, it is too easy to focus on how we punish offenders when we should talk more about victims. Everything I am announcing today is in pursuit of a justice system that serves victims. If our prisons collapse, it is victims who pay the price. By cutting reoffending, we will have fewer victims in future, but there is more we must do to support victims today. The review recommends a number of important measures, including better identifying domestic abusers at sentencing, so that we can monitor and manage them more effectively. I pay tribute to those who have campaigned on this, particularly the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Josh Babarinde). I also welcome the recommendation to expand the use of specialist domestic abuse courts, where trained staff support victims. To improve transparency in the system, we will extend a pilot of free sentencing transcripts for victims of rape and serious sexual offences.

I want to go further than the review recommends to better support victims. Exclusion zones are an important tool, preventing offenders from entering areas their

victims might be in, but these place greater limits on victims than on offenders. I want to change that, locking offenders down to specific locations so that victims know they are safe wherever else they want to go.

This review sets out major reform. I know its recommendations will not be welcomed by all. By appointing David Gauke, a former Conservative Lord Chancellor, I hoped to show that two politicians from different traditions can agree on the reforms our justice system requires. I do not expect Conservative Members to join me to solve this crisis. In fact, I can hear their soundbites already. "Just build faster," they will say. Well, we are building faster than they did: we have already added 2,400 places, and we are now investing £4.7 billion more. "Just deport more foreign criminals," they will say. Well, we are ahead of where they were, and today we have accepted major reform to go further and faster. "Clear the courts backlog," they will say despite having created it themselves. Well, we are investing more in our courts than they ever did, and we are ready to embrace once-in-a-generation reform to deliver swifter justice for victims.

While we are doing more on each of these areas than they ever did, these are not solutions that rise to the scale of the crisis that they left behind. We must build prisons on an historic scale, deport foreign national offenders faster than ever, and speed up our courts; and yet still, despite all that, we must reform sentencing too. So, more in hope than expectation, and despite, not because of, experience, by appealing to the better angels of their nature—if they have any—I end by inviting those opposite to help us fix the crisis that they left behind. I commend this statement to the House.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Lord Chancellor.

11.45 am

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): Today is about one question: should violent and prolific criminals be on the streets or behind bars? I think they should be behind bars. For all the Justice Secretary's rhetoric, the substance of her statement could not be clearer: she is okay and her party is okay with criminals terrorising our streets and tormenting our country. The truth is this: any Government—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I thought people had come to listen to the statement and I expect them to listen. I expected the Opposition Front Bench to be quiet; I certainly expect better from the Government Front Bench.

Robert Jenrick: Mr Speaker, the truth is this: any Government serious about keeping violent criminals behind bars, any Government willing to do whatever it took, could obviously find and build the prison cells required to negate the need for these disastrous changes. What do the changes amount to? [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. Mr Swallow, you are getting very excited. You were telling me how good a schoolteacher you were; this is a very bad example of that.

Robert Jenrick: What do these changes amount to? They are a "get out of jail free" card for dangerous criminals. Has the Justice Secretary even gone through

a court listing recently? Pick one from anywhere in our country: those currently going to jail for 12 months or less are not angels. They are Adam Gregory in Calne, who got 12 months for sexually assaulting his partner; Vinnie Nolan, who got 12 months for breaking someone's jaw; Shaun Yardley, 10 months for beating his partner; or Paul Morris, who got six and a half months for shoplifting 36 times. Her plan is to let precisely these criminals loose. It is a recipe for a crime wave.

What about the Justice Secretary's plan for most criminals going to jail to serve just one third of their prison sentence there and for her slashing of sentences across the board—discounts so big they would make Aldi and Lidl blush? I would call it a joke if the consequences for the public were not so terrifying. In fact it gets worse, because criminals who plead guilty—and most do—already get a third cut in their sentence, so under her scheme a burglar who pleads guilty to an 18-month headline term would spend just one fifth of that term in jail—barely 11 weeks. Eleven weeks for smashing through a family's door and storming through a child's bedroom looking for valuables, leaving them traumatised for life. Is that the Justice Secretary's idea of justice for victims? The least she could do is here and now guarantee that violent criminals, domestic abusers, stalkers and sexual assaulters will not be eligible for any discount in their sentence. Will she commit to that?

If not prison, what is the plan to punish these criminals and to keep the public safe? Well, the Justice Secretary says it is digital prisons—as she puts it, prison outside of prison, words that lead most people in this country to conclude that the Justice Secretary is out of her mind. I am all for technology but tags are not iron bars—they cannot stop your child being stabbed on their walk home from school, or a shop being ransacked time and again, or a domestic abuser returning to their victim's front door.

Mr Speaker: Order. I do not think that “out of her mind” is language that should be used. I am sure the shadow Secretary of State would like to reflect on that.

Robert Jenrick: Of course, Mr Speaker.

The Ministry of Justice's own pilot scheme found that 71% of tagged offenders breached their curfew. When it comes to stopping reoffending, tags are about as useful as smoke alarms are at putting out bonfires. What is the Justice Secretary going to say when she meets the victims of offenders that she let off? How is she going to look them in the eye and say with a straight face, “I'm sorry—we are looking into how this criminal escaped from their digital prison cell.” Her reforms are a recipe for carnage.

I urge the Justice Secretary to change course and to make different choices—yes, choices—from the ones that we knew the Government would make from the day that the Prime Minister hand-picked Lord Timpson as Minister of State for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending, a man who is on record as saying that

“a lot of people in prison...shouldn't be there”—

two thirds of them in fact, he said—

“and they are there for far too long”.

The Labour party is clearly ideologically opposed to prison and that is why the Government are letting criminals off with a “get out of jail free” card, rather

than deporting the 10,800 foreign national offenders in our prisons—one in every eight cells—a figure that is rising under the Justice Secretary's watch. If she is actually serious about keeping violent criminals off our streets and finding the cells that are needed, will she bring forward legislation, tomorrow, and disapply the Human Rights Act 1998, which is stopping us from swiftly deporting foreign national offenders?

Some 17,800 prisoners are on remand awaiting trial—another figure that has risen under the Justice Secretary. In fact, her own Department's figures forecast that it could rise to as many as 23,600. If she is serious, will she commit to taking up the Lady Chief Justice's request for extra court sitting days to hear those cases and free up prison spaces? Will she commit, here and now, to building more than the meagre 250 rapid deployment cells her prison capacity strategy says she is planning to build this year? They have been built in seven months before, and they can be built even faster.

If the Justice Secretary were serious, she would commit to striking deals with the 14 European countries with spare prison capacity, renting their cells from them at an affordable price, as Denmark is doing with Kosovo. Between 1993 and 1996, her beloved Texas, the state on which she modelled these reforms—a state that, by the way, has an incarceration rate five times higher than that of the United Kingdom—built 75,000 extra cells. If the Government were serious, why can they not build 10,000 over a similar time period?

Labour is not serious about keeping hyper-prolific offenders behind bars. In fact, there is nothing in the Justice Secretary's statement on locking them up or cutting crime, because the Labour party does not believe in punishing criminals and it does not really believe in prison. The radical, terrible changes made today are cloaked in necessity, but their root is Labour's ideology. It is the public who will be paying the price for her weakness.

Shabana Mahmood: The shadow Secretary of State talks about serious Government—if the Government that he was a part of had ever been serious, they would have built more than 500 prison places in 14 years in office—[*Interruption.*] He is a new convert to the prison-building cause. He and his party have never stood up in this Chamber and apologised for adding only 500 places—

Mr Speaker: Order. I want the same respect from Members on the Opposition Front Bench. [*Interruption.*] Do we understand each other?

Robert Jenrick indicated assent.

Shabana Mahmood: Mr Speaker, if I were waiting for respect from Opposition Members, I would be waiting for a long time, so it is a good job that I do not need it.

The shadow Secretary of State talks about “iron bars”, but he was part of a Government that did not build the prison places that this country needs. Unlike him, I take responsibility, and it has fallen to me to clean up the mess that he and his party left behind. In case there is any confusion, let me spell out what happens when he and his party leave our prison system on the brink of collapse, which is exactly what they did, and set out the prospect that faced me on day one, when I walked into the Justice Department. When prisons are

[*Shabana Mahmood*]

on the verge of collapse, we basically have only two choices left at our disposal: either we shut the front door, or we have to open the back door. The right hon. Gentleman's party knew that that was the situation it was confronted with, but did it make any decisions? No, it just decided to call an election instead and did a runner.

The public put the Conservatives in their current position. If they ever want to get out of that position, I suggest that they start by reckoning with the reality of their own track record in office. In any other reality, they should have started already with an apology. Conservative Members have had many chances to apologise to the country for leaving our prisons on the point of absolute collapse, but they have never taken them. Frankly, that tells us everything that anyone needs to know about the modern Conservative party.

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

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith and Chiswick) (Lab): I welcome the report and the Government's response. It is a comprehensive and measured response to the prisons crisis, as one would expect from David Gauke, in contrast with the hysterical nonsense that we have heard from the Opposition today. I particularly welcome the additional resources for probation and electronic monitoring to enable robust punishment and control in the community as an alternative to custody, but even the aggregate effect of the measures in the report will only stabilise the prison population over the longer term. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we also need effective rehabilitation to end the cycle of reoffending if we are to see a fall in historically high prison numbers?

Shabana Mahmood: Let me be clear: we will be adding prison places to the estate, and we will be filling them up. The prison population will rise year on year by the end of this Parliament, but my hon. Friend is right that the measures we have announced today stabilise the prison population. As a whole country, we will have to do better at ensuring that our prisons are churning out better citizens, rather than better criminals. When we know that 80% of offenders are reoffenders, there is clearly much work to be done in this area.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Josh Babarinde (Eastbourne) (LD): I start by saying that it is an absolute honour to be able to share with my mum, who is a survivor of domestic abuse at the hands of a former partner, that campaigning fuelled by our harrowing experiences at home all those years ago, and the experiences of many other survivors across the country, has contributed to the Government heeding our calls to better identify domestic abuse in the criminal justice system. The increased visibility and the interventions that it will inform to patch up what was an outrageous gap in the system stand to protect victims and survivors across the country, and I sincerely thank the Government for listening to us.

My party and I will hold the Government to account on the implementation, and we would like to get clarity on the record that the new identifier will mean that the Government can be empowered to exclude domestic

abusers from, for example, an SDS40 early release scheme, and that partners using Clare's law will see offences flagged as domestic abuse in the light of the report.

It must be said that it is absolutely appalling that the shadow Justice Secretary has just tried to play politics with domestic abusers.

Robert Jenrick: I do not want to let criminals out early—you do.

Josh Babarinde: The right hon. Gentleman says that this Government want to let domestic abusers out early. He fails to remember that the end-of-custody supervised licence scheme under the Conservative Government from October to June last year released 10,083 offenders early, with no exclusions for domestic abusers. Does the Secretary of State agree it is critical that this Government provide more support for domestic abuse victims from the likes of their abusers in a way that the last Government failed to do on their watch?

Shabana Mahmood: I thank the hon. Member for his remarks. I would accept nothing less than holding us fully to account for these changes, and I look forward to working collaboratively where possible on these measures as we move forward. I pay tribute to him, his family and his mum for the campaigning that they have done on the identification of cases arising from domestic abuse being flagged properly within our justice system.

The new identifier will develop over time, and I am sure that it will inform future policy decisions made by Governments of all stripes, but it is an important starting point. We are very happy to accept the recommendation, and we will move at pace to ensure that we deliver it.

Cases under Clare's law will be covered by the new measure. As for more support for victims of domestic abuse, we are very keen to take forward the review's recommendation on the specialist courts, because we think they will have a particularly important role to play. As I said in my statement, we will ensure that the measures relating to the presumption against short sentences contain an exclusion for breaches of orders, which we know is a matter of particular concern for victims of domestic abuse. I will engage with Members across the House on where we can make further progress.

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): Before I put my question to my right hon. Friend, may I give the shadow Justice Secretary a reality check? Under the previous Government, 98% of reported rape cases went completely unpunished. Under the Conservative Government, rape was effectively legalised, so a little bit of humility would not go amiss.

One in five adults in this country will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime. Could my right hon. Friend please explain how domestic abuse victims will be protected under these new measures?

Shabana Mahmood: I will repeat the point I have made to the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Josh Babarinde). We know that there is a particular concern about what the presumption against short sentences might have meant for breaches of protective orders, and we know that issue is of real concern for domestic abuse victims. We want to ensure that those orders are not rendered useless because those who breach them are not seeing

any prison time at all. The specific circumstances surrounding this type of violence against women need a very specific response, which is why we have already said that we will make that exclusion, and I will work with Members across the House to identify where we can make further progress.

Dame Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con): I welcome what the Secretary of State has said about female offenders, but I would like to know a little bit more. Hope Street in Hampshire, which offers residential alternatives to custody for women, has seen remarkable results, and of course it prevents those women from being separated from their children, which would otherwise drive the intergenerational cycle of offending behaviour, trauma and cost to society. Do these proposals include any plans to set up more such facilities across the rest of the country?

Shabana Mahmood: The hon. Lady raises an important point. The combination of the measures that we are accepting from the review will mean that we will see a huge reduction in the number of women going to prison. Approximately two thirds go in for sentences of less than one year and, as the hon. Lady knows, many of those women are themselves victims of domestic abuse. In future, we expect the numbers to drop very significantly, and I know we will make progress in that regard. I have set out an ambition to see fewer women prisoners and, ultimately, to have fewer women's prisons.

Turning to residential alternatives to custody, the hon. Lady will know that I have set up the Women's Justice Board. It is well represented, including by those who have personal experience of Hope Street, and we will work with the Women's Justice Board as we roll out further changes to the female estate.

Emily Darlington (Milton Keynes Central) (Lab): Despite what the shadow Justice Secretary has said about this scheme putting domestic abusers and rapists out on the streets, can the Justice Secretary cut through the rhetoric and fearmongering from the Opposition and be clear that she has put the victims of sexual and domestic abuse at the heart of these measures? Can she confirm that they will be protected, and that those abusers and perpetrators will not benefit from the early release scheme?

Shabana Mahmood: All dangerous offenders—those who receive an extended determinate sentence, including some of the serious offenders to which my hon. Friend has referred—will be excluded from this scheme. All other offenders receiving a standard determinate sentence will be within the earned progression model, but they will have to earn an early release. That is why we are ensuring that there is an uplift in probation funding, to ensure that all those individuals are intensively supervised in the middle stage of their sentence. The worst thing that could happen for every type of victim in this country, and in fact for every citizen, would be for us to run out of prison places altogether. We are in this position because of the mess that the previous Government left behind, and it falls to us to fix it.

Mr Paul Kohler (Wimbledon) (LD): Notwithstanding the predictable nonsense from the shadow Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for Newark

(Robert Jenrick), it is critical that we focus on the needs of the victim. I welcome the Lord Chancellor making that point in her statement, but we need more than fine words. Can she please commit to giving all victims of crime proper access to restorative justice?

Shabana Mahmood: Restorative justice has an important role to play in our justice system, so where it is appropriate and where it can make a difference, we will ensure that it is available. But I want to ensure that victims of crime have other confidence-inducing measures at their disposal, which is why I want to look at exclusion zones in particular, and it is why we want to do the domestic abuse identifier, so that we can track systems, learn from the cases that are going through and make better policy for victims.

Sarah Coombes (West Bromwich) (Lab): I am amazed by the gall of the Conservatives, who left our prisons in utter crisis, failing victims. I thank the Lord Chancellor for her work. Five years ago, my constituent Diane had her world changed when her husband was killed by a driver who was on her phone. Not only did the driver do that, but the first call the driver made was not to 999, but to her sister. When the driver is released from prison, she will have a four-year driving ban, but Diane and her family have had their lives devastated forever. Can the Minister set out that, as we take this necessary action to fix our bursting prison system, we will make use of lengthy restrictions and lifetime driving bans for those who cause death by dangerous driving?

Shabana Mahmood: I am sorry to hear of the case of my hon. Friend's constituent; those are truly horrible circumstances for any family to find themselves in. I can assure her that we will be rigorously pursuing the recommendations in the Gauke review relating to ancillary orders, which are other orders that we can make that curtail an offender's liberty, including lengthier driving bans, which I am considering bringing forward.

Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst (Solihull West and Shirley) (Con): Public confidence in the criminal justice system—and, importantly, the confidence of victims—is paramount. Since 2010, the use of community-based orders has decreased by 61%. That is in no small part because of concerns about offender engagement in the process. If the Government are going to pursue this route, what steps has the Lord Chancellor taken to model how many will reoffend and, more importantly, that they will be rigorously reinforced?

Shabana Mahmood: That issue is why already today I have announced measures to toughen up community punishment, and we will be going further in some areas than even the review recommends. I absolutely agree that community punishment has to maintain the confidence of the public. Like all other Members, I am a constituency Member of Parliament, and I want my constituents to be able to see community punishment as real punishment. It is on us to make sure that it is worthy of that name. That is why I am considering going further on unpaid work, working with businesses to see whether salaries could be paid into a victims fund. That might be one model. I want to see offenders filling potholes and cleaning our streets, and I will be working with local authorities to ensure that we go as far as we can, but

[*Shabana Mahmood*]

I assure the hon. Gentleman that this Government are committed to toughening up community punishment and making sure that it maintains the confidence of the public.

Warinder Juss (Wolverhampton West) (Lab): I am grateful to the Lord Chancellor for her statement and for commissioning the sentencing review. Does she agree that this Government are now taking action, whereas this time last year, rather than sorting out the prison crisis—when we had fewer than 90 spaces, with a prison population of 90,000—the Conservatives called a general election instead? Does she also agree that the present proposals will ensure that dangerous offenders will be locked up and will enable us to rehabilitate others and stop reoffending, which costs us £22 billion a year?

Shabana Mahmood: My hon. Friend is right. This time last year, the Conservatives had a chance to put the country first. Instead, they called an election and tried to put themselves first. They did a runner on the job, and it falls to us to clean up their mess. This Government will clean up their mess, and we will get our prison system on to a sustainable footing so that there is always a prison place. There will be more prison places under this Government, and we will make sure that there is always a prison place for the most dangerous offenders. That is why we are taking all the other measures that we need to take to ensure that we never run out of prison places again.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Respect for justice is diminished by the fiction of the judge announcing a sentence and those in the know then calculating on the back of a fag packet the fraction that it actually represents. Has this statement not reinforced that system with bells on?

Shabana Mahmood: I am sorry to have to break it to the right hon. Gentleman, but he will be horrified to discover that he agrees with David Gauke on this one. The independent reviewer has pointed out that transparency will be paramount to maintaining confidence in the justice system, and we will make sure that we take the transparency measures forward.

Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab): With the National Police Chiefs' Council having declared violence against women and girls a national emergency, it is right that we explore radical methods to bring down the scale of offending in our communities. We know that most sexual offending is not about sex at all, but about power. However, for the subset of convicts whose offending is driven by sexual compulsion, chemical castration could be an option. Is there estimate data on how many future offences that could prevent? By definition, it would only be for those who have already offended. As I am not aware of a method of permanent chemical castration, is there capacity in the Probation Service to monitor ongoing compliance with treatment?

Shabana Mahmood: Studies show a 60% reduction in offending. My hon. Friend is right to say that, for one subset of offenders, offending relates to power. For another subset of offenders, we believe that a combination

of chemical suppressants and psychological interventions can have a big and positive impact. A pilot has been trundling along for many years, and nobody has shown much interest in it, including any of my predecessors—Tory Justice Secretaries just let it carry on. I am not willing to do that, and I am not squeamish about taking further measures. We are going to have a national roll-out of this programme, and I will ensure that is what happens. I am expanding it to two further regions, including for prisoners in 20 further prisons, so that we can build the evidence base and make sure that we are using every tool at our disposal to cut reoffending.

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): I welcome the Government's commitment to extending the pilot scheme to give free sentencing transcripts for rape and serious sexual offences—something for which I have long campaigned. I am sorry that the Victims Minister, the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Alex Davies-Jones), has just left the Chamber, because I wanted to pay tribute to her for all her work on this issue. I also pay tribute to the victims, survivors and campaigners, and particularly my own constituent Juliana Terlizzi, for their bravery and advocacy on this issue. I look forward to continuing to work with the Minister on this issue. Can the Lord Chancellor tell us what measures will be taken to ensure that victims know about the scheme, and that they understand their right to request a transcript of the sentencing remarks? I know that the pilot has shown how much that contributes to their recovery and their welfare after sentencing.

Shabana Mahmood: I pay tribute to the hon. Lady for her work in this area, and I will pass on her remarks to the Victims Minister. I also pay tribute to her constituent. It is very difficult to raise these issues and talk about them openly, and her constituent has shown real bravery in coming forward and explaining why the scheme would have made a difference to her own recovery.

I am very pleased to extend the pilot scheme. We will learn the lessons about how the first pilot scheme worked in the first year, and if we need to do more on publicising what the scheme can do and its availability, we will do so. The hon. Lady will know that I want to make further progress on using AI technology to make transcripts more widely available, because I believe in a transparent justice system. I do not believe that we are very far away from having tech that is accurate enough to be a matter of court record, but we are not quite there yet. It is something we continue to work on.

Linsey Farnsworth (Amber Valley) (Lab): In my 21 years as a Crown prosecutor, I prosecuted many, many cases, but I prosecuted far fewer individuals. That is because 80% of offenders are reoffenders, so I saw the same defendants time and again. The current system does not work. Does the Lord Chancellor agree that the new approach will reduce reoffending, cut crime and lead to fewer victims?

Shabana Mahmood: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to remind the House that 80% of offenders in our country are reoffenders, which tells us that our system is broken. It tells us that our prisons are creating better criminals, not better citizens, and this is something we absolutely have to turn around if we are to protect victims and cut crime.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): The Lord Chancellor will know that for a very long time in this country, the prejudices of the establishment, poisoned by liberal thinking, have been at odds with the preoccupations of the vast majority of law-abiding people. Will she acknowledge now that the principal purpose of prison is retributive? It has other purposes, too, but its principal purpose is punishment. In that spirit, will she confirm when she will bring forward the further legislation on sentencing that she promised? Given what she has announced today, will she also confirm that violent sexual offenders will be excluded from early release?

Shabana Mahmood: I have no truck with anyone else's prejudices and they certainly do not decide what I do in office. I believe in prison. This Government are going to build more prison places, and we will fill them. I believe in prison for the reasons of punishment, primarily; I agree with the right hon. Gentleman on that. I will not let this country run out of prison places, because I know what will happen if we do. I am not willing to put anyone through the breakdown of law and order in our country—I am not willing to take that risk. It means that harder choices are in front of me and this House as we get ourselves out of this crisis, and I am making those choices today.

I will work at pace to bring forward legislation at the earliest opportunity, so that the House can consider the proposals in full. Those on extended determinate sentences—the most dangerous offenders, as judged by a judge in a court—will be excluded from these measures. For all other offenders, earlier release will have to be earned, and there will be intensive supervision afterwards. That is the earned progression model, and I am sure we will debate it at length in the weeks and months ahead.

Mike Tapp (Dover and Deal) (Lab): There is no place in our country for foreign offenders who pose a serious risk to the public. This Government are already returning more foreign national offenders than the Conservatives did when they were in power. Does the Minister agree that the Tories are clearly all talk and no action?

Shabana Mahmood: My hon. Friend puts it very well, and he is absolutely right. We have made more progress on the deportation of foreign national offenders than the previous Government and we will go further. We accept the review's recommendations on reducing the threshold for early removal from 50% to 30%. For offenders who get less than three years in prison, we will work with the Home Office on proposals to move to immediate deportation.

Caroline Voaden (South Devon) (LD): The national average reoffending rate for people who have done a short-term sentence is 54%. Among those who graduate from a prisoner rehabilitation programme in my constituency, the average reoffending rate is just 6%—and the programme is still in touch with every single graduate, after operating for 10 years. In the spirit of trying to reduce the prison population, does the Lord Chancellor agree that such rehabilitation programmes are absolutely crucial and that investing in rehabilitation not only keeps people safe in the community because it reduces

the reoffending rate, but helps the mission to free up prison places for the dangerous criminals who absolutely need to be there?

Shabana Mahmood: The hon. Lady makes a good point. I pay tribute to the work that is going on in her constituency. As I have said before, 80% of offenders in this country are reoffenders. That tells us how broken our system is, and how imperative it is that we sort it out.

Clive Efford (Eltham and Chislehurst) (Lab): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. Reoffending is costing us £22 billion a year, and 80% of offenders are reoffenders. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we need to bring that figure down? What is she intending to do to prevent people from reoffending at such high rates?

Shabana Mahmood: One of the problems of running a prison system at absolutely boiling hot—where it is permanently on the point of collapse, as has been the case in our prison system for far too long now—is that we are not able to make much progress in the prison estate on the programmes that offenders need to access to begin a rehabilitation journey. Part of our proposals, which are designed to relieve the stress in our prison system, will help with rehabilitation within the prison estate.

We are also absolutely determined to make more progress on rehabilitation outside the prison estate, which is why we are toughening up community punishment. We know that that works, and we know that the country can have confidence in such punishment. We will be working with our colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care to think about the availability of drug and alcohol treatment. We will expand the use of sobriety tags, which are already helping offenders to come off the drink that often fuels their offending. I have asked some tech companies to look at further technological innovation that can help us in this space. The holy grail would be a drugs tag, which could make a huge difference in reducing reoffending in our country. We will continue to press ahead and work as quickly as we can to find further technological solutions.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Crimes against children are among the worst crimes humanity can commit. There is relatively little, if anything at all, about offences against children in this review. Could the Lord Chancellor confirm that those who have abused children will not be allowed out early?

Shabana Mahmood: All those who have received an extended determinate sentence—and that includes many of the offenders mentioned by the hon. Lady—are excluded from these measures. All other offenders would have to earn an earlier release by proving that they have behaved properly in prison and not broken prison rules; the minimum for them is set at one third of the sentence, but it can be higher. As I have said, for those who egregiously offend, we will set no upper limit.

James Naish (Rushcliffe) (Lab): We heard this morning that probation services in Nottinghamshire have been rated inadequate following visits by inspectors. They have been judged as understaffed, with urgent improvements needed. I therefore welcome the £700 million increase

[James Naish]

for probation services, but can I ask the Lord Chancellor what other steps can be taken to drive up probation standards in constituencies like mine?

Shabana Mahmood: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for raising issues relating to the Probation Service. We have already expanded the number of staff. Last year, we recruited 1,000 extra, and this year we are on track to hit our target of 1,300 extra staff. Increasing resource—first and foremost with more staff—is a clear priority for us. We are investing in technology to help the Probation Service to be more productive. We have already funded programmes and pilots on AI tech designed to decrease the amount of file work that probation officers have to do to allow them to have more time to do the things that only a human can do: to spend time with the offender in front of them, to come up with a proper plan to reduce their reoffending and therefore to keep the public safe.

Calum Miller (Bicester and Woodstock) (LD): I very much welcome the Lord Chancellor's statement, and I know that victims and survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence in my constituency will do so as well. I thank her and her ministerial colleagues for their cross-party working, including with my hon. Friends the Members for Eastbourne (Josh Babarinde) and for Twickenham (Munira Wilson).

On the domestic abuse recommendations and the application of domestic abuse at sentencing, will the Lord Chancellor consider whether it is possible to tag those offences retrospectively, as well as at sentencing? Also, I welcome her remarks about transcripts and transparency. In the light of the pilot on transcripts for sexual violence and rape cases, will she consider including in that pilot the entire transcript, not just the transcript of sentencing?

Shabana Mahmood: On tagging retrospectively, I will certainly go away and have a look at that point. I suspect, although I do not want to mislead the hon. Member or the House, that a retrospective trawl of all cases—including common assault, which is where we see most domestic abuse cases land for a charge and a criminal case—may be beyond where we can get with the data available to us and the time it would take. However, going forward we will try to capture exactly those cases—not only domestic abuse-connected offences, but other offences such as common assault, which we know have taken place in a domestic abuse context—so that they are all flagged and proper data is kept.

On transcripts, sentencing remarks are currently available for other victims, such as in murder cases and so on, and that will be extended to victims of rape and serious sexual violence. To repeat a point I made earlier, I believe in a transparent justice system. I would like to be in the position of using AI technology to make not just sentencing remarks available. We are thinking about making broadly what happens in courts and such transcripts more widely available. What inhibits us is cost, and we are trying to take out that cost by looking at AI models, but we cannot proceed with anything unless we are absolutely certain about its accuracy because, as I am sure the hon. Member appreciates, a document purporting to be a record of what was said in court needs to be bang on.

Douglas McAllister (West Dunbartonshire) (Lab):

I welcome the fact that this Government are getting on with building the largest prison expansion programme since the Victorians. That is a Labour Government in action, fixing the Tory prison crisis once and for all. Can I ask the Secretary of State to learn from the SNP Scottish Government's abject failure with the new Barlinnie prison project in Glasgow? It has been delayed again, and now will not be ready until 2028, which is nine years late. The cost has soared from £100 million to a staggering £1 billion for one prison. Will we learn lessons from the SNP failure?

Shabana Mahmood: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. Let me tell him that we have already learned the lessons of the Tory party's failure, and I am very sorry to hear about the situation he describes in Scotland. The Conservatives' failure on prison building stemmed from two things: they could not get it past their own Back Benchers, so the planning delays added billions to the cost of prison place expansion; and they did not make certain and available the amount needed to stimulate funding at the rate required. We have reversed both those things: we have made £4.7 billion available and we have made it very clear that planning will not get in the way of prison building.

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): Several years ago, when I was a magistrate in Westminster and my father was a magistrate in north Wiltshire, we lamented a great deal about the fact that when we put people in prison, we found that there was a whole list of antecedents every time and that this recurred all the time. Could the Secretary of State tell the House what assurances she can give us about prison education, rehabilitation programmes and regular work programmes so that we avoid the pattern of prescribing—with good intentions—solutions that do not work, cost a lot of money and leave the public pretty dissatisfied with the justice system?

Shabana Mahmood: I pay tribute to the right hon. Member, his father and magistrates all over our country. They do an incredibly valuable job of keeping our justice system going. In fact, magistrates deal with 90% of all criminal cases.

The right hon. Member is referring to prolific offending: the people who keep coming back, cycling in and out of the system. The review recommends that we switch to a model of intensive supervision courts, where a judge is in charge of making sure that a treatment programme is adhered to. We will take that forward, and I will set out more proposals when we bring forward the legislation. The early pilots—which, in fairness, were started under the previous Government—have shown very positive progress in helping those offenders to turn their lives around and break the cycle of addiction or mental health problems that often leads to prolific offending. We will build on that work.

Ms Polly Billington (East Thanet) (Lab): What does the Secretary of State make of the extraordinary admission by the former Lord Chancellor last year that the previous Government chose not to take action on the prison crisis because

“you have to win votes”?

Fortunately, the Conservatives did not win any votes in Margate, Broadstairs and Ramsgate, which is why I stand here today to say that neighbourhoods in East Thanet are blighted by drug dealing, theft, burglary, sex trafficking and antisocial behaviour, which ebbs and flows according to whether the main criminals, organisers, pimps, co-ordinators and dealers are in or out of prison, causing mayhem. Does she agree with me that the shortage of prison cells, because of the Conservative party, and the lack of alternative punishments, because of the Conservative party, have contributed to that situation, which blights the lives of those in our communities?

Shabana Mahmood: My hon. Friend makes an incredibly powerful point and she is absolutely right. When we have a prison system on the point of collapse, it is not as if the criminals do not know that that is happening. That is why it is imperative that we get our system under control and ensure there is always a prison place available for those who have to be locked up to keep the public safe. Her point about winning votes shows the approach taken by the previous Government: they put themselves first, not the country first.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): On behalf of the justice unions parliamentary group, I welcome the independent review's recognition of probation officers and join the call from the National Association of Probation Officers for extra direct investment in staff now. Stable accommodation on release is also key to offender rehabilitation. There are presently no approved premises for women in Wales and women centres struggle for funding, so how will the Justice Secretary improve rehabilitation and life chances for Welsh women in the criminal justice system?

Shabana Mahmood: I very much hope that the position for Welsh women will be the same as for women in England, which is that we see a huge reduction in the number of women in Wales and England entering the female prison estate. That is because the combination of the measures David Gauke recommends, in particular on short sentences, will mean that fewer women go to prison. I will, of course, work with colleagues across Wales to look at what more we can do on accommodation provision. I know that there is no specific centre in Wales—the right hon. Lady and I have discussed that previously. It was a promise made by the previous Government without any funding attached to it, so I was not able to make decisions when I first came into office that could reverse that, but we will work with the Women's Justice Board and others to ensure that the offer for women who are now no longer going to prison is still strong and helps them on their rehabilitation journey.

Jonathan Hinder (Pendle and Clitheroe) (Lab): This is a day of shame for the Conservative party. One of their own has laid bare the scale of its failure, leaving us with nowhere to put the prisoners. Conservatives used to call themselves the party of law and order. Take it from this former police inspector: they lost that label long ago and they are never getting it back. Moving forward, the criminal justice system is just that—a system. Decisions taken on policing, courts, probation and prisons all affect one another, so will the Lord Chancellor assure me that the implications for policing and the enforcement of sentences are being taken into account when we roll out the changes?

Shabana Mahmood: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: it is a day of shame for the Conservative party. I am sorry to see that the attitude of Conservative Members today is shameless. He makes a very important point on policing. I have had a good conversation with police leaders. I am determined to use the national Criminal Justice Board to ensure that every part of the criminal justice system is aligned and that we take into account all the interactions—based on this review, and on the upcoming criminal courts review—and think about the impact they have not just on the bit of the justice system I am directly responsible for, but on the wider criminal justice system, including policing as a whole.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): May I first say to the Lord Chancellor that I have huge personal respect for her? I may disagree with some—some, by the way, not all—of what she has announced today, but I would like to put that on the record. She mentions female offending. She will know that there are six mother and baby units in female prisons in England. There were 90 applications for the last period we know about, up to March 2024, with 64 places for mothers and 70 places for babies, allowing for twins. Clearly, there are not enough places. Has she considered as part of this review, when there is not serious and violent offending by female prisoners, getting more of those mothers and babies into the community, rather than having them in prison?

Shabana Mahmood: Let me thank the right hon. Gentleman for his remarks of personal respect, which are shared across this House. I thank him for that and for the important issue he raises. I hope to move to a position where the combined impact of the changes in the review and the work we are doing with the Women's Justice Board mean that we see a huge drop in the number of female prisoners. I am particularly keen to ensure that pregnant women and mothers of young children are not anywhere near our female prison estate in future. Of course, for serious offenders we will always need to make sure that prison is an option, but the vast majority of women go to prison on short sentences for much less serious offences and we need to turn that around.

Chris Webb (Blackpool South) (Lab): Under the last Conservative Government, the number of foreign criminals in our prisons rose to the tens of thousands, shamefully. Will the Lord Chancellor outline for my constituents what we are doing to deport those foreign criminals from our prisons as quickly as possible to free up vital prison spaces?

Shabana Mahmood: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We are deporting at a faster rate than the previous Government. We have accepted the review's recommendation to drop the threshold for early removal from this country from 50% of the custodial sentence to 30%. We will urgently work up a plan, with the Home Office, for those who are sentenced to less than three years to be deported as quickly as possible after sentencing.

James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con): In her statement, the Lord Chancellor said that under her earned progression plans, if offenders follow prison rules they will win earlier release. The review says that thousands of offenders will benefit from that. Can she

[James Wild]

explain to my constituents why simply following the rules means that serious offenders will serve only a third of their sentence? Where is the punishment and where are victims' interests in that approach?

Shabana Mahmood: The hon. Gentleman will know that the track record of his party in government was to run prisons boiling hot, with violence off the charts. The shadow Justice Secretary has been showing a huge amount of concern for prison officers and the violence they face in our prisons. I would have hoped that the Conservative party might welcome some incentivisation in our prison system to make sure we can run safer prisons and keep our prison officers safe. Making sure that people follow the rules, and that that is how they can earn an earlier release, means that those who break the rules will serve longer in prison.

Andrew Pakes (Peterborough) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend for her statement and her razor-like focus on fixing the broken justice and prison system this Government inherited. May I welcome the £700 million to help rebuild probation services and ask a question on rehabilitation and making community punishment pay? I think many people in my constituency will welcome a focus on community punishment being used to do jobs such as fixing potholes and rebuilding services that are needed locally. Equally, I want community punishment to pay by breaking the cycle of reoffending. Can she tell us more about how this programme will get businesses and apprenticeships into prisons, and give young offenders a way out of that cycle, so that we stop them being in prison for a second and third time?

Shabana Mahmood: My hon. Friend raises a really important point. This is why the Government have already rolled out employment work councils, where prisons link up with employers in their region and try to make sure that there are jobs and training available for offenders on leaving prison. We know that the ability to work is a really important part of driving down reoffending. That is a priority for this Government. Of course, unpaid work is a very visible way for offenders to make reparations to the communities they have harmed. In our eyes, that is the primary focus of it, but the discipline of doing that work can help offenders who are far away from the world of work to get closer to it.

Jess Brown-Fuller (Chichester) (LD): The Government's plans lay out an expectation that they will be able to manage ex-offenders in the community under intensive supervision. A probation officer in my constituency recently told me that she was told off by her bosses for spending too long with offenders when she was booking just 15-minute appointments. Can the Lord Chancellor tell me when the promised investment will actually reach frontline probation services, and can she guarantee it will be enough to ensure public safety and reduce reoffending?

Shabana Mahmood: Let me reassure the hon. Lady that this is a huge uplift in funding for probation. It is a £1.6 billion budget as it stands, and it will increase by up to £700 million by the end of the spending review period. We have already invested in piloting AI and

other technology designed to improve productivity, where AI can complete much of the paperwork that a lot of probation officers spend far too much of their time on, often repeating the same information in different documents. That shows huge promise. We will roll that out at pace to give probation officers more time with the offenders in front of them, doing the thing that only a human can do, which is to get to grips with what is driving that offender's behaviour and have a plan to tackle it, including by accessing treatment programmes and other things in the community. We are determined to make sure that the Probation Service can rise to the scale of the challenge. The funding will help with that, as will our investment in that technology.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): Order. We have a number of Members still to get in, so can hon. Members remember to keep their questions and answers short?

Mr Jonathan Brash (Hartlepool) (Lab): Location and curfew restrictions using electronic tagging to stop hyper-prolific offenders going anywhere near a place where they could reoffend; a requirement to engage in mental health, drug and alcohol treatment, including the use of sobriety tags to address the cause of criminality; putting offenders back to work cleaning up the communities they have harmed; chemical castration for sex offenders; the speeding up of foreign deportations; and the largest prison expansion ever—does the Lord Chancellor agree that this is about putting victims and the public first?

Shabana Mahmood: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This Government are determined to clean up the mess left by the previous Conservative Government and to put victims first, cut crime and make our communities safer.

John Cooper (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con): Under the yoke of the SNP, Scotland already has a presumption against short sentences, and now the new Scottish commission looking at sentencing and penal policy has been accused of being packed with activists determined to keep criminals out of jail. Why is the Lord Chancellor in Westminster following this lead and failing to put victims at the heart of the justice system?

Shabana Mahmood: What absolute rubbish, I am sorry to say. I am not taking any lessons from the hon. Gentleman or the SNP. This is a programme for England and Wales, for which I am directly responsible, and we are going to make it work.

Jo White (Bassetlaw) (Lab): When a previous Government fail to take responsibility for the crisis they have caused, they deserve a life sentence on the Opposition Benches. I welcome the construction of a new wing at Ranby prison in my constituency by Worksop-based Laing O'Rourke, a specialist in modern methods of construction that is involved in many other construction projects across the country. If the Minister is seeking more sites for new prisons, could I propose the Crown-owned land across the road from HMP Ranby? We would very much welcome a new prison there.

Shabana Mahmood: I shall take my hon. Friend's early bid for further building in her constituency under advisement immediately.

Blake Stephenson (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con): Under these proposals, foreign criminals will be deported after serving 30% of their sentence, which I appreciate is an improvement. The public want them to be deported right away—does the Lord Chancellor?

Shabana Mahmood: The review recommends immediate deportation—meaning “as quickly as possible”, because we still have to detain people before we can get them on a plane and back to their country of origin—for sentences of under three years. We are going to work up proposals on that with the Home Office. For more serious offenders with sentences of over three years, we are going to bring the threshold down from 50% to 30%.

Josh Fenton-Glynn (Calder Valley) (Lab): I thank the Lord Chancellor for her statement today, which is a sensible response to the overincarceration and prison places crisis. Can she assure my constituents that notwithstanding these changes, under-reported and under-prosecuted crimes, such as violence against women and girls, will continue to be prioritised by this Government?

Shabana Mahmood: This Government will make sure we are running a prison system that is sustainable and not on the point of collapse, so that we can ensure that dangerous offenders in this country are still locked up. We will make progress on our broader mission to halve the level of violence against women and girls over 10 years.

Tessa Munt (Wells and Mendip Hills) (LD): I welcome the Lord Chancellor’s statement and the work that David Gauke has done to inform everything that is happening today. As a member of the Justice Committee, I look forward to seeing him before us shortly. I seek clarity on what the Lord Chancellor referred to as the “so-called medication to manage problematic sexual arousal”.

Will she place the available research and conclusions in the Library so that we all have access to the information and can understand the data on which she and David Gauke have relied?

Shabana Mahmood: I am happy to ensure that the evidence is available. I would say to the hon. Lady that the very small-scale pilot that I inherited had been running for some time without anybody paying a huge amount of attention to it, and the evidence from other jurisdictions where it has been rolled out a bit more widely is stronger. Our roll-out—I want to get to a national roll-out—will start with two extra regions and 20 more prisons, and we will build the evidence base there. We want measures that work, and I do believe that the combination of chemical suppressants and psychological interventions can help with a cohort of particularly difficult sex offenders.

Ben Goldsborough (South Norfolk) (Lab): In the last four years of the previous Conservative Government, the number of foreign national offenders increased. Now, call me old-fashioned, but I believe that non-UK citizens who commit crimes within the UK should not serve their sentences here. Today’s report makes good progress, and I welcome the Lord Chancellor’s tackling this issue urgently; it is what South Norfolk wants to see, and it will get capacity back in our prisons.

Shabana Mahmood: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: we are already deporting more foreign national offenders than the previous Government. We are taking forward the measures from the Gauke review to speed up and get more foreign offenders out of our system and back to their countries of origin.

Charlie Dewhirst (Bridlington and The Wolds) (Con): I wholeheartedly support my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Bedfordshire (Blake Stephenson) in his call for the immediate deportation of foreign criminals. What is the Lord Chancellor doing to ensure that the courts are not holding up those deportations, and that once deported, those criminals are never allowed back on these shores?

Shabana Mahmood: The hon. Gentleman may have seen that just last week, when the Home Secretary set out the immigration White Paper, we announced that we are reviewing the use of article 8 in relation to immigration cases, and we will bring forward our proposals on that in due course. We will not allow the misuse of our courts and the use of article 8 to enable people who have no right to be in this country to stay in this country. That will require changes to the immigration rules, which the Home Secretary is working on.

Jess Asato (Lowestoft) (Lab): Does the Lord Chancellor agree that the voluntary and community sector can play a vital role in supporting offenders to rehabilitate and gain vital employment and housing? Organisations such as Pathways Care Farm and Access Community Trust in my constituency have helped to prevent reoffending.

Shabana Mahmood: I pay tribute to the organisations in my hon. Friend’s constituency; such voluntary organisations play a hugely important role in helping the justice system to succeed in rehabilitating offenders. We will continue to work closely and build on the review’s recommendations in this area.

Rachel Gilmour (Tiverton and Minehead) (LD): Having sat on the Public Accounts Committee inquiry into prison overcrowding, I know full well the issue at hand and who to blame. Can the Lord Chancellor assure me and my constituents that they will not be placed in more danger by the Government not jailing criminals? When those individuals are in the community, the local community must have a voice in the effectiveness and planning of these new sentences, lest we end up with community concerns similar to those about bail hostels in Tiverton and Minehead.

Shabana Mahmood: What puts the whole country at risk, including current, future and potential victims of crime, is letting our prison system collapse, and I will never let that happen. The measures we are taking forward from the review today are designed to make sure that this country never runs out of prison places ever again. I will ensure that there is ample time for debate and discussion across this House as we bring our legislation forward.

Josh Newbury (Cannock Chase) (Lab): Is the Lord Chancellor as astounded as I am by the hypocrisy of the Conservatives? They really are the arsonists attacking

[Josh Newbury]

the firefighters. We are having to clean up their mess, because, in the words of the National Audit Office, this crisis is the result of their failure

“to ensure that the number of prison places was aligned with criminal justice” priorities.

Shabana Mahmood: After some months in this job facing the shadow Ministers, I am afraid that nothing about their behaviour surprises me any more. I will take notice—as, I think, will the country—when the Conservatives finally offer an apology for the absolute abject mess they left behind.

Shaun Davies (Telford) (Lab): Police officers, magistrates and judges all report that some offenders would rather go to prison to be back with their mates, watching Sky TV and having three square meals a day. Does the Lord Chancellor agree that those who go to prison should be treated more harshly and robustly than was the case under the 14 years of the previous Conservative Government?

Shabana Mahmood: We want to make sure that our prisons are used to punish offenders, that those offenders are made to abide by strict prison rules, that they engage with programmes in prison to bring down their propensity to reoffend, and that, ultimately, we succeed in keeping my hon. Friend’s constituents safe by turning out better citizens rather than better criminals.

Luke Myer (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): There are thousands of decent, moderate Conservatives all across the country who will have seen the ridiculous spectacle today of the Opposition denigrating David Gauke—of all people—on the prison system. The review was absolutely clear that short sentences are driving reoffending—60% reoffend within the year. Will the Minister set out the steps that she will take to cut crime and create fewer victims?

Shabana Mahmood: My hon. Friend is right. We have to cut crime, have fewer victims and make sure that our streets are safe. That is why we have to make sure that we never run out of prison places, that we never see the breakdown in law and order that would ensue were that to happen, and that we take forward a package of measures that I have announced today. We work on the legislation in the coming weeks and months, which will be designed to make sure that we do not run out of prison places, that we put victims first, and that we cut crime in this country.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call Tristan Osborne for the last question on this statement.

Tristan Osborne (Chatham and Aylesford) (Lab): Leaving the best until last, Madam Deputy Speaker.

As a former police officer, I can say that community payback works. Does the Lord Chancellor agree with me and many of my colleagues in the criminal justice system that rehabilitation of offenders, including filling potholes and clearing fly tipping, is popular, not only in Chatham and Aylesford but in Newark and across the country?

Shabana Mahmood: My hon. Friend makes an incredibly important point. I am determined that we toughen community punishment and make sure that unpaid work truly pays back to the communities that have been harmed by crime. That is why I work with businesses and local authorities, so we can all have a system that drives down reoffending—a system where reparations are made to the communities that have been harmed by crime, whether they are in Newark, Birmingham Ladywood or indeed anywhere else.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): That concludes the statement.

Business of the House

12.51 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Lucy Powell): With permission, I should like to make a statement about the business for the week commencing 2 June.

MONDAY 2 JUNE—Second Reading of the Bus Services (No. 2) Bill [*Lords*].

TUESDAY 3 JUNE—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Armed Forces Commissioner Bill, followed by, if necessary, consideration of a Lords message, followed by a general debate on dementia care. The subject for this debate was determined by the Backbench Business Committee, in unallotted time.

WEDNESDAY 4 JUNE—Remaining stages of the Product Regulation and Metrology Bill [*Lords*].

THURSDAY 5 JUNE—Debate on a motion on high street banking closures and banking hubs, followed by a debate on a motion on safety regulations in the construction and planning of battery energy storage sites. The subjects for these debates were determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 6 JUNE—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 9 June 2025 will include:

MONDAY 9 JUNE—Remaining stages of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, day one.

TUESDAY 10 JUNE—Remaining stages of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, day two.

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

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): It is an honour to be responding to business questions as we march on to the recess. I know that the Leader of the House has had a challenging few weeks, but I want to start by thanking her for everything that she has done to advocate for Members in this House.

This morning, we have learned that the Government have been prevented from signing their Chagos surrender deal by the High Court. When will the Prime Minister come to the House to explain this latest humiliation and masterclass in how not to negotiate in Britain's interests?

I know that Members across the House often say things in the Chamber and elsewhere that they regret. I know, too, that the Leader of the House has said that she regrets her words on rape gangs, but it is for the victims of those rape gangs to decide whether those regrets are enough. It is time for the Government finally to take action on this scandal. Will she grant a debate, in Government time, on the rape gang scandal, and commit the Government to the national inquiry that the victims deserve?

At the previous business questions, I called on the Leader of the House to ask the Chancellor to U-turn on her disastrous economic policies. Since then, things have got even worse. This week, inflation, which stood at 2% when Labour took office, has surged to 3.5%. Today, public sector net borrowing hit £20.2 billion, the fourth highest figure for the month since records began. We have had a disastrous Budget followed by an emergency one, and it looks like the next one could be catastrophic.

It seems that the Deputy Prime Minister has also had enough of the Chancellor's economic policies. The difference is that we on the Conservative Benches want the tax raids on businesses and households to be reversed, but the Deputy Prime Minister wants more tax and more spend. Yesterday, the Prime Minister would not rule out more tax rises either. I think that we can all see what is coming: £40 billion of tax rises last autumn was never going to be enough for this Government—a Government who are tough with the vulnerable, but weak with the unions.

The Deputy Prime Minister may be on leadership manoeuvres, but it is quite a shopping list of new taxes that she is after—although, curiously, further taxes on second homes were not included. It is the people who save hard for their retirement and build businesses who are next in the firing line for the tax-raid obsession of this Labour Government. To pensioners, farmers and business owners we can now add savers to the list of people whom this Government seem determined to make poor. Will the Leader of the House grant a debate, in Government time, on the Government's economic plans, so that the Deputy Prime Minister can also come and set out her tax plans for the House. I would be very interested to see the tag-team operation there.

If the Deputy Prime Minister is otherwise engaged, perhaps we could turn our attention to yesterday's welcome U-turn from the Prime Minister. I understand that he has always been gifted with the most flexible of principles, but it was quite a sight yesterday to see him admitting to promising a U-turn on punishing pensioners without any date for that U-turn, or an explanation of whether it would benefit all or just some pensioners. Crucially, we did not hear an apology from him. Will the Leader of the House grant a debate in Government time on the winter fuel payment U-turn, so that the Chancellor, or the Prime Minister, can come to this House and apologise to pensioners and set out when they will give pensioners the certainty that they can heat their homes next winter?

Let me conclude—[HON. MEMBERS: "More!"] Ah, thank you. We are watching the Government in a slow-motion car crash, with no economic plan but to tax and spend as fast as they can. It is not the gingerbread man; it is tax, tax as fast as they can.

We are watching a Prime Minister who is having to undo the decisions of his own Government in the space of just months but who cannot bring himself to apologise. The Government are already showing that they have failed to learn the lesson of all socialist Governments: they eventually run out of everyone else's money. This Government seem determined to run out in record time, and the only losers will be the British people.

Lucy Powell: First of all, I congratulate Tottenham Hotspur and Crystal Palace football clubs on both winning silverware for the first time in a long time. North and south London celebrate, while both sides of Manchester commiserate.

The hon. Lady asks about an important subject. I can say now that the injunction has been lifted that, with the permission of Mr Speaker, the Defence Secretary will make a statement later today—probably at the end of business—on the future of the Diego Garcia military base following those developments.

[Lucy Powell]

I know that the whole House will want to send a very clear message that we condemn the brutal murder of the Israeli embassy staff in Washington overnight. We stand firmly together against antisemitism.

Today also marks the eighth anniversary of the Manchester Arena attack in my constituency. I am sure that the thoughts of the whole House will be with the families of those affected. I also want to put on record my reflection of the determination of Figen Murray and her campaign for Martyn's law. I am really proud that it was this Labour Government and our Prime Minister who kept the promise to Figen to introduce Martyn's law, which is now an Act of Parliament.

Today also marks a year since the general election was called—in the rain, which I think we all remember. Let us be honest, the rain is still pouring on the Conservatives. They do not seem to have learned very much. They might have thought on that day that things could not get any worse, but they are. I want to say to the hon. Lady that I very much respect her and enjoy working with her on the Modernisation Committee and across the House. I thank her for yet again stepping in at short notice to cover for the shadow Leader of the House, who is performing other parliamentary functions, but I am sure we will see him back soon.

The hon. Lady asks about grooming gangs. I want to be absolutely clear that this Government—myself included—want the victims and survivors to be at the heart of everything that we do. We want their terrible experiences to be acted on, and we want those responsible to be brought to justice. That is exactly what we are doing. We will leave no stone unturned in securing justice for the victims. First and foremost, they want action to be taken and the many recommendations of the previous national inquiry to be implemented, and we are doing that. In addition, Louise Casey's full audit of these matters will be brought to this House in very short order.

The hon. Lady raises several issues relating to the economy, but it is worth reminding the House what we inherited and what we have had to deal with since we came into office. The Conservatives do not want to talk about it, but we had to fix the gaping hole that their party left in the public finances. Pay deals were on desks but were unfunded. Billions of pounds on asylum hotels were not accounted for. All the reserves were gone in July of the financial year, and new hospitals were nothing more than a work of fiction.

We had to come in, fix the economy and get economic stability back. Those who pay the heaviest price when the economy crashes and when markets lose confidence are those on fixed incomes, such as pensioners and the poorest in society. It is also the value of people's pensions that falls. We have acted on the £22 billion black hole, and we have got the economy going again.

The Conservatives do not like to hear it, but fixing the economy is exactly what we are doing. Growth is up. Interest rates have been cut four times since the general election. Half a million more people have moved into work since the election, and the UK is now the fastest growing European economy in the G7. Real wages have gone up for the first time in a decade, after the Conservatives left living standards falling for the first time in our history. We are fixing the mess that they left behind.

The hon. Lady asked about winter fuel payments. As the Prime Minister made clear yesterday, now that the economy is showing signs of recovery, because of the actions we have taken, we want to look at the threshold. First and foremost, we want to make sure that people feel the benefits of that economic growth and have more money in their pockets, and that includes pensions as well. However, we will not be making spending commitments without saying where the money is coming from, and it is right that those decisions are made in a future fiscal event, as the Prime Minister said yesterday.

A year on from that rainy day on Downing Street, it could not be clearer: the Conservatives are having an existential identity crisis. A year on from their worst defeat, they are still going backwards. They do not know who they are any more. They do not know what they stand for any more, and they do not know what they are even doing. They once proudly stood for free trade, and now they are against any trade deals. They used to claim to be the party of business, but in opposing our agreement with the EU, they are setting themselves against the Federation of Small Businesses, the Confederation of British Industry, the British Chambers of Commerce, UK Hospitality and the Food and Drink Federation.

The Conservatives were once for levelling up and reindustrialisation of the north, but now they are against new energy infrastructure and the jobs of the future. They were once compassionate Conservatives who supported the NHS—I remember that very famously—but now they oppose the much-needed funding it is getting. A year on from that rainy day at Downing Street, they have not learned a thing, nor have they said sorry for the mess they left behind—whether that is the economy or prisons, which we heard about in the earlier statement. It is down to this Labour Government to clear up the mess that they left, fix the economy and public services, boost people's living standards, cut immigration and get waiting lists down.

Jon Trickett (Normanton and Hemsworth) (Lab): I associate myself with the comments from the Leader of the House repudiating antisemitism. In South Elmsall in my constituency, there is a clay pit that has been working for 14 years, four years after the licence expired. Last year, an enforcement notice was taken out by the Environment Agency, and now we are hearing of multiple breaches of the licence, but nothing has been done yet to close the operation down. Can we have a debate in Government time on the enforcement powers of the Environment Agency in order that I can express my wish that immediate action now takes place to protect that community?

Lucy Powell: I am really sorry to hear about the situation in my hon. Friend's constituency, where he does great work on behalf of his constituents, and that enforcement action is not being taken where it should be. I will ensure that the relevant Minister has heard his question today and that the Environment Agency takes the action that it should be taking.

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

Marie Goldman (Chelmsford) (LD): Yesterday it was revealed by the charities Tommy's and Sands that, tragically, delays in improvements to NHS maternity care are

costing the lives of hundreds of babies a year. This follows the Care Quality Commission's findings that 65% of maternity units are not sufficiently safe, putting women and babies under threat. Will the Leader of the House grant Government time to debate the crisis unfolding in our maternity units, the failure to implement the immediate and essential actions in the Ockenden review, and the Government's decision to end the ringfencing of £100 million for vital improvements to maternity care?

Lucy Powell: I thank the hon. Lady for that question. As a mother myself, I pay tribute to the amazing work that midwives and our maternity services do, and I am sure that many other Members from across the House do too. I am sure we all remember every midwife involved when we gave birth. She is right that, after the parlous state that our maternity services were left in by the previous Government, we need to learn lessons and ensure that our maternity services are fit for purpose and have the funding that they need.

We must also ensure that we take on board all the experiences of those who have used the services and the many inquiries, including the Ockenden inquiry. That is what the Health Secretary is doing. He will come to this House to provide an update after he has considered all the findings and conversations. The hon. Lady spoke of ringfencing, but I assure her that the funding levels for maternity services have not gone down at all since the election.

Carolyn Harris (Neath and Swansea East) (Lab): Over the last few days, the Welsh Rugby Union has announced plans to introduce a disproportionate funding formula that will disadvantage both the Ospreys and the Scarlets rugby union teams. Will the Leader of the House ask colleagues at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to add their voices to a group of cross-party Welsh MPs who are asking the WRU to find a way to protect and support all four equally important regional Welsh rugby teams?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend is a great champion for Welsh rugby who raises these issues with me regularly in these sessions. I am sorry to hear about the new funding arrangements. I am sure that the Welsh Rugby Union has heard her question and will respond and take action. I will ensure that a Minister gets in touch with her.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call Martin Vickers, on behalf of the Backbench Business Committee.

Martin Vickers (Brigg and Immingham) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Chairman sends his apologies to you and the House. I know that he will be pleased to hear the Leader of the House's comments about Tottenham Hotspur.

In addition to the business already announced, the Committee agreed at its meeting earlier this week to another Select Committee statement on Thursday 5 June, which will be from the Justice Committee. It also agreed on debates in the Chamber on 19 June on incontinence and on Windrush Day. We also accepted debates for Westminster Hall on hydrogen powered aviation, the role of carers, education in improving social mobility, and Down syndrome regression disorder.

I remind hon. Members that application forms for the main estimates day debates, which we anticipate in late June, are now available on the Backbench Business Committee website. We are swamped with general applications, which is good news in one sense, but I urge hon. Members to get their applications in as quickly as possible, particularly if they are looking for a Chamber debate, as we have enough on the waiting list to fill the Chamber until November.

Last week, I was privileged to meet some teenagers from the Teenage Cancer Trust who were in Parliament having submitted a letter to the Department of Health and Social Care. They are remarkable young people who have clearly had an awful experience with cancer at an early age. May I gently suggest to the Leader of the House that she might like to allocate some Government time for a debate on that subject?

Lucy Powell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for stepping in for the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), who I understand is still out celebrating in Bilbao; he might eventually make his way back when he has finished. We look forward to seeing him after the recess. I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for all the work he does in business questions and elsewhere in raising issues from his area as well as British Steel in Scunthorpe.

The hon. Gentleman raises the really important issue of teenage cancer. Many of us have met young people who are living with and getting treatment for cancer. I know that the Secretary of State is particularly committed to these issues, and I am sure that he will be updating the House regularly.

Clive Efford (Eltham and Chislehurst) (Lab): On Tuesday, those who are infected and affected by the contaminated blood scandal protested in Whitehall and handed in letters to No. 10. They are angry that they have been excluded from overseeing the compensation process and that, as a consequence, the process is very slow. The Government promised a debate in Government time on the contaminated blood scandal. May I ask my right hon. Friend whether we are likely to get that debate this side of the summer recess?

Lucy Powell: I thank my hon. Friend once again for raising these important matters, which he does consistently and regularly. He knows that the Government are committed to paying comprehensive compensation to the infected and affected in the infected blood scandal, and we are working at pace to ensure that compensation is paid out. We are also committed to a debate. We had a statement to the House last week, and I will ensure that a debate, as promised, is forthcoming.

Sir Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con): I have been working with residents of Meadowcroft retirement home in Bushey who have suffered repeated failures by Anchor homes, which culminated this week in residents being unable to get an ambulance to the facility because of a faulty key box. Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on the exploitation of vulnerable residents by such companies?

Lucy Powell: I am really sorry to hear of that shocking incident. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, Anchor has a responsibility to ensure that care and ambulances

[Lucy Powell]

can get in. It is important that we ensure that our care homes are operating to the highest standards, that they have the best people working there, and that all the residents can be safe and cared for. I am sure that would be a popular topic for debate.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): Since the creation of the role of the National Security Adviser in 2010, every incumbent has come before the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy—until this Government. The Leader of the House will understand how accountability to this place is the cornerstone of our democracy, and a failure of the NSA to meet the Committee would set a dangerous precedent for future Governments to avoid parliamentary scrutiny, so will she use her position as a representative of this House in Government to ensure that the NSA is held to account and appears before the Committee?

Lucy Powell: I thank my hon. Friend for raising the matter with me directly as well as with the Leader of the House of Lords. I will respond to him properly shortly. We take accountability very seriously indeed. I will ensure that the Committee is updated on the Government's work to protect UK national security and that relevant people can appear before the Committee to be scrutinised.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): Order. I hope to end business questions at about 2 o'clock, so will Members please help each other out by keeping questions and answers short?

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): Following the outcome of the UK-EU summit earlier this week, will the Leader of the House grant a debate in Government time on the state of British democracy? On 23 June 2016, 70% of my constituents in Romford voted to leave the European Union—as did the rest of the United Kingdom—yet this so-called EU reset is in fact a surrender of our hard-won Brexit freedoms, with rule taking from Brussels once again, the European Court of Justice back in charge, British fish handed over until 2038, and billions in payments back to the European Union. Will she please let the British people's views be paramount, not the short-term views of the Government?

Lucy Powell: What people voted for in the referendum was to leave the European Union but retain many benefits of trade and co-operation, which the hon. Member's Government failed to negotiate in the aftermath of that referendum. This Government have brought them about. He cannot have it both ways. One of the promises that his Government made was that leaving the EU meant we could do lots of free trade deals with other countries. That is what this Government have delivered, with a unique and unprecedented trade deal with India and a trade deal with the US. We cannot have surrendered ourselves to the EU if we are getting those trade deals and securing those benefits at the same time.

The hon. Member will know that, in fact, since we left the EU we have had to adopt all the EU's standards and regulations in order to continue trading with it, but we have had absolutely no benefit from doing that. Now

we have those free trade benefits as well as doing that. I am sorry to say that our deal is far better than the deal that his Government got.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): On Saturday, my constituent Vimal Pandya received the freedom of Bermondsey at Southwark cathedral for his exceptional work running Rotherhithe Community Kitchen, which feeds hundreds of people weekly. For his equally exceptional work during the covid lockdowns, he was recognised by Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. However, he has recently been detained by the Home Office. May we have a debate in Government time to ensure that Home Office exceptional circumstances criteria recognise truly exceptional people such as Vimal and the amazing contribution that they make to communities such as mine?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend is aware that I cannot comment on individual cases, but I will ensure that a Minister gives him a reply on his case. In this House, we regularly discuss issues relating to immigration and visas, and I will ensure that there is ample opportunity to do so in future.

Helen Morgan (North Shropshire) (LD): I chair the all-party parliamentary group on digital communities. At our meeting on Tuesday, we heard from industry executives that the shared rural network has been rolled out well ahead of schedule. However, I am afraid that my constituents have noticed no discernible difference to their mobile signal on the ground. May we have a debate in Government time to discuss what a decent mobile signal looks like for rural areas and how on earth we will deliver it?

Lucy Powell: Mobile blackspots are a real challenge for many of our constituents, so I thank the hon. Lady for raising these issues. I will ensure that she receives a full response, but I know that any time anyone applies for a debate on such issues, it is very well subscribed.

Dame Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con): The Leader of the House may be aware that cheerleading is one of the fastest-growing sports in the UK, and that it achieves the remarkable feat of keeping young girls engaged in sport at an age when so many disengage from school sports. She might not know, however, that two of the best cheerleading teams in the country are in Gosport. In fact, both Storm Athletics and Jessie Leigh Dance and Cheer Academy came back from the world summit in Florida early this month with gold medals and first-place trophies. I would love to see many more young people get involved in the sport, which has now been recognised as such by Sport England, but funding to support more disadvantaged youngsters to get involved cannot be applied for yet. Will the Leader of the House lead the cheer for cheerleading as a debate here in Parliament? [Interruption.]

Lucy Powell: I do not have my pom-poms with me, but the hon. Lady raises an important matter, and I am glad that cheerleading has been recognised as a sport because, as she says, particularly for young women and girls, it is a great way to keep active and to stay involved in sport. I also congratulate her constituents on their gold medals and on all that they are doing for cheerleading the sport into the future.

Jo Platt (Leigh and Atherton) (Lab/Co-op): To mark NABMA's "Love Your Local Market" campaign, I want to express my support for Leigh market in my constituency. It is a vibrant hub of creativity, entrepreneurship and community spirit, and this Saturday it will host live events and workshops. Will the Leader of the House join me in celebrating local markets and recognising how they remain vital to the regeneration of our town centres?

Lucy Powell: Leigh market is brilliant, and I thank my hon. Friend for raising it here. "Love Your Local Market" is a great campaign, because she is right to say that markets are at the heart of the regeneration of our town centres.

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): May we have an early debate on the refusal of the Bank of England to comply with its 2% inflation target? Also, will the Leader of the House facilitate a meeting between me and Treasury Ministers to see whether the Government are willing to support my Bank of England (Inflation Targets) Bill, due for Second Reading on 11 July, which makes provision for penalties against the court of directors of the Bank of England for failure to meet inflation targets?

Lucy Powell: We had Treasury questions earlier this week, when the hon. Gentleman could have raised those issues.

I am proud that the previous Labour Government gave the Bank of England independence, which has been an important part of the fiscal stability that we have had in this country—sometimes ignored by the hon. Gentleman's Conservative Government and party, I am sorry to say. Inflation is on its way down and interest rates are on their way down—that is what this Government are delivering.

Paulette Hamilton (Birmingham Erdington) (Lab): The unchecked proliferation of houses in multiple occupation and exempt accommodation is devastating communities across my constituency of Birmingham Erdington. Birmingham has the highest number of exempt accommodation claims in the country. Wards in my constituency rank among those worst affected by HMOs in the city, crippling neighbourhoods and overwhelming local services. Given the urgency of the crisis, will the Leader of the House commit to scheduling a debate in Government time to discuss how to ensure that no community is left behind while this issue is left in limbo?

Lucy Powell: I know that the quality of HMOs and exempt accommodation is a huge issue in Birmingham and, frankly, it is a disgrace. We are determined to improve the quality of supported housing and are consulting on reforms. At the same time, we are progressing the Renters' Rights Bill, which will give local authorities more power in that area, through the other House.

Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP): May I begin by echoing the revulsion of the Leader of the House in respect of the antisemitic murders in the United States of America in recent hours?

"Cruel" and a policy that sees a third child treated

"as almost a second-class citizen".

That is not my phrasing, but that of Gordon Brown in describing the Labour party's two-child benefit cap—and it is the Labour party's two-child benefit cap, because its Members went through the Division Lobbies to retain it just last year. In Scotland, we know that the SNP will scrap the two-child benefit cap. Based on the Prime Minister's U-turn yesterday in respect of the winter fuel allowance, will the Leader of the House advise us on whether another one is likely in respect of this heinous policy?

Lucy Powell: This Labour Government, like the last, are absolutely determined to reduce child poverty in this country. We will be judged on our actions over the course of this Parliament as to whether we do, but we are determined to achieve that. I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his advice, as I thank the former Prime Minister Gordon Brown, whom I greatly respect, for his. Our child poverty strategy will come out later this summer and the right hon. Gentleman will have ample opportunity to discuss that then.

Mrs Sureena Brackenridge (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House join me in thanking Wednesfield History Society and all who organised the moving 80th anniversary service for the Lancaster bomber crash, which took place just nine days after VE Day in 1945, in which seven young airmen lost their lives in Wednesfield? It was deeply moving to stand with the crew's family and see the community come together to pay its respects and watch an awe-inspiring flypast.

Lucy Powell: What a lovely tribute my hon. Friend has just paid to the Wednesfield History Society for marking the 80th anniversary of the Lancaster bomber crash in her constituency. It is moments like that, when people come together to commemorate what happened, that show how we all stand together to remember the great sacrifice that all those people made in the second world war.

Sir John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con): On what basis are the Government claiming that the Lords amendment to the Data (Use and Access) Bill engages financial privilege, given that it contains no spending commitments? Will the Government engage with supporters of the amendment in the other place and with the creative industries to find a way forward, rather than trying to use spurious procedural arguments?

Lucy Powell: May I assure the right hon. Gentleman? We will shortly debate the Lords amendment, after these questions, and we will have ample time to do that. It will go back to the Lords and the two Houses will continue to consider the matter, which I know is of great importance to many Members across the House. We are committed to trying to get the balance right between supporting our valued creative industries and the rights that they hold and supporting the future of the artificial intelligence industry. That is why we will legislate in future on some of those issues, and the consultation is running. We welcome that consideration, and we will continue to discuss the matter with Members across both Houses.

Ben Goldsborough (South Norfolk) (Lab): The wonderful Wymondham train station in my constituency will mark its 180th birthday in July, which is great news, but we cannot bring out the cake just yet because it is not fully accessible—the centre platform cannot be reached by all. May I call for a debate in Government time on how we can get Access for All funding for all the stations up and down the country that desperately it?

Lucy Powell: I thank my hon. Friend for raising the issue of Access for All in his Norfolk constituency. It is raised with me regularly at these sessions, and I know Ministers will come to this House and update us shortly on the review of the Access for All funding. I encourage him and others to apply for a debate because I think it would be very popular indeed.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): One of the burning issues in my constituency is that of waste incinerators. When can we have a debate on the Government's proposals for either placing a moratorium on them, as happens in Scotland and Wales, or introducing a tax on incineration—a bit like the landfill tax—to encourage the reduction, reuse and recycling of waste, rather than consigning it to the great landfill in the sky?

Lucy Powell: We are taking steps and have set out new rules around waste incinerators. They will receive planning approval only if they meet strict new criteria, and they must demonstrate how they are going to move forward as part of the circular economy rather than the landfill process. The issue is raised with me a lot in these sessions, and I know it is a matter of importance to the House, so I will ensure that he gets an update from Ministers and that the rest of the House is kept updated.

Melanie Ward (Cowdenbeath and Kirkcaldy) (Lab): Community ownership of assets can be incredibly valuable, and I congratulate the village of Auchtertool on its new community ownership of the Tiel pub. Meanwhile, in North Queensferry, the community are working hard to take ownership of the Albert hotel, but their efforts were blocked by SNP Government Ministers, who rejected their application to exercise their right to buy. Will the Leader of the House join me in urging the Scottish Government to give way to the “Save the Albert” campaign, reverse their decision and let the residents of North Queensferry take this much-loved village asset into community ownership, and will she make Government time available for a debate on community ownership?

Lucy Powell: Community ownership and community right to buy are a key part of this Government's agenda on devolution. I am sorry to hear that the Scottish Government have rejected the application by her constituents. That should not have happened. We will be debating the importance of community right to buy in forthcoming legislation.

Alison Bennett (Mid Sussex) (LD): Val Upton is a pillar of the community in the village of Lindfield in my constituency. Among the many hats she wears in her village is her involvement in the Royal British Legion. When I saw Val a couple of weeks ago at the 30th celebration of the Eastern Road nature reserve,

she asked me to find out whether more notice could be given for celebrations and commemoration events for VJ Day than were provided for VE Day. Is that possible?

Lucy Powell: I thank Val Upton for all the community work she does in the hon. Member's constituency. I hear her question; I will ask Ministers and ensure that she and Val get the reply they deserve.

Emma Foody (Cramlington and Killingworth) (Lab/Co-op): The villages and towns across my constituency rely heavily on our bus services. Despite that, the big bus survey that I have been running recently shows that local people too often find buses to be unreliable and inaccessible and that they do not take them to the places they need to go. Will the upcoming buses Bill be an opportunity to debate how this Government are putting communities back in the driving seat and how a system can work for all our areas?

Lucy Powell: I am pleased to hear the results of my hon. Friend's big bus survey. She is absolutely right: people want affordable, reliable bus services that take them to the places they need to go. Our buses Bill will give local areas the powers to do that. I have seen what happens when local areas like mine in Manchester have those powers; it has massively increased the number of people using bus services and has brought in extra funding from doing so.

Dr Luke Evans (Hinckley and Bosworth) (Con): Last Friday, I was lucky enough that my private Member's Bill was the second Bill listed. Unfortunately, it was timed out—rightfully so—for the assisted dying Bill. Two of my constituents, Roux and Ada, have been in contact with me about my Bill, which is about dog-on-dog attacks. I must declare an interest: Roux and Ada are my whippets and they live with me, but they are concerned about dog-on-dog attacks, as are many people up and down Leicestershire. Could the Government find time to have a debate on dog-on-dog attacks and responsible dog ownership?

Lucy Powell: I am sorry if Roux and Ada have ever been in a dog-on-dog attack—I am sure they are well looked after in the hon. Member's ownership. It is an important matter, and I am sorry that we did not get to his private Member's Bill last week, but maybe there will be further opportunity to do so later in the Session.

Mr Jonathan Brash (Hartlepool) (Lab): Hartlepool's seaside community of Seaton Carew has earned a “top quality” award from environmental charity Keep Britain Tidy. The seaside accolade is only given to English beaches that are safe, clean and meet the highest environmental standards. Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating council staff and volunteer litter pickers, including the brilliant people of Hartlepool Big Town Tidy Up, for their exceptional work in making our community a better place for us all to live?

Lucy Powell: I thank all the council staff and volunteers from Hartlepool Big Town Tidy Up for getting Seaton Carew to be so tidy and for winning the seaside award. That sounds like a fantastic activity, bringing lots of tourists and enjoyment for local people in their clean seaside town.

Adam Dance (Yeovil) (LD): In January, the Care Quality Commission warned that paediatric care at Yeovil district hospital requires significant improvement. The maternity unit has suddenly closed, initially for six months, creating real fear. This follows the closure of the hospital's hyper-acute stroke unit. May we have a debate in Government time on improving hospitals' investment management and infrastructure so that we can discuss protecting hospital services in Yeovil and across the country?

Lucy Powell: This Government are absolutely committed to improving our NHS and hospital services in Yeovil and elsewhere, given the situation in the public services that we inherited from the Conservatives. I will ensure that he gets a ministerial reply about what is happening in his local hospital with paediatric and other services, why they have been closed and what action is being taken after the CQC report.

Mrs Elsie Blundell (Heywood and Middleton North) (Lab): As the Leader of the House knows, good internet connectivity is vital for economic growth, productivity and ensuring that everyone has access to the benefits of being online, but in many parts of Middleton in my constituency—less than six miles from Manchester city centre—people and businesses are being held back, with many having no connectivity whatsoever. I have been working locally to address the issue. Covering my campaign, the *Manchester Evening News* reported:

“The entire town has become a signal dead spot, and locals are sick of it”.

Will the Leader of the House work with me to secure a debate to provide a forum for Members to relay similar concerns about the lack of mobile signal in urban areas to ensure that the full scale of this national challenge is relayed to Government?

Lucy Powell: I congratulate my hon. Friend on her campaign and the attention she is getting in bringing her community together to tackle the mobile blackspot in Rochdale and Middleton. I will ensure that she gets a ministerial reply, but as this is the second question, from across the House, relating to mobile blackspots, I suggest that Members get together and get a debate on this important matter.

Joe Robertson (Isle of Wight East) (Con): The Government are implementing their plans for UK transport, including major interventions on rail and buses, but also road and aviation. So far, they have ignored the plight of UK island residents, including mine on the Isle of Wight, where we pay up to £400 to take a car back and forth on a four-mile journey. Will the Government and the Leader of the House do more by allowing a debate in the House in Government time to discuss the cost of transport to and from UK islands?

Lucy Powell: I thank the hon. Member for recognising all the work the Government are doing to ensure that our transport infrastructure—trains, rail, aviation—is there into the future and is fit for purpose. I hear what he says about the particular issues faced by his constituents on the Isle of Wight and by those on other isles, and I will ensure that he gets a full ministerial response. I encourage him to apply for an Adjournment debate, because that would be a good topic for one.

Euan Stainbank (Falkirk) (Lab): As hon. Friends in the Scottish parliamentary Labour party are sick of being reminded, it has been another distinctly fantastic season for football in Falkirk. Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating everyone at Falkirk football club on securing back-to-back promotions and a return to premiership football for the first time in 15 years? Will she also congratulate them on the restoration of the youth academy and congratulate Steins Thistle in Allandale on becoming the first Falkirk-based club to win the Scottish amateur cup in over 100 years?

Lucy Powell: These things do not always go down well with everybody, but I join my hon. Friend in congratulating Falkirk FC on its back-to-back promotion and all its success this season, which I hope continues in the next.

Sarah Dyke (Glastonbury and Somerton) (LD): The recent no-notice closure of the special care baby unit and maternity unit at Yeovil district hospital has shocked residents across Glastonbury and Somerton. A soon-to-be first-time dad from Martock told me:

“We are now left in this limbo state as the local NHS trust takes care of its poor management affairs”.

He is not alone; many people have expressed concern that adequate steps seem not to have been taken by the integrated care board and Somerset NHS trust to protect maternity care services in Yeovil. Could we have a debate in Government time specifically on improving maternity care services?

Lucy Powell: I am really sorry to hear about the closure of services at Yeovil hospital. I do not know the reasons behind it, but I will ensure that all Members whose constituencies are in the hospital's catchment area are updated by Ministers on the action plan to reopen the services as quickly as possible. The hon. Lady raises an important matter, in which many Members across the House take a great interest: making sure we have the very best, world-class maternity services available for every single community in the country. I am sure it would be a good topic for a debate.

David Baines (St Helens North) (Lab): My constituent, Corporal Andy Reid MBE, was severely injured while on patrol in Helmand province in 2009. He defied the odds to survive and has continued to do so every day since. He has undertaken a huge amount of charity work, including through his Standing Tall Foundation, which does incredible work across St Helens, the region and the whole country. In a ceremony in St Helens today, he is to receive the King's Coronation Medal. Will the Leader of the House join me in paying tribute to Andy and all the work he has done, and in thanking him for his service and for everything he continues to do for people up and down this country?

Lucy Powell: I am delighted to join my hon. Friend in congratulating Corporal Andy Reid on receiving the King's Coronation Medal today in St Helens. He sounds like a remarkable man who has made a remarkable contribution, and I am sure the whole House wishes him well.

Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst (Solihull West and Shirley) (Con): The petition to protect Northern Ireland veterans from prosecution has, in a matter of days, amassed over

[Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst]

98,500 signatures. Will the Leader of the House commit that the petition, once it reaches the 100,000-signature threshold, will be granted debating time at the earliest opportunity?

Lucy Powell: As the hon. Member knows, all petitions that receive 100,000 signatures are considered by the Petitions Committee and allocated time in Westminster Hall. Some issues, like this one, attract a great deal of attention, and that is what the petitions process is for. In fact, the Modernisation Committee, which I chair, is looking into whether the Petitions Committee can be given more opportunities to have debates here in the main Chamber or in Westminster Hall.

Andrew Pakes (Peterborough) (Lab): First, I associate myself on the record with the comments about the terrible antisemitic attacks in the United States overnight.

The horrors in Gaza are not just the young lives lost, but the lost opportunities. In the last few weeks, I have been speaking to an incredibly bright young Palestinian student in Gaza, who is due to start university in Cambridge in September. She cannot get a study visa because she is trapped in Gaza by the bombing and cannot get to a visa centre. She is supported by me, the university, and the Co-operative group—a great Manchester business that upholds its values well. Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on how we can resolve challenges like this, and how we can help students in conflict zones get the best future?

Lucy Powell: I thank my hon. Friend for raising this important matter. Personal stories bring into the light—if any more was needed—the true horrors happening in Gaza at the moment. That is why this Government have taken a very strong stance on some of those issues. I am really sorry to hear of the struggles his hope-to-be constituent is having in getting a visa, and I will make sure that the Minister gives him a full response about this case.

Pete Wishart (Perth and Kinross-shire) (SNP): Can we have a statement about political advertising and what is and is not acceptable? A disgusting, racist advert has been released by Reform in the Hamilton by-election in which a speech by the Scottish Labour leader, Anas Sarwar, is selectively edited to question his identity and loyalty. We may disagree profoundly with Anas Sarwar on a range of issues, but he is a proud Scot, who always tries to put the interests of his country first. We in Scotland are united against that sort of gutter politics. Does the Leader of the House agree that this is everything that we in Scotland are not?

Lucy Powell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the way he asked that question and for putting on the record his disgust at how people warp what others say and edit things together to give a different impression of their values and opinions, as sounds like has been done to Anas Sarwar. I thank him greatly for that.

We have to tackle mis and disinformation, especially in our political discourse. Parties that purport to be mainstream really should know better than to engage in this type of activity. The Electoral Commission has

powers in this regard, but we recognise that those powers and some of the laws around such matters need strengthening. That is why we are bringing forward an elections Bill next year. I hope that Reform heard the hon. Gentleman's question and takes down the video he described.

Johanna Baxter (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (Lab): The Scottish National party pretends to be on the side of elderly people in our communities, but despite the rhetoric, the SNP-led Renfrewshire integration joint board has taken the heartless decision to slash funding to the Food Train—a vital volunteer initiative that supports our elderly residents with prepared meals and shopping, and helps them to live independently. The Food Train's funding has been cut, despite the Scottish Government having received a record-breaking funding settlement from this Labour Government. Will the Leader of the House join me in condemning Renfrewshire IJB's heartless decision?

Lucy Powell: I am really sorry to hear about the decision on funding for the Food Train, which sounds like it is a short-sighted one. As my hon. Friend says, this Government have given the Scottish Government a record budget settlement, and I hope they will use that record budget to support local services like those in her constituency.

Victoria Collins (Harpden and Berkhamsted) (LD): I am sure we all agree on the importance of protecting our rare chalk streams from pollution. I wrote to the Environment Agency nearly two months ago, on 28 March, regarding its investigation into Markyate waste water treatment works, which has now discharged raw sewage into the River Ver, a precious chalk stream, for over 4,000 hours. Despite the seriousness of the issue and its impact on my constituents, I have yet to receive a reply from the agency. Will the Leader of the House assist me in securing a response and a meeting with the Environment Agency on this urgent matter?

Lucy Powell: I am sorry to hear that the hon. Lady has not heard back from the Environment Agency. Other Members have raised with me, today and on other occasions, cases where the enforcement powers are not being used and responses are not being given. That is just not acceptable. I shall ensure that the Environment Agency heard her question today. I assure her that the Government are absolutely committed to cleaning up our waterways and giving people the powers they need to take on water bosses where that is necessary. That is why the Water (Special Measures) Act 2025 is now in force, and further legislation will be introduced to make wider reforms to our water industry.

Alistair Strathern (Hitchin) (Lab): It has been fantastic to secure investment from GB Energy in much-needed rooftop solar panels at Lister hospital, saving thousands on the hospital's bills that can now be better spent on treating patients, but we should not stop there. Far too many homes are being built in my constituency without solar panels, so new residents are missing out on potential savings. May we have a statement from the Housing Secretary to make sure that we toughen regulations on solar panels, so that in the future more new homes get the benefits they bring?

Lucy Powell: I am really glad to hear my hon. Friend's welcome for GB Energy's investment in solar panels on his local hospital and that it is already having an effect. He raises the important issue of how we can fully utilise solar technology and other advances in green technologies in new homes. That is what this Government are committed to doing.

Ann Davies (Caerfyrddin) (PC): My constituent's daughter, Greta Marie Otteson, and her fiancé, Arno Els Quinton, tragically died in Vietnam on Christmas day. The limoncello drink supplied by a local restaurant was contaminated with methanol, a toxic industrial chemical sometimes used instead of alcohol. Greta's parents, Susan and Paul Otteson, are seeking transparency and justice. Notwithstanding their attempts to do so over the last five months, they remain without answers. Will the Leader of the House ask the Foreign Office to urgently provide either Greta's parents or my office with an update on the ongoing criminal case?

Lucy Powell: Like many other Members, I am sure, I remember hearing of the shocking nature of this case over Christmas. I am sorry that the hon. Lady's constituents have suffered since and have not been able to get the answers they need on the deaths of their loved ones. I will ensure that the relevant Minister is in touch with her at the earliest opportunity to ensure that her constituents get the answers and support they need.

Adam Thompson (Erewash) (Lab): As the first metrologist elected to this House, I think it falls to me to remind Members that Tuesday this week was World Metrology Day. This year, we celebrated the 150th anniversary of the metre convention, which is the international treaty that established the Bureau International des Poids et Mesures and enabled the creation of the modern metrological framework that allows our modern world to exist. As the Product Regulation and Metrology Bill passes through this House, will the Leader of the House join me in wishing everybody a very happy, if slightly belated, World Metrology Day?

Lucy Powell: Absolutely. We all bring our own special expertise to this House, and my hon. Friend's expertise is particularly noteworthy—and unique, by the sound of it. I wish him a happy World Metrology Day, and I am really pleased that the Product Regulation and Metrology Bill has come to this House with his arrival here—he can take full credit for it.

Shockat Adam (Leicester South) (Ind): A few short years ago, when I was a bright-eyed nine-year-old boy, I visited the Leicester City football training ground on Belvoir Drive. That was the first time I saw a young Gary Winston Lineker. He went on to be my sporting hero, as the top scorer at virtually every football club he played for, the Golden Boot winner at the '86 World cup and an England captain. For the past 26 years, Gary has been a national Saturday night institution as the face of "Match of the Day". He has brought us sharp analysis and very dry humour, and when Leicester City won the league, he even brought out his boxer shorts. Will the Leader of the House join me in paying tribute to our Gary for his remarkable run on "Match of the Day" and his contribution to countless childhood cancer charities, and wish him all the best as he signs off from the sofa for the last time this weekend?

Lucy Powell: I thank the hon. Member for taking the opportunity to raise that. I am sure the whole House will want to pay tribute to and thank Gary Lineker, who has been a remarkable "Match of the Day" presenter for many years. He has brought football and football highlights to life for many of us, and I am sure we all want to pay tribute to him.

Claire Hughes (Bangor Aberconwy) (Lab): Bangor pier celebrated its 129th anniversary last Sunday. Will the Leader of the House join me in thanking the Friends of Bangor Garth Pier for organising an amazing event, which is just one of those happening this year, as Bangor celebrates its 1,500th year?

Lucy Powell: Happy birthday to Bangor pier—I am sure we will all join my hon. Friend in that celebration.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): People living in the north of Scotland are forced to pay extortionate delivery charges for goods they order from further south—charges that are far higher than people in Glasgow, Edinburgh or Birmingham have to pay. This is a fundamental injustice. Could we have a debate in Government time on something that is very wrong indeed?

Lucy Powell: The hon. Member raises the really important matter of the different delivery costs for rural communities such as his, who often need those deliveries the most. I shall certainly raise it with Ministers and get a full response for him.

Michelle Welsh (Sherwood Forest) (Lab): In just over a week's time, the independent review of maternity services at Nottingham university hospitals NHS trust is due to close to new cases. It is the largest review of maternity services in NHS history, with more than 2,300 families now involved. Will the Leader of the House join me in thanking Donna Ockenden, her team and the affected families, and encourage anyone else who can to come forward before 31 May? I am the third person to raise this matter in business questions today. I would like, as would the affected families, a debate in this House in Government time on the future of maternity services, as the issue becomes more and more pressing.

Lucy Powell: I join my hon. Friend in thanking Donna Ockenden for all the tremendous work she is doing on the independent review of maternity services at Nottingham university hospitals NHS trust. As she says, a number of people have raised the future and quality of maternity services with me today. I will, when I leave the Chamber, speak to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and encourage him to make time to update the House and ensure that Members are well informed about the progress of the review.

Mr Tom Morrison (Cheadle) (LD): On new year's day, hundreds of homes and businesses across my constituency were flooded, and this followed similar floods in 2016 and 2019. Since then, residents have been desperately fighting to get a commitment from the Government and the Environment Agency to ensure that it never happens again, but the process is not transparent and clear. Can we have a debate on how communities can engage organisations such as the Environment Agency to help secure their areas from flooding, so that this never happens again?

Lucy Powell: I remember well the floods in the hon. Member's constituency. I am really sorry that his constituents are still dealing with the aftermath and are unable to get the answers and support they need from the Environment Agency. A number of colleagues have raised the lack of responsiveness of the Environment Agency with me today, so I will ensure that they are all heard, but they can rest assured that this Government take flooding and its consequences incredibly seriously. That is why we have set up the taskforce and put record levels of funding into it.

Mark Swards (Leeds South West and Morley) (Lab): As I am sure you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is time for trams in West Yorkshire. I want to thank all the colleagues across this House and the other place who have supported Tracy Brabin and I as we lead the charge to secure mass transit in West Yorkshire. The benefits are obvious: we know it will create jobs, growth and investment. Ahead of the spending review, will the Leader of the House grant a debate in Government time on why it is finally time to bring trams back to Leeds and to bring them to West Yorkshire?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend has raised this issue with me before, and he is a fantastic campaigner and advocate for the tram system coming to Leeds. I am sure his near neighbour, the Chancellor, has heard his question ahead of the spending review, and I am sure she also wants to see trams coming to Leeds. I know what a great benefit they have been for Manchester, and I hope Leeds gets them soon, too.

Claire Young (Thornbury and Yate) (LD): Businesses in Thornbury and Yate are crying out for change on business rates, from the Play Shed, which has seen its relief cut from 75% to 40%, to the company told it would have to wait at least a year to get a revaluation after it subdivided some units. Will the Leader of the House ensure that the Government bring to this House a statement setting out how they will review business rates?

Lucy Powell: The hon. Member will be aware that we have made some changes to business rates, with a new lower business rate for small independent businesses.

I am sure that further announcements will be made in due course, and I will ensure that they are made in the House.

Luke Myer (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): Thanks to the decisions of this Government, NHS waiting times have been falling consistently month on month, but there are still some delays for specific kinds of treatment. My constituent, Alan, has been waiting over a year for the specialist corrective procedure he urgently needs. Does the Leader of the House agree that these delays in specialist treatment deserve serious parliamentary attention?

Lucy Powell: I join my hon. Friend in recognising that waiting lists have been falling month on month since last year. That is what this Government are committed to doing, but we recognise that some specialist treatments will be a harder nut to crack, and I will ensure he is updated on that issue.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): Order. I call Tessa Munt to ask the final question on the business statement.

Tessa Munt (Wells and Mendip Hills) (LD): This week is National Epilepsy Week. Epilepsy is more than just seizures; it affects every area of somebody's life. With more than 630,000 people suffering in the UK, every single MP in this House will have someone with this condition in their constituency. In the light of this being National Epilepsy Week, can we have a debate in Government time on the Government's commitment to improving access to care and treatment for those with this condition, particularly those whose seizures do not respond to treatment?

Lucy Powell: I thank the hon. Lady for raising that during Epilepsy Week. The Government are committed to improving care for people with neurological conditions including epilepsy. We have a transformation programme under way and that is improving services, but there is much more to be done and much more can be done. I will ensure that she and the rest of the House are kept updated.

Points of Order

1.59 pm

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am on record as having expressed my appreciation to the Leader of the House for her insistence that Ministers should give accurate and timely responses to parliamentary questions. I am sure she will therefore share my disappointment that in answering my question earlier she asserted that inflation is falling when in fact it is not falling but has reached 3.5%. She also chided me for not having raised the issue at Treasury questions on Tuesday, but the news did not come out until Wednesday. Is that the standard we are now expected to accept?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. As he will know, that is a matter of debate and is not a matter for the Chair.

Adam Jogee (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I rise in my role as chair of the all-party group on Ireland and the Irish in Britain regarding yesterday's Opposition day debate on business and the economy in which the shadow Secretary of State the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Andrew Griffith) said in response to an intervention from the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone):

"I am not sure if one can subsist entirely on a seed potato—it may have been tried historically, and not with enormous success".—[*Official Report*, 21 May 2025; Vol. 767, c. 1038.]

Those words appear to be referencing the tragedy of the Irish potato famine, which, if that is the case, is of course offensive and insensitive to what took place at the time in the United Kingdom. Can you, Madam Deputy Speaker, please advise on how best we can remedy any offence caused by outlining the process for an hon. Member to withdraw such a statement?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Member for giving me notice of his point of order. I take it that he has notified the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Andrew Griffith) that he intended to refer to him in the Chamber.

Adam Jogee *indicated assent*.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Chair is not responsible for the shadow Secretary of State's remarks, but the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Adam Jogee) has put his point on the record.

Data (Use and Access) Bill [*Lords*]

Consideration of Lords message

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I must draw the House's attention to the fact that the Lords amendment 49D engages Commons financial privilege. If Lords amendment 49D is agreed to, I will cause the customary entry waiving Commons financial privilege to be entered in the *Journal*.

Before Clause 138

REQUIREMENT TO MAKE PROVISION IN RELATION TO
TRANSPARENCY OF COPYRIGHTED WORKS USED IN
RELATION TO AI MODELS

2.2 pm

The Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology (Peter Kyle): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 49D.

I want to start by putting on record something that I should perhaps have said a bit more about in this place. I cherish the UK creative industries—their immense contribution to our national and personal lives; their embodiment of the best of human creativity—and I appreciate the sincerity of their concerns about the future. I want to express my genuine gratitude to the whole of the creative sector, from national treasures such as Sir Ian McKellen, Kate Bush and, yes, Sir Elton John, whose performances enrich our lives—having seen all of them perform live, I can say how much that has personally enriched my life—to local artists such as Pauly the painter, whose paintings of Hove enrich my ministerial office in Whitehall. However, this is not a competition about who loves the sector most; it is an argument about how best to champion the interests of creatives, large and small, and to protect and promote them into the future.

The purpose of the Data (Use and Access) Bill is to better harness data for economic growth, to improve public services and to support modern digital government, and I acknowledge the agreements reached in the other place on scientific research and sex data to that end. The Bill before us today is one step closer to completion, and I am grateful to Minister Baroness Jones of Whitchurch for her work on these important issues. I am sure the House will unite in wishing her a happy birthday today—it is a significant birthday, but I will not do her the discourtesy of mentioning which one.

This Bill was never intended to be about artificial intelligence, intellectual property and copyright. However, the other place has yet again suggested that there be an amendment on this issue, despite hon. Members of this elected House having already removed a similar amendment twice before. Madam Deputy Speaker, I also note your decision that the amendment from the other place still conflicts with the financial privileges of this place. As my hon. Friend the Minister for Data Protection and Telecoms has stated repeatedly, we absolutely recognise that a workable solution on transparency is a key part of tackling this issue, but we absolutely disagree that this Bill or this amendment is the right way to address it.

Samantha Niblett (South Derbyshire) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for mentioning Kate Bush; she is the love of my life and has been since I was nine.

[Samantha Niblett]

We have repeatedly spoken about the need for a tech solution to address this issue. I have a background in data and technology and have been meeting several companies that seem between them to have a possible tech solution. Will the Secretary of State meet me and them to discuss it?

Peter Kyle: I am extremely grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention, for her love of Kate Bush, which I share, and for her passion for finding a workable solution and way forward. As I go through my remarks, I hope she will see that I propose a way to formalise the insight, wisdom and experience of the kinds of companies that she references, so that they can move forward. It is because of the complexities around AI copyright law and the understandable sensitivities of content creators that this needs to be done properly and carefully in a considered, measured and reasoned way. That is what this Government intend to do.

In order to make progress all of us need to work to find some common ground and reflect on things that we could have done better. In that spirit, let me say to this House and the other place that I regret the timing of the consultation on copyright and AI and the consideration of this Bill and the way that the two collided, and I regret that by indicating a preferred option it appeared to some that I had taken a side in the debate before everyone felt that they had been listened to.

Alison Hume (Scarborough and Whitby) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State's words; it is great to hear words such as "cherish" and "champion" in this House. I acknowledge that there is no opt-out in the Bill, but the Secretary of State mentioned the consultation that was launched alongside it, which adjoins these very issues. Will my right hon. Friend confirm once and for all that the Government's preferred opt-out for reserving copyright is now abandoned?

Peter Kyle: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her comments. Just to clarify, this is a legacy Bill which has been in Parliament several times before, including under the previous Government, so it was always inevitable that at whatever time the consultation was launched it would have coincided with the Bill going through Parliament. That was never my intention but, as I have just said, I accept that that was the impression given. When we went into the consultation, I believed that opting out could have offered an opportunity to bring both sides together, but I now accept that that is not the case.

Pete Wishart (Perth and Kinross-shire) (SNP): This afternoon, we will go to the Ivor Novello awards to celebrate the ability and talent of the best of our songwriters from across this country—it will be a magnificent and wonderful display. Those writers are seriously concerned that their works will be ingested and churned out in an inferior way. The Government are not offering anything to our creators. The amendment that the Lords have presented seems to be reasonable, so what is wrong with it as a way forward?

Peter Kyle: As I have said, and as I will elaborate, the Government and I believe that there is a better way forward to give the creative sectors and creators the

protections that they need. It would deliver them the certainties, protections and ability to have transparency and to be remunerated, and provide more possibilities to large creators, or those who represent them, to deliver licences into the future. We need to take the issues in the round, not just one part of them. I hope that the hon. Gentleman has a great time at the Ivor Novello awards. I congratulate everyone who wins, has been nominated or is participating today, especially U2, who are I think receiving an award—other creators who I have seen live many times.

James Naish (Rushcliffe) (Lab): Many of my constituents have told me that they feel that their works have already been scraped, and that AI development has already trampled over their rights. What reassurances can the Secretary of State give me that we already recognise that this is a time-limited issue and that action is required?

Peter Kyle: My hon. Friend makes a pertinent point. It is true that much content has already been used and subsumed by AI models, usually from other territories and under the current law. Nothing illustrates the need to have a comprehensive think about the way forward than the example that he has just given.

Dame Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con): On that point, will the Secretary of State give way?

Peter Kyle: I see that the right hon. Lady, the Chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, is on her feet, and, of course, I give way.

Dame Caroline Dinenage: I appreciate the tone in which the Secretary of State has started his speech. Ministers keep repeating a mantra about "the uncertainty" of what our copyright law says about AI training. However, there is no uncertainty: commercial generative AI training on UK copyright work is illegal in the UK, but what rightsholders need is what this amendment says:

"clear, relevant, accurate and accessible information" about

"the use of their copyright works used, and the means by which those works were accessed".

A legislative vehicle in the future, however welcome, will be simply too late to protect the livelihoods of so many of the UK's 2.5 million creative workers, who fear that this uncertainty line is just an excuse to undermine copyright law. Is the Government really committed to proactively enforcing our copyright law? If they do not do so through this Bill now, how will they do it and when?

Peter Kyle: I am grateful for the hon. Lady's intervention, which is thoughtful as always. May I pick her up on one substantial point? I have not used the word "uncertainty" or implied that the challenge we have is uncertainty. Existing copyright law is very certain, but it is not fit for purpose. All the dangers and the existing loss into AI models have happened within the existing law. The challenges that we have, which I will go into further, are happening currently.

We need to ensure that we can have a domestic legal system that is fit for the digital age; we cannot rely on legislation that was created for, and is still only effective

in, the analogue age. I want to give certainty. The reason that I am making this speech is to give certainty, not only in my words but most importantly in legislation, in the most rapid fashion possible, so that creatives and the AI sector can move forward together.

Unfortunately, at times the Bill has been presented as a battle between creative industries and new technology companies, but nothing could be further from the truth

Ms Polly Billington (East Thanet) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend for his tone and for the direction of travel that he is setting out. Bearing in mind that he is talking about “the most rapid fashion possible”, why are the Government refusing to put notice of backstop powers for transparency in the Bill? That is what the creative industries would like to see, in order to give reassurance that, in anticipation of further legislation along the line, the Secretary of State and the Government give themselves the powers to act, when and if they see that the current rules are being broken systemically by AI and tech companies.

Peter Kyle: I am grateful to my hon. Friend—nobody speaks with more passion and insight on the subject than she does. I simply say that the amendment is not comprehensive enough and does not tackle the needs and opportunities of both sectors. The only way that our country will benefit from the maximum potential that both these sectors present is if we can bring them together to find a way forward. Pitting one against the other is unnecessarily divisive and damages both.

The truth is that growing Britain’s economy needs both sectors to succeed and to prosper. Britain has to be the place where the creative industries, every bit as much as AI companies, can invest and grow, confident that their future prosperity is assured. We have to become a country where our people can enjoy the benefits and the opportunities of both. There is an investment battle for Britain happening, and we must win it.

2.15 pm

Mr James Frith (Bury North) (Lab): My right hon. Friend’s tone is most welcome, but it is also consistent with how he has been both in private and public on this matter, and I thank him for that, while sharing much of his taste in music. Does he agree that transparency should be a prerequisite for all AI development, not a matter for copyright to handle? If not now, will he commit to including such powers in secondary legislation, should the voluntary approach fail?

Peter Kyle: I am grateful for my hon. Friend’s tone and for the way that he has engaged so fruitfully, passionately and effectively, both on the record and in the conversations that we have had together.

Transparency is the foundation upon which we will build the future solutions to this problem. In a moment, I will go on to talk a bit more about how I intend to deliver that progress, but in order to have remuneration, solutions and the empowerment that creatives need in the digital age, of course we need transparency, which is essential and immutable. I will strive on behalf of creatives to deliver those things in a way that is also enforceable and will make the tangible difference, to give them the grip that they need in a digital age that they are currently lacking in the age that we live in.

Joe Robertson (Isle of Wight East) (Con): The Secretary of State talks about delivering certainty, but does he not see that the certainty he is giving is to large multinational tech companies that will be able to get away with scraping original content that is copyrighted? Through the Bill, he will give such companies the certainty to abuse the rights of creatives.

Peter Kyle: In all sincerity, I am confused by the hon. Gentleman’s intervention. The Bill before us does not mention AI or copyright—it has nothing to do with those items. The Data (Use and Access) Bill is as I described at the beginning of my remarks. If there is a clause, sentence or paragraph of the legislation that is before us and for consideration that damages either the AI sectors or the creative industries, then I would like him to stand up and read that out. What I am proposing is a comprehensive solution in legislation to both the opportunities and the challenges presented to the AI sector, which is a barrier for companies in that sector investing here, and to the current direction of travel that is posing an existential threat to the nature of the creative sector as we know it. That is what I am proposing, and I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Bill before us does not damage any of those interests in the way that he suggests.

Emily Darlington (Milton Keynes Central) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend for the way in which he is comprehensively showing our commitment to the creative industries. Like him, I am a huge nerd when it comes to amazing new innovations in data and AI. I am hugely enthusiastic about them, but I also share his equally huge enthusiasm for the creative industries. I appreciate what he is saying about transparency—for me, that is the absolutely key point—but what is the backstop if the voluntary approach does not create the transparency that creators need to understand how their creations are being used and if they are being remunerated properly for that?

Peter Kyle: The reason I opened the consultation in the first place was to try to understand where the concerns are and where the tech companies can provide their suggested solutions, on the back of which we can come together as two Houses of Parliament and two separate sectors to find the way forward. If we cannot answer the question that my hon. Friend poses, how will the legislation, which I will propose as soon as I can, get through either House?

We need to bring both sectors together. We need to have workable, implementable solutions that have grip in the digital age as well as the confidence of both Houses to get the legislation forward. I ask Members across this House and in the other place to offer me a degree of trust that I will lead it through the difficult, challenging process—which has bedevilled not just the current situation, but the Government before—needed to deliver it for those who need it the most.

Mr Bayo Alaba (Southend East and Rochford) (Lab)
rose—

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op) *rose—*

Peter Kyle: I will give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Southend East and Rochford (Mr Alaba), who was the first on his feet, then I will come to my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell).

Mr Alaba: I appreciate the tone with which the Secretary of State is conducting this discussion, and I thank him for that. Having spent two decades running businesses and projects in the creative sector before entering this House, may I ask the Secretary of State to confirm when the Government intend to bring forward the promised AI and IP Bill? Will he commit to prioritising transparency obligations in the next Parliament or even to finding a suitable vehicle? Finally, will stakeholders be formally consulted before that Bill is introduced?

Peter Kyle: We can see what a fast learner my hon. Friend has become since he has been in this place, as he got three questions into a 30-second intervention. I will take them in reverse order. I assure him that I will engage with both sectors and give a meaningful voice, including finding ways of engaging views across the House in that process. On his first two questions, I have striven to speak—perhaps even stretched the boundaries of the clarity with which I am allowed to speak—about the future when it comes to legislation and the processes and formalities of this House, in which we are governed by traditions, conventions and the wrath of the Leader of the House.

I know and hope that when I offer my words, Members with varying degrees of experience will understand that there are meanings behind them about the speed, enthusiasm and determination to get this issue resolved swiftly, but the legislative programme of the House is in the hands of His Majesty the King and the Leader of the House, for whom we have high regard—I know that she will be watching somewhere in this building, ready to pounce should I step one millimetre out of line. I hope my hon. Friend the Member for Southend East and Rochford will understand as I go through my remarks and speak in a bit more detail about my intentions that the necessity for speed and alacrity underpins every single one of my words.

Sally Jameson (Doncaster Central) (Lab/Co-op) *rose*—

Ms Billington *rose*—

Peter Kyle: I will give way once more, before I make some progress.

Ms Billington: On the point about speed, determination and the conventions of this House with regard to the legislative programme, in some ways that gives the Secretary of State a case for putting backstop powers on the face of this Bill to create the confidence that the creative industries require, so that we do not have to wait for full legislation. Having some confidence now would give the Government the power to enforce if they saw something that passed the test and there were some transgressions. There is a case for what we are asking for because of those constraints.

Peter Kyle: Let me be as direct as I possibly can. The amendment before us does not include powers of enforcement; it would give powers to the Secretary of State, but it gives no indication of how those powers should be used. Given that ambiguity, it would be incumbent on me to use the powers in a way in which I saw fit, and I would see fit to do a thorough engagement on the back of such powers before using them, if I decided to use them at all. Any of my successors in the post could well use those powers in vastly different ways, which

would lead to great instability in an area where I am determined to create stability. Finally, it would be disempowering for this place to have all those powers in the hands of the Secretary of State and future Secretaries of State when what we really need is a comprehensive set of legislative measures that this place and the other place have fully endorsed, is on statute and can give the security that both sectors need into the future.

It was remiss of me to take the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for East Thanet (Ms Billington), even though it was an important one, before the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for York Central, to whom I turn now.

Rachael Maskell: I do take a word spoken at the Dispatch Box as a commitment, so I really welcome what the Secretary of State is saying. Will he ensure that, beyond transparency, there will be accountability? That is the missing element in the Lords amendment in particular. We need accountability for those businesses and platforms that go on to make profit out of our creatives' work. They should be held to account as the Secretary of State approaches this issue in a more comprehensive way, working with the Secretary of State for Business and Trade.

Peter Kyle: The range of interventions shows several things, including the breadth of wisdom and experience in this House and the complex nature of the issue at hand. That is all being dealt with by one amendment that does not actually touch on many of the issues that I am being questioned about. Again, that reinforces the need to deal with this issue in the round and in its entirety, with all its complexities.

I will turn to the point that my hon. Friend raises shortly, but the extraterritorial nature of the way in which AI is being consumed, scraped and brought into the models adds challenges to getting a grip on it. That is why having a Bill that incentivises investment in this country, alongside giving modern digital rights and obligations to creatives in the digital age, is a way in which we can incentivise companies to come and obey the law of this land as we move forward.

I believe one more Member was on their feet to whom I am yet to give way.

Sally Jameson: While I agree with most of the Secretary of State's music recommendations, I pay tribute to Girls Aloud, who are the ultimate pop icons in the British music industry.

The Minister for Data Protection and Telecoms (Chris Bryant): Sugababes, surely!

Sally Jameson: A close second. Will the Secretary of State commit to chairing a cross-sector working group with the AI industries and the creative sector in the room to help to inform any future legislation?

Peter Kyle: I kind of regret taking that intervention, because it contains the first reference to a band I have not seen live. I have some life goals yet, so I will add it to my bucket list.

I will turn to the point that my hon. Friend made then make progress, because we have limited time here, and I want to ensure that Opposition figures have all the time that they need to make their points. These issues

need serious and dedicated consideration. We have never needed the language of conflict, betrayal or slavery in this debate.

Catherine Fookes (Monmouthshire) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Peter Kyle: I am going to make some progress. I will try to give way a bit later.

It is time to tone down the unnecessary rhetoric and instead recognise that the country needs to strike a balance between content and creativity, transparency and training, and recognition and reward. That cannot be done by well-meaning but ultimately imperfect amendments to a Bill that was never intended to do such a thing. The issue of AI copyright needs properly considered and enforceable legislation, drafted with the inclusion, involvement and experience of both creatives and technologists. To that end, I can tell the House that I am now setting up a series of expert working groups to bring together people from both sectors on the issues of transparency, licensing and other technical standards to chart a workable way forward. I will ensure that the outcome of these endeavours is made available to Members of both Houses.

2.30 pm

I know that people want this issue resolved speedily. I understand that, just as I understand the anger and frustration of creatives who feel that their contribution is being taken without proper recognition or reward. The copyright system must be designed so that it works for creatives and AI companies alike.

Catherine Fookes: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Peter Kyle: I am going to make some progress, but other voices will be heard.

Much of the creative content on the internet has already been scraped elsewhere in the world. We cannot turn back time, and nor should we kid ourselves that we can exercise extraterritorial reach that we simply do not have. My determination is to get this absolutely right, not just rush it right now, which would make us feel better but would make no real improvements to the status quo. Let me be absolutely clear to the House: I get it, and I will get it right.

Finally, just as I regret that this has been portrayed as a choice between creatives and artificial intelligence, it is regrettable to me that this has become an issue of contention between this House and the other place. This House is not putting the interests of one sector above those of another—that would be the wrong approach. The right approach is to recognise that this is too important and complex an issue to be rushed. It deserves proper consideration, and it requires us to accept our responsibility to do this right, in a way that reflects the seriousness of the situation and the sensitivities of both sectors. For now, let us just put this data Bill behind us.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Given the constructive tone that the Secretary of State is taking today, would he like to say a word of praise for the upper House, without whose determination to keep revisiting this matter he might not have felt it quite so necessary to come to this House today and outline in such detail the constructive alternatives he wishes to put forward?

Peter Kyle: I of course acknowledge the point that the right hon. Gentleman makes. I have acknowledged a couple of times already in my speech the work of the upper House and several Members of it, and the constructive and functional way in which we have resolved disagreements on other parts of the Bill. That is the way both Houses were designed to work—in co-operation, sometimes with tension, but ultimately to deliver the legislation that the Government intend to introduce, using the primacy of this place.

I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will recognise that this is not the first time I have engaged, privately or publicly. Many of the statements I have made today have been made previously, but not in the pointed way that I am doing now, which I hope rises to the moment we are in. I have already acknowledged how, looking back, I would have taken other actions to bring this matter to a conclusion much sooner. I also hope that other Members across this House and in the other place will similarly act in a way that can put this moment behind us, so that we can focus on using the power of Government and, of course, of both Houses to get this right for those sectors that are counting on us to do just that.

From this moment, I give this House my personal commitment from the Dispatch Box to unstinting work alongside both sectors, working together to resolve the contentious issue of AI and copyright quickly and effectively. I will report back to this House regularly on the progress made. My responsibility as Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology is to bring forward proposals on copyright that can deliver the balance we seek between the interests of the creative industries and those of the AI industry. We will do that, and we will get it right.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Sir John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Secretary of State has spoken for 33 minutes in a debate that is due to last for an hour, and we have yet to hear from the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman. There will not be time to have a proper debate on this matter, which is of great importance to a number of people. Will the Government please make available more time beyond the 60-minute time limit?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his point of order, which was not in fact a point of order. He will be aware that the programme motion has already been agreed to by the House.

Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con): As hon. Members know, the substance of this Bill began with the previous Government, in recognition of the need to streamline and harness the use of data to grow the economy and drive improvement in the delivery of public services. As I have said before, when the Bill started its life, most of us had no idea that it would become the vehicle for addressing some of the most important social and technological issues of our time.

Although I welcome the huge benefits that the Bill will bring to the economy and public services when it comes into force, I fear that it will go down on the Government's record as the Bill of missed opportunities.

[Dr Ben Spencer]

It is a missed opportunity to fix our flawed public data sets, which present a barrier to tracking and tackling inequalities in areas such as women's health; a missed opportunity to commit to a review of protections for children in their use of social media platforms, and to taking action to increase those protections where the evidence shows there is good reason to do so; and a missed opportunity to provide much-needed certainty to two of our key growth industries, the creative and AI sectors, on how they can interact to promote their mutual growth and flourishing.

It could be seen as somewhat dispiriting to be back at the Dispatch Box again, having the debate on copyright and AI with the Department's ministerial team, but I see that there has been an upgrade since our last outing at the Dispatch Box. I pay tribute to the Secretary of State for his tone and his approach to this debate, particularly his recognition of previous mistakes made. As politicians, we do not say sorry often enough, or recognise mistakes or where we would have wanted things to go better. I appreciate the statements he has made from the Dispatch Box, but the fact that we are here is testament to the determination and sincere concern of Members of both Houses. Whatever Benches they sit on, they are deeply concerned that we must not miss this opportunity to find a solution to such a significant challenge.

Our colleagues in the other place have spoken about their commitment to the primacy of this House, and their reticence to delay the passage of this Bill any further than is absolutely necessary. Their resolve demonstrates the importance of this issue to Members of both Houses and the stakeholders they represent. The Government have spoken repeatedly of their commitment to protecting the creative industries, but their actions are still yet to match their rhetoric. It appears that "reviews" have today been upgraded to "working groups."

Many excuses have been made for why the Government feel unable to act now. Baroness Kidron and other noble Lords have acted in good faith on the Government's stated concerns, and have sought to address them in the latest iteration of their transparency amendment on copyright and AI. Lords amendment 49D would provide the Government with flexibility to put in place proportionate regulations on the transparency of AI enterprises by reference to their size. Importantly, it would allow a reasonable timeframe for the Government to complete their review of responses to their consultation, which concluded in February, before the Secretary of State is compelled to lay draft transparency regulations before Parliament.

For the third time, an amendment on this topic received the overwhelming support of Members in the other place, and the debate at the last round showed that the strength of feeling is mirrored in this House. Amendment 49D is a balanced clause that would put in place a much-needed long-stop date to provide the certainty that creatives and the technology industries alike have been calling for. As the hon. Member for East Thanet (Ms Billington) suggested, it is a backstop.

The Government have run out of excuses for failing to act. Today we have an opportunity to achieve something relatively rare in our political climate: creating effective, balanced legislation based on cross-party compromise.

It is important to public confidence in Government to show that we can put sound principles above politics when the overwhelming need arises. The Government have another opportunity today; let us make sure that it is not another missed one.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Victoria Collins (Harpenden and Berkhamsted) (LD): I rise to speak to Lords amendment 49D. As the Bill returns to this House, I am grateful that the other place continues to fight for creatives, and this amendment focuses on the fundamental principle of transparency while securing the principle of proportionality. I am also grateful for the cross-party work and support in this House and the movement from the Secretary of State today. I know that many Members have signed various amendments standing up for creatives, and I call on colleagues across the House to consider how they vote today on this amendment.

At its very core, the amendment would require AI companies to provide copyright owners with clear, relevant information about how their works are being used for AI development and training. The amendment is clear that it is for the trader or data holder to ensure that the data is accessible to copyright owners upon request. Behind that are real people, real communities and the rich tapestry of a £126 billion creative industry.

Manuela Perteghella (Stratford-on-Avon) (LD): My constituency of Stratford-on-Avon has always been a place where arts and creativity flourish. Does my hon. Friend agree that Government action is needed now to ensure that our British artists, musicians and writers—the William Shakespeares of the future—are fully protected and compensated by the big tech companies?

Victoria Collins: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. Indeed, I was going to say that every MP here will have local creatives. The Secretary of State talked about the artists represented in his office. In mine is Tabitha Mary, who does pictures of around town in Harpenden and Berkhamsted. We have musicians such as Rock Chorus. In Hertfordshire we have film studios such as Elstree, Warner Bros Leavesden and Bovingdon, and I am that sure many of them will be following this debate. Their life's work—their paintings, performances or films—are feeding into AI systems right now and they have no way of knowing. They want to work hand in hand with technology and AI, but our creatives are calling for a fair playing field.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. I was recently approached by the British Deaf Association with concerns about AI companies requiring vast volumes of video footage of British Sign Language without proper consent or awareness from the original signers. I was curious about what an AI would say about the issue, so I asked it to write in the style of the hon. Member for Rhondda and Ogmore (Chris Bryant). I did not ask it for the Secretary of State. As the hon. Member for Rhondda and Ogmore is a Minister in the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, I thought it would be quite interesting.

I highlight that the AI said that the Minister was known for his bold, articulate style, often weaving sharp analysis with a touch of wit, but I will let others be the judge of whether the AI has encapsulated that. This is what it had to say:

“Ladies and gentlemen, we stand at a crossroads—one where technology and creativity are colliding, not in conflict, but in collaboration. For centuries, imagination has driven progress, shaping our world through art, literature, design, and innovation. And now, AI is in the mix, not to replace human ingenuity, but to challenge it, expand it, and sometimes even surprise us. The question isn’t whether AI is coming—it’s here. The real question is: how do we harness it to elevate human creativity, rather than diminish it?”

It asks a very good question. To elevate that human creativity, creatives are calling for transparency. Today we are at that crossroads, with an opportunity to vote for that transparency.

As the Bill nears completion, I urge the Government to accept this reasonable compromise. I accept that the tone and the movement today are welcome, and that work with creatives and tech is much-needed.

Emily Darlington: Does the hon. Member agree that what that quote proves is that AI cannot capture the wit and humour that my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda and Ogmore (Chris Bryant) brings to this Chamber?

Chris Bryant: And fashion.

Emily Darlington: And fashion. In fact, AI is a poor copy of what my hon. Friend represents and bring.

Victoria Collins: I think the House has spoken on that. True leadership in AI means building on respect for creativity, including in the House of Commons, not exploitation. We can build an AI-powered future where technology and human ingenuity flourish together, but only if we start with transparency. We can be a world leader in setting a standard for creatives and technology to work together. I invite all colleagues from all parties to join us today in supporting amendment 49D, to set that direction and to stand up for transparency for our creators and for the principle that, in the age of AI, human creativity still matters.

2.45 pm

Pete Wishart (Perth and Kinross-shire) (SNP): This is the second time we have considered this amendment in this House, and it is the second time we have received this, “Just trust me—I just want to get on with it” homily that all the ministerial team present when we discuss the matter. They say they want to set up all sorts of working groups and that they want to get to legislation. None of us have any difficulty with or objection to that, but what we want is action now. We get concerned when the Secretary of State, as he just did, says that there is no certainty in our copyright laws just now.

Peter Kyle: I did not say that.

Pete Wishart: The Secretary of State can check back in *Hansard*. That is exactly what he said, and that is where the concern and anxiety comes in. The Government might get a technical victory today because of the invocation of financial issues, but the Bill will come back again from the House of Lords. They are not going to give up.

Everybody is united with the House of Lords when it comes to these issues; everybody wants a solution now. Nobody agrees with the Government’s position—except the AI firms that seek to benefit from the unauthorised use of our cultural work—and the anger is growing. The more the public see of this, the more our constituents get increasingly concerned about how our artists are being treated. We only need to look at Sir Elton John’s reaction on Sunday—not just the choice of language about the Government Front Benchers, but that he feels so dismissed he is even threatening legal action.

Surely the way forward is compromise and the Government going some way toward giving the creative sector what they want. Lords amendment 49D presents that approach. It respects the financial prerogatives of this Government, and it has taken on board everything that the Front Benchers have said. I urge the Government to reconsider their position and to engage seriously on the substance of the amendment, which would address copyright holders’ calls for transparency without imposing immediate enforcement costs. It would require AI developers to provide copyright owners with clear, relevant, accurate and accessible information on how their works have been used and how they were accessed. Nothing could be fairer than that.

The Government use words like “may” rather than “must”, thereby avoiding direct spending obligations. We must surely work together on the basis of what has been agreed between both Houses, and try to ensure that we get something that meets everybody’s concerns. That has to start with this Lords amendment. I urge the Government to accept it at this really late stage, and I encourage Labour Back Benchers, who have made fantastic contributions today and who have stood up to this Government, to vote against them. That will show exactly how strongly they feel about this issue. I encourage Labour colleagues to back the amendment.

Sir John Whittingdale: I have to say that I am slightly surprised that no Labour Back Bencher is willing to speak in support of the Government’s position, but it means that I have more time to speak than I had initially thought would be the case. I will not repeat the arguments that we have had in the lengthy debates on these measures that have already taken place, but I want to make one or two points.

In his contribution, the Secretary of State said that he had never mentioned the word “uncertainty” and implied that he thought that copyright law is clear. I have to say that that contrasts with an awful lot of the debates we have had previously, in which his colleague, the Minister for the Creative Industries, has talked about there being uncertainty.

Chris Bryant: The right hon. Member must have missed several of the debates in which I expressly said that I did not think there was any uncertainty about the law as it presently stands.

Sir John Whittingdale: Well, the ministerial foreword to the consultation paper suggests there was uncertainty, and that has consistently been one of the reasons why the Government have said they need to carry out all these consultations. Even if the law is clear, as the Secretary of State suggests—personally, I believe it is

[Sir John Whittingdale]

clear—the important thing is that it can only be enforced if those who have their copyright breached are aware that that has taken place. That is why transparency is of critical importance, as I know the Government have acknowledged.

The Secretary of State has said this afternoon that he is going to set up more working parties. Our concern is that, as the Secretary of State has just said, a large amount of copyrighted material is already being scraped by generative AI. His working parties and further consultations—we wait to hear when legislation might arrive—mean that it will be another few years before we actually have this measure on the statute book. There is an opportunity to have something on the statute book now, and he will be aware that the existing provisions—the robots.txt provisions—are simply being ignored. They are not working, and it is important that we act immediately to send a very clear signal that we expect transparency to be in place and for generative AI companies to properly remunerate licence holders.

I want to mention some of the other provisions. On the Order Paper, the Government have said that Lords amendment 49D “engages financial privilege”.

Peter Kyle: The Chair says that—not us.

Sir John Whittingdale: Well, the Clerks may have advised—[*Interruption.*] I merely suggest that it is very unclear. As many in the House of Lords have suggested, it is very unclear how the amendment can engage financial privilege. The amendment use the word “may”, so it does not contain any requirement on the Government to indulge in financial expenditure. It is a worrying precedent if the Government are going to avoid debate on policy by suggesting that—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): Order. I think it would be helpful if I clarified that that is a matter for the Chair and not for the Government.

Sir John Whittingdale: I accept your ruling, Madam Deputy Speaker; it just looks very strange to see that the amendment “engages financial privilege” when there is no financial requirement in the amendment.

I will finish on one further point. I understand the Secretary of State’s keenness to attract investment from tech companies. When we have previously debated legislation affecting tech companies, on each occasion we have heard that it may result in their being unwilling to come and invest in this country, but that has never been the case. I hope the Secretary of State will not listen to those who say that if we proceeded to enforce copyright law, it may somehow result in tech companies finding this country unattractive. I do not believe that is the case and I do not believe that it would jeopardise the jobs that the Government are keen to create. But unless we proceed down the route of accepting the Lords amendment, we will jeopardise the jobs of the 2.4 million people in this country who are employed in the creative industries.

Question put. That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 49D.

The House divided: Ayes 195, Noes 124.

Division No. 206]

[2.53 pm

AYES

Abrahams, Debbie
Alaba, Mr Bayo
Aldridge, Dan
Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
Al-Hassan, Sadik
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Anderson, Callum
Anderson, Fleur
Asato, Jess
Asser, James
Athwal, Jas
Atkinson, Lewis
Baines, David
Ballinger, Alex
Baxter, Johanna
Bell, Torsten
Billington, Ms Polly
Blake, Olivia
Blake, Rachel
Bloore, Chris
Blundell, Mrs Elsie
Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena
Brash, Mr Jonathan
Bryant, Chris
Burton-Sampson, David
Byrne, rh Liam
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Campbell, Irene
Campbell-Savours, Markus
Carling, Sam
Charalambous, Bambos
Clark, Feryal
Collinge, Lizzi
Collins, Tom
Conlon, Liam
Coombes, Sarah
Cooper, Andrew
Costigan, Deirdre
Coyle, Neil
Creagh, Mary
Crichton, Torcuil
Daby, Janet
Dakin, Sir Nicholas
Dalton, Ashley
Darlington, Emily
Dean, Josh
Dickson, Jim
Dodds, rh Anneliese
Dollimore, Helena
Dowd, Peter
Eagle, Dame Angela
Edwards, Lauren
Edwards, Sarah
Efford, Clive
Egan, Damien
Elmore, Chris
Fahnbulleh, Miatta
Farnsworth, Linsey
Fenton-Glynn, Josh
Ferguson, Mark
Foody, Emma
Fookes, Catherine
Foster, Mr Paul
Foxcroft, Vicky
Francis, Daniel
Frith, Mr James
Furniss, Gill

Gemmell, Alan
Goldsborough, Ben
Greenwood, Lilian
Gwynne, Andrew (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
Hack, Amanda
Haigh, rh Louise
Hamilton, Paulette
Hardy, Emma
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Hazelgrove, Claire
Hendrick, Sir Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
Hillier, Dame Meg
Hinchliff, Chris
Hinder, Jonathan
Hopkins, Rachel
Hughes, Claire
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hurley, Patrick
Ingham, Leigh
Irons, Natasha
Jameson, Sally
Jogee, Adam
Jones, rh Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Louise
Juss, Warinder
Kane, Mike
Kaur, Satvir (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
Khan, Afzal
Kitchen, Gen
Kumar, Sonia
Kumaran, Uma
Kyle, rh Peter
Lamb, Peter
Leishman, Brian
Lewin, Andrew
Madders, Justin
Malhotra, Seema
Martin, Amanda
Maskell, Rachael
McAllister, Douglas
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonald, Andy
McIntyre, Alex
McKee, Gordon
McKenna, Kevin
McMorrin, Anna
Midgley, Anneliese
Morris, Joe
Mullane, Margaret
Murphy, Luke
Murray, Chris
Murray, rh Ian (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
Murray, Katrina
Myer, Luke
Naish, James
Narayan, Kanishka
Newbury, Josh
Nichols, Charlotte
Norris, Dan (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
Onn, Melanie

Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owen, Sarah
 Pakes, Andrew
 Patrick, Matthew
 Pearce, Jon
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Phillipson, rh Bridget
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Joe
 Powell, rh Lucy
 Poynton, Gregor
 Prinsley, Peter
 Race, Steve
 Reed, rh Steve
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
 Robertson, Dave
 Rushworth, Sam
 Ryan, Oliver
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sowards, Mark
 Shanks, Michael
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stevenson, Kenneth
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren

Swallow, Peter
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tapp, Mike
 Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Adam
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Tomlinson, Dan
 Trickett, Jon
 Tufnell, Henry (*Proxy vote cast by Adam Jogee*)
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Laurence
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Ward, Chris (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Ward, Melanie
 Webb, Chris
 Welsh, Michelle
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew
 Western, Matt
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 Wrighting, Rosie
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Keir Mather and
Christian Wakeford

NOES

Amos, Gideon
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Aquarone, Steff
 Argar, rh Edward
 Babarinde, Josh
 Baldwin, Dame Harriett
 Bedford, Mr Peter
 Begum, Apsana (*Proxy vote cast by Zarah Sultana*)
 Bennett, Alison
 Berry, Siân
 Brewer, Alex
 Brown-Fuller, Jess
 Cane, Charlotte
 Cartledge, James
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Chambers, Dr Danny
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Chowns, Ellie
 Cleverly, rh Sir James
 Cocking, Lewis
 Collins, Victoria
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, John
 Coutinho, rh Claire (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
 Dance, Adam
 Darling, Steve
 Davies, Ann
 Davies, Mims
 Denyer, Carla
 Dillon, Mr Lee

Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dowden, rh Sir Oliver
 Dyke, Sarah
 Eastwood, Colum
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Flynn, rh Stephen
 Foord, Richard
 Franklin, Zöe
 French, Mr Louie
 Gibson, Sarah (*Proxy vote cast by Wendy Chamberlain*)
 Gilmour, Rachel
 Glen, rh John
 Glover, Oly
 Goldman, Marie
 Gordon, Tom
 Griffiths, Alison
 Harding, Monica
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heylings, Pippa
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hunt, rh Sir Jeremy
 Jardine, Christine
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Kearns, Alicia (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
 Kohler, Mr Paul
 Kruger, Danny

Lake, Ben
 Lam, Katie
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 MacCleary, James
 Maguire, Ben
 Maguire, Helen
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mayhew, Jerome
 McDonnell, rh John
 McMurdock, James
 McVey, rh Esther
 Medi, Llinos
 Miller, Calum
 Milne, John
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moran, Layla (*Proxy vote cast by Zöe Franklin*)
 Morello, Edward
 Morgan, Helen
 Morrison, Mr Tom
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Murray, Susan
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Obese-Jecty, Ben
 O'Brien, Neil
 Olney, Sarah
 Perteghella, Manuela
 Philp, rh Chris
 Pinkerton, Dr Al
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Raja, Shivani (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Gagan Mohindra*)
 Rankin, Jack
 Reynolds, Mr Joshua

Robertson, Joe
 Savage, Dr Roz
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shannon, Jim
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, rh Sir Julian
 Snowden, Mr Andrew
 Sollom, Ian
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, Patrick (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
 Stone, Jamie
 Sultana, Zarah
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Taylor, Luke
 Thomas, Cameron
 Tice, Richard
 Timothy, Nick
 Trott, rh Laura
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Martin
 Voaden, Caroline
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wild, James
 Wilkinson, Max
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wilson, Munira
 Wishart, Pete
 Wood, Mike
 Young, Claire

Tellers for the Noes:
Charlie Maynard and
Mr Will Forster

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 49D disagreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83H(2)), That a Committee be appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendment 49D;

That Peter Kyle, Anna Turley, Matthew Patrick, Steven Yemm, Katrina Murray, Dr Ben Spencer and Victoria Collins be members of the Committee;

That Peter Kyle be the Chair of the Committee;

That three be the quorum of the Committee;

That the Committee do withdraw immediately.—(*Anna McMorris.*)

Question agreed to.

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

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (TODAY)

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, notwithstanding the provisions of paragraphs (1) and (2) of Standing Order No. 22D relating to the scheduling of select committee statements, select committee statements on the Sixth Report of the Business and Trade Committee and the Third Report of the Joint Committee on Human Rights may be made after the conclusion of proceedings on the Motion for this Order.—(*Anna McMorris.*)

UK-EU Summit: Policy Priorities

BUSINESS AND TRADE COMMITTEE

Select Committee statement

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): We now come to the Select Committee statement on behalf of the Business and Trade Committee. The Chair of the Business and Trade Committee, the right hon. Member for Birmingham Hodge Hill and Solihull North (Liam Byrne), will speak for up to 10 minutes, during which time no interventions can be taken. At the conclusion of his statement, I will call Members to ask questions on the subject of the statement; these should be brief questions, not speeches. I emphasise that questions should be directed to the Select Committee Chair and not the relevant Minister. Front Benchers may take part in questioning.

3.9 pm

Liam Byrne (Birmingham Hodge Hill and Solihull North) (Lab): I rise to speak to the House today on behalf of the Business and Trade Committee on our sixth report—a road map for the EU reset. I hope you will forgive me, Madam Deputy Speaker, for using this moment to share my profound thanks to the members of the Committee, who are both diligent and hard-working.

From our earliest days together as a Committee, it was clear to us all that our relationship with the European Union had been trapped in the logic of the past, and that although not all of that past was bitter, the present was clearly unsatisfactory, and the future could be richer if we collectively chose to reset that relationship with more ambition. That, we sensed, was also the analysis of His Majesty's Government. We asked ourselves what could be done to move this relationship forward—not distracted by fantasy, but informed with a real, hard-headed and pragmatic focus.

We travelled to Brussels, Belfast and Geneva. We listened to businesses, trade unions, diplomats and officials in the European Commission. We looked at border posts, trade barriers and, I am afraid to say, an awful lot of lost opportunities. We asked one simple question: how can we make these arrangements better? We sought not to reopen old wounds, but to open new doors.

What surprised us was that it was not difficult to find 21 different ways in which our relationship with the European Union could be reset in a manner that would make our country richer—with steps that would support our security, deepen our energy ties, and cut the red tape that is throttling trade with the EU. These were not abstract aspirations. They were grounded, practical and deliverable, and they were supported by an overwhelming coalition of business groups that we met. In short, the proposals we presented were backed by business, because they were good for business and therefore good for our country.

We divided the work into three ambitions: first, to defend our prosperity; secondly, to defend and advance energy co-operation; and, thirdly, to cut the red tape strangling trade at the border.

On security, we proposed a bold new partnership: a joint defence industrial policy, a framework for protecting critical national infrastructure and stronger co-ordination to tackle economic crime. We called for closer co-operation at the World Trade Organisation, including UK participation

in the new dispute resolution procedures, because a rules-based order is not just idealism; for us it is insurance. On energy, we saw something extraordinary: an opportunity to unlock the potential of the North sea as the world's biggest green energy power station. That vision demanded that we come together with the EU to create a single carbon border adjustment mechanism and to connect, again, electricity trading and emissions trading. That could add up to a faster and cheaper path to net zero for both us and our European neighbours.

On trade, we welcomed the Government's ambition for a deep sanitary and phytosanitary agreement and, indeed, a fair fisheries deal, but we pressed for some specifics: mutual recognition of alternative economic operator schemes; bilateral waivers for safety and security declarations; co-operation around roll-on, roll-off ferries; rejoining the Pan-Euro-Mediterranean convention; mutual recognition of conformity assessments; and a long-term road map for compatible regulation.

On services, we urged His Majesty's Government to strike a new data adequacy agreement, pursue deeper co-operation on financial services, ensure UK access to Horizon Europe framework programme 10, sort out a new road map for mutual recognition of professional qualifications, reduce the barriers for touring artists, and implement a visa-based, number-capped, age-capped youth experience scheme.

We published our draft report to test it. The response was overwhelming, with support levels of between 80% and 90% for the measures that we proposed. Businesses said, "This is what we need, because it will unlock growth, create jobs and raise wages."

On Monday, we saw some signs that the Government had listened. We were glad to see progress on security, defence, electricity trading and emissions alignment. There was a new security and defence pact. There was useful language on critical national infrastructure. There was a welcome step towards joining electricity and carbon markets together. There was, however, also much left in the to-do pile. There was no iron-clad commitment to a shared defence industrial policy and there was too little progress on law enforcement co-operation. There was silence on WTO co-operation, although I acknowledge that may come in the trade strategy when it is published. We also thought that there could have been more on financial services co-operation, data adequacy and mutual recognition of conformity assessments.

This is a deal without a date—a handshake, but not yet a contract. None the less, it was an important start. After years of drift and division, this was the first time since Brexit that, collectively, we had the chance to stop digging ditches of grievance and start rebuilding some bridges of co-operation. This was a step forward, but it was only a step. What comes next must be really clear. We must now have a timetable for drawing up, finalising and implementing these agreements. There should be action to take forward the unfinished business, which we have set out in this report. Crucially, we think there should be a bigger role for Parliament, because Parliament should not be a bystander while our future is forged.

Let us not retreat into nostalgia. Let us work pragmatically together in the national interest, because that is how futures are built. We are at our best in this Parliament when we choose to lead, and that is exactly what this relationship now needs. I commend to the House this report and its call to action.

Sonia Kumar (Dudley) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that consistency and clarity are exactly what businesses require to grow and thrive? That is why the Government should consider the report's recommendation to consult with industry on rejoining the pan-Euro-Mediterranean convention. PEM membership could support tariff-free trade, simplify rules of origin and reduce trade barriers for key sectors such as automotive, manufacturing, chemicals and food production. By joining PEM, British business would expand its preferential market access to 25 countries, thereby strengthening supply chains and boosting the competitiveness of British exports.

Liam Byrne: My hon. Friend made that point repeatedly during the Committee's deliberations. What has been especially welcome is how she consistently brings the perspective of local businesses in her Dudley constituency—the home of the industrial revolution, as we all know. She is right that, subject to consultation, in particular around the implications for the electric vehicle industry, rejoining the PEM convention could deliver us some rules of origin that would radically cut red tape for many businesses in her constituency and across our country. Frankly, it would also lower costs at a time when that is much needed.

Dame Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): I thank the right hon. Gentleman and his Committee for their extensive piece of work and for the report he has presented today. He mentions the wide range of different asks that the UK Government had and that he recommended that they pursue. Does he agree that it is disappointing that out of the areas that the UK wanted to achieve agreement on, movement for touring artists and participation in EU defence spending are left unagreed, while the UK Government seem to have agreed on and traded one of our most valuable areas in the negotiation: access to our fishing grounds?

Liam Byrne: The hon. Lady will know, as I do, that although fisheries and the fishing industry constitutes quite a small part of our economy—about 0.04% of GDP—for many coastal communities it is a vital industry. Nevertheless, we felt—I certainly did—that the prize of an SPS agreement, which could be worth a huge boost of up to £3 billion to £4 billion a year according to Aston University and that allows for shellfish exports to the European market, was potentially a prize was worth having.

However, the hon. Lady is right to say that the biggest concern that we should have had was defence industrial co-operation. We cannot defend Europe in the way that we should, and we cannot spend the increases in our defence spending in the way that we should, unless we reorganise Europe's fragmented defence industrial base. We cannot be stronger together unless we build that shared defence base together. I very much hope that we will hear of progress on that in the strategic defence review and the national security review when those strategies are presented to Parliament before the summer recess.

Gregor Poynton (Livingston) (Lab): Our Committee's report covered how we can help agrifood businesses export to the EU, and I was delighted to see Salmon Scotland and the National Farmers Union Scotland come out in support of the deal this week. Does my

right hon. Friend agree that it was baffling to see the SNP stand with Reform and the Tories in opposition to the deal?

Liam Byrne: The consensus when we published the draft of our report was overwhelming, and the measures we proposed were backed by an enormous majority of business groups across the country, including groups across Scotland. What business saw was a practical, hard-headed, common-sense set of recommendations that should be supported by not only the Government but those in public life across our country.

Charlie Maynard (Witney) (LD): I thank the right hon. Member for his leadership and hard work on the Committee. I welcome the move this week, and the set of aspirational statements of intent that go in the right direction. That is great, but does he agree that we should focus on the big stuff? Proportionately, the deal with India will get us 0.1% of GDP growth by 2040 and the American pact takes us to a position that is worse than where we were six months ago, so Europe is where it is at. Europe represents 45% of our trade versus 12% with the US, but of the beneficial 21 recommendations that the Committee set out, maybe five or six have been hit. The key thing is to go for the big stuff, such as being back inside the customs union. That would make a big difference.

Liam Byrne: The report could not have been as well written or as strong and robust in its recommendations without the hon. Member's input. We are grateful for the hard work he put into getting the report right. As he knows, a bespoke customs union was not a proposal we made, perhaps because it would not necessarily have swept up the Committee in unanimity. What is striking is that the measures set out in the report would have been significant enough to offset the economic damage we will suffer because of the tariffs introduced by President Trump. The hon. Member is right that in economic matters it is always wise to focus on the big numbers, and the big numbers in trade come from a better, closer, stronger relationship with the European Union.

Chris Bloore (Redditch) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his report and his stewardship of the Committee. My inbox was full of emails from local businesses in Redditch, relieved that after years of hesitation and no progress we are finally in a dialogue with the EU about improving access for businesses. Does he agree that, as the report states, by continuously speaking to the EU we can finally start getting rid of the red tape, as was promised to businesses by many on the pro-Brexit side, and get proper access to the markets that world-leading companies in Redditch really should be able to access freely?

Liam Byrne: My hon. Friend has consistently been a strong voice for the business community in Redditch since he joined us in the House. He is right that what has been lacking for a long time in the relationship with the European Union is the kinetic energy required to drive any bureaucracy forward.

A number of working groups were set up because of the trade and co-operation agreement. In a cross-party spirit, I should say it is important to note that the mood in Brussels changed significantly under the last Prime Minister, with the progress made in the Windsor framework.

[Liam Byrne]

However, unless significant amounts of political attention and energy are invested, things will not move forward, and there is still a long way to go. The Committee has set out in the report where some of that progress still needs to happen, but ultimately politics is what changes things. I hope that the political energy that went into Monday can be sustained for the future.

John Cooper (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con): I thank the right hon. Gentleman, whose tremendously adroit chairmanship of the Committee has allowed a lot of cross-party working, which has been really refreshing and very good. This is a moment of regret: the Committee did flag up how fragile coastal communities could be damaged badly by a multi-year deal on fishing, and the 12-year deal is beyond anything anybody imagined. It will hammer fragile communities right across Britain, and particularly in Scotland; that is unfortunate. Does he agree that achieving an SPS deal must be balanced with the deals with India, America and so forth that are coming down the tracks—I am sure the Committee will look at this—and that we must have due care for ensuring that the Brexit freedoms that allow us to strike those deals are not damaged?

Liam Byrne: The hon. Gentleman is right. As we were composing the report for the House over the last few weeks, he consistently underlined the risks that coastal communities would confront if the deal were to go the wrong way. We are all incredibly grateful to him for the voice he provided.

We must ensure that we enshrine certain standards that allow us to draw closer to Europe without compromising the alliances already coming into place and those that we still need to strike in order to restore our role as the great free trading nation on this planet. The way in which the Government seek to tessellate the agreement with the trade deal with the United States, with our leadership of the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership, with the deal with India and with the deals that are still to come with the Gulf Co-operation Council, Korea and Switzerland needs to be very carefully balanced. It looks like the Government have just about got it right. However, I know that the hon. Gentleman, like me, will want our Committee to keep an extremely close eye on that as the trade talks proceed.

James Naish (Rushcliffe) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend for this excellent report that is rooted in pragmatism and practical steps, which I know my constituents welcome. He has highlighted a gap—as he sees it, it is a first step—and there is a lot more to do. Will his Committee undertake to monitor the gap between what the Government have committed to and where he would like the Government to be, and will he and his Committee continue to make recommendations to the Government?

Liam Byrne: My hon. Friend is right to point that out. The good news for the Minister is that he now has the scrutiny framework in front of him that the Committee will use to judge the progress that he makes over the course of this Parliament. There is a moment that is still to come for this Parliament, however. At some point—we are not quite sure when—scrubbed treaties will need to

be laid in this House. This House will then enjoy the grand total of 21 days during the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 process in which to scrutinise them. That is not very long. The Committee has therefore decided this week that we will open inquiries on the EU, India and United States deals. We will seek to hold hearings on each of those trade deals before the summer so that the House can be as well informed as possible when the CRaG process begins, and we can zero in on the issues that are at stake for our constituents.

Richard Foord (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): I am grateful to the Chair of the Business and Trade Committee for this thorough set of proposals, and especially for the call for a greater role for Parliament. The Committee red, amber and green-rated its 20 proposals and marked as green the UK-EU security pact. Yet the Prime Minister's spokesman admitted:

“This is a first step towards UK participation in Europe's defence investment progression”

and went on to say that it merely

“opens the door towards joint procurement.”

Will the Committee Chair acknowledge how much more there is to do before this amounts to a shared defence industrial base?

Liam Byrne: The hon. Member is absolutely right. He knows, because of the extraordinary record of service that he brings to this House, that there is an immense amount of work that we still need to do to conquer the inefficiencies and fragmentation of the European defence industrial base. We cannot spend the money that we propose to spend on defence wisely unless we change the way that we procure military equipment. On the one hand, that will provide greater certainty and long-term contracts to defence suppliers and, on the other, it will help ensure that we are building an innovative ecosystem of funding to help smaller, innovative, nimble and agile suppliers of weaponry to come forward in the way that they can to ensure that the lessons that we have learned on the battlefields of Ukraine inform our military strategy in future.

If there is one lesson that we have learned, it is that any warfighting capability depends on the strength of our defence industrial base. Quite obviously, today's defence industrial base in Europe is not in the right place, and together with our partners we have to work hard on that. I hope that the strategic defence review will set out some practical steps for how we will do that together with our allies in Europe.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his statement and on the work of his Committee. Clearly, renewable energy is an important part of our relationship with the European Union. What opportunity did his Committee have to examine that and the trade of energy between the UK and the European Union, particularly in the light of the possibility in the near future of an interconnector between Morocco and the UK by way of the UK-Morocco Power Project, or Xlinks? He may know that if the UK does not greenlight that in the near future, other European countries certainly will.

Liam Byrne: The right hon. Member is absolutely right to say that Morocco is a country that we should work more closely with. Xlinks is an exciting proposal.

As a stable, long-term partner to Europe, Morocco is a country with which we have a shared interest in the future.

The perspective that we brought to the question was on how we can ensure a faster, cheaper and less risky path to net zero for us and for Europe. We heard striking evidence from many in the electricity and energy sectors about almost the thoughtless way that we had been disconnected from electricity trading schemes. What really worried us in the near term was that, given different carbon prices in the UK and Europe, if Europe introduced a carbon border adjustment mechanism, and we did a little later on, almost a tariff wall would be created.

We think the Government have done well in seizing that win-win, but that is not to take anything away from the logic and force of the hon. Member's remarks. Ultimately, we will need several big infrastructure initiatives if we are to do what we all know needs to be done in this country: to drive down industrial electricity prices.

Mental Health Bill: Legislative Scrutiny

JOINT COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Select Committee statement

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): The hon. Member for Bracknell (Peter Swallow) will speak for up to 10 minutes, during which no interventions will be taken. At the conclusion of his statement, I will call Members to ask questions on the subject of the statement. These should be brief questions, not speeches. I emphasise that questions must be directed to the Select Committee member and not the relevant Minister, and Front Benchers may take part in questioning.

3.30 pm

Peter Swallow (Bracknell) (Lab): It is an honour to present to the House the Joint Committee on Human Rights' report into the Mental Health Bill. As Members will know, the Joint Committee is a cross-party body of both Houses, chaired by Lord Alton of Liverpool, whose remit is to examine matters relating to human rights within the UK, including through legislative scrutiny.

Over the course of our inquiry into the Bill, we have examined legal frameworks and witness submissions and, crucially, heard from those with direct experience of the mental health system. As part of our inquiry, the Committee convened a roundtable with individuals who had experienced detention under the Mental Health Act 1983. Their testimonies were powerful, candid and often harrowing. They spoke of the trauma of being sectioned, the overuse of medication and restraint, and the disempowerment from being detained in facilities that too often felt isolating rather than therapeutic.

Participants have since shared with us

"how important this visibility was to them, to see their evidence truly listened to and shared publicly".

Hearing directly from people with lived experience was not just informative; it was essential. These conversations grounded our scrutiny in the realities faced by patients and families. The insights shared at that roundtable shaped our thinking and sharpened our final recommendations. As one participant told us:

"lived experience matters. Using it to inform policy should be the standard, not a shock."

I take this opportunity to thank all those who contributed to the roundtable, often at the cost of revisiting past trauma. The Committee is also grateful for the expert work of the Committee's legal counsel, particularly Alex Gask who led on this work, as well as Thiago Simoes Froio and Hafsa Saeed who led on the delivery of the roundtable event.

It became clear over the course of our scrutiny just how overdue the Mental Health Bill had become. It will introduce substantial changes to the Mental Health Act, which provides the legal framework for the detention and compulsory treatment of people with "mental disorders"—an outdated term, but one that remains part of our law. The changes introduced by the Bill will bring our mental health legislation into the 21st century, strengthen patient rights and help end practices that bring more harm than good.

When people hear about detention under the Mental Health Act, many instinctively think of those who have committed the most serious and violent crimes. They

[Peter Swallow]

picture high-security hospitals such as Broadmoor, which happens to be located in my constituency. I have had the opportunity to visit Broadmoor. The work they do there is outstanding; it is vital, world-leading work that deals with some of the most complex and challenging cases in psychiatric medicine.

Let us be clear, though: the reality of detention under the Mental Health Act is not limited to high-security hospitals or individuals convicted of serious crimes. Many people detained under the Act are not criminals. Many of them are children, young people and adults with autism or learning disabilities who are detained not because they pose a danger to others, but because the support they need in their communities simply is not there. This is not just inefficient, it can often be deeply traumatising and raises significant human rights concerns.

That is why the Committee welcomes the major changes introduced by the Government's Bill. It will end the detention of individuals under section 3 of the Mental Health Act solely on the basis that they are autistic or have a learning disability; tighten the criteria for detention and require decision makers to consider the nature, degree and likelihood of harm before deciding to detain; introduce the concept of a nominated person to replace the outdated nearest relative system; and remove police stations and prisons as places of safety for individuals in crisis. As stated in the evidence we received from witnesses, those are important, welcomed and long-awaited reforms. They reflect the breadth of the Government's consultations and prove that the Government listened to the information they received.

While welcoming the Bill's direction of travel, the Committee believes that there are areas where the Government could go even further to provide enhanced protections for human rights. That is why, based on the evidence we received during the inquiry, we have recommended a few key amendments. First, we recommend a new clause to ensure that children detained under the Mental Health Act are accommodated on adult wards only when that is demonstrably in their best interests.

Secondly, we recommend an amendment to clause 1 to include equity as a fifth guiding principle under the Act. This would refer specifically to addressing inequalities in treatments and outcomes on racial grounds in particular, and I welcome the Health Secretary saying on Second Reading of the Bill on Monday:

"People from ethnic minority communities, especially black African and Caribbean men, are more than three times as likely to be sectioned."—[*Official Report*, 19 May 2025; Vol. 767, c. 783.] In our report, we find that adding equity as a guiding principle would do more to address racial disparities.

Thirdly, we recommend an amendment to clause 32 to shorten the review periods for restricted patients who are discharged into conditions amounting to the deprivation of liberty. The first review will be required within six months, rather than 12, and subsequent reviews will take place annually, rather than every two years.

Those key amendments come amid a range of other recommendations. Recent case law shows that mental health patients in state-commissioned and funded but privately provided care do not come within the protection of the Human Rights Act. That loophole must be closed, and we recommend that the Government do just that.

We also heard evidence that the question of when the Mental Health Act and when the Mental Capacity Act should govern a patient's deprivation of liberty and treatment is far too complex and raises human rights concerns, not least because depriving a person of their liberty on any ground can be justified only if the legal basis is clear. We therefore recommend that the Government carry out an urgent review and provide the clarity that is currently lacking on this question.

Another crucial area the Bill covers is the rights of children, who are particularly vulnerable when assessed or treated under the Mental Health Act. Many of the proposed changes to the law will be positive for children, including the introduction of an opt-out approach to receiving a report from independent mental health advocates, but we recommend that the Government consult on introducing a statutory test for assessing whether under-16s are competent to consent or to refuse consent to treatment—a cornerstone of compliance with a child's human rights.

The Committee also deems it vital that prisoners whose mental health makes holding them in prison unsuitable are transferred promptly to an appropriate setting. Keeping them in prison may result in human rights breaches. In our report, we welcome the introduction in the Bill of a statutory 28-day timeframe for hospital transfer. Relevant data should be collected and made available to monitor and help to ensure compliance with that standard.

The Committee welcomes changes to restriction orders placed on a small number of offenders detained under a hospital order, but the Government should consider introducing more prompt and regular reviews by the mental health tribunal, to ensure that any loss of liberty is justified. Witnesses told us that, in the absence of effective support in the community, autistic people and people with learning disabilities could still end up in unjustified detention on other legal bases. The Government have stated that the change in the Bill will come into force only where there are strong community services in place, but it is vital that this does not delay the much-needed reform. We therefore welcome the Government's commitment to provide a written ministerial statement annually to both Houses of Parliament setting out progress to date on implementation. On what more the Bill could do to improve the prospects of patients receiving timely care in the community, we also ask the Government to consider introducing an English equivalent to the right to a mental health assessment that applies in Wales.

The report makes it clear that much more is needed to fix the broken mental health system in this country, and I know the Government recognise that as well. This is a small, targeted Bill, which will not change everything, but the changes it will introduce are significant and long overdue. The Government have committed to introducing mental health experts in every school, to set up Young Futures hubs and to recruit 8,500 more mental health staff. By focusing on community-based interventions and driving down waiting lists for mental health support alongside the welcome changes in the Bill, we can turn the tide and fix our broken mental health system, so that the human rights of all those with mental health needs are properly protected and they can get the support they need.

I commend this report to the House.

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

Dr Luke Evans (Hinckley and Bosworth) (Con): I commend the hon. Member for Bracknell (Peter Swallow) and his Committee for the report. We on the Opposition Benches will be looking favourably at it, especially as the Bill goes into Committee. I have one technical question. He talked about restraint for people who have autism and learning disabilities. Currently, the timetable for working out whether they have a mental health disorder or it is related to their condition is 28 days. Did his Committee look at that from a human rights perspective, to see whether it is the right time in which to make that assessment?

Peter Swallow: We did look at whether the process for assessing people was appropriate, and that issue came up. It is one where the individual's human rights are exercised, and we must strike a careful balance between the need to protect them and those around them and to ensure that the deprivation of liberty is only ever a last resort. Off the top of my head, I seem to remember that the report finds that the balance currently struck is appropriate, albeit it is one that the Government should look at. If I have got that wrong, I will happily correct the record.

Chris Bloore (Redditch) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member on his Committee's report. I was really interested in the point he made about an English equivalent to the right to a mental health assessment in Wales. With admissions to acute mental health settings increasing year by year, does he agree that it could drastically improve admissions if we were to introduce such equivalence for England and did not wait until a crisis point for people—particularly young people—to get the support they need?

Peter Swallow: My hon. Friend makes a really good point. It is vital, as we have seen across health, education and the justice system, that we get back to having a laser-like focus on early intervention, because we know that the earlier we intervene, the better it is for all involved. As he suggests, improving our mental health system through the measure recommended in the report would mean that we do not get to a crisis point where individuals have to be sectioned under the Mental Health Act. Instead, community support, which we know works when it is there, can be used to provide these individuals with the help they need.

Richard Foord (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): I am grateful to the Joint Committee for this report. I note the Committee's call for

“more prompt and regular reviews by the Mental Health Tribunal.”

The basis for that call is compliance with the individual's right to liberty, but does the hon. Member agree that regular reviews by the tribunal are also in the interests of the families and neighbours of mental health patients, given how disruptive and upsetting it can be for them to have patients living in the community?

Peter Swallow: Absolutely. We heard through our reporting of families being in real distress, particularly where a child is in treatment and where treatment is happening a long way away from where the family lives, making access to the family member even more difficult. The hon. Member's point is really important. Of course, our Committee was scrutinising this Bill through the lens of human rights, though it was important to us, as I said in my statement, that we hear from those with lived experience of the mental health system to inform our recommendations. He makes a powerful point.

Backbench Business

Access to NHS Dentistry

3.44 pm

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered access to NHS dentistry.

I thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting time for this debate and the colleagues who supported that application. I am pleased that many Members want to speak and am aware of the limitations on time, so I will keep my remarks brief.

During the general election, Labour promised to tackle the lack of NHS dental services, and I welcome the progress already made in the Labour Government's first 10 months. After 14 years of neglect we are finally starting to see action to address the crisis in NHS dental care, including the launch of 700,000 extra urgent dental appointments, with my own integrated care board in Humber and North Yorkshire delivering 27,196 of them across the region.

This Government are rightly focusing on prevention by rolling out much-needed supervised tooth-brushing schemes in schools. That is a small intervention with long-term benefits, particularly for children growing up in areas like mine where levels of tooth decay are among the highest in England. Currently, one in three five-year-olds in deprived areas experience tooth decay—a shocking statistic that simply must be addressed.

Over 260,000 people have signed a petition led by the British Dental Association, the Women's Institute and the *Daily Mirror* calling on the Government to urgently deliver on their promise to reform NHS dentistry, and the demand could not be more urgent. Catherine, one of many constituents who has written to me about dental provision, had been with her dentist for over a decade but during the pandemic a missed appointment—a simple missed appointment that was cancelled by the surgery itself—saw her removed from her regular appointments, and she has since been unable to join another practice, being told that waiting lists would take at least two years. In the meantime she suffered devastating deterioration to her oral health, losing all of her back teeth, suffering with an infected crown and bridge, and facing the real fear of losing her top teeth too; and Catherine is only in her 40s. She was quoted £14,000 privately for treatment. She simply cannot afford that. She has had to endure constant pain that no one should be left to bear.

Constituents regularly tell me that they cannot find an NHS dentist taking new patients. They are calling every single practice listed on the NHS website and they are getting nowhere. People are living in pain, they are missing work and their mental health is suffering. Some people are even attempting their own dental work, and we cannot allow that to become the norm.

The desire for action is also supported by dental practices in my constituency. One of them told me:

"We're seeing high-need patients we've never treated before, often for complex work—but we're doing this using the same budget we've had for years."

In fact, some of the new urgent care and schools-based initiatives are not additionally funded. The BDA's most recent figures show that dentists in England are delivering the least NHS care of all four UK nations: only 39% of dentists in England are spending most of their time on

NHS work, compared with nearly 60% in Scotland. Practices are delivering NHS treatments at a loss: they lose over £42 for every denture fitted and nearly £8 for every new patient they see.

This Labour Government pledged to reform the dental contract: it was in our manifesto; it was part of the plan that we were elected on. I welcome the early signs of recovery, but when we say that we want to go further, faster, it is precisely on issues like this that the public are looking to Government to deliver.

In Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes and across the nation we are privileged to have so many dedicated dental professionals. Tomorrow I am visiting Dental Design Studio to celebrate its 20 years of high-quality dental care provision in Cleethorpes. It is a real credit to the team there who have delivered consistent care to local people, often under increasing strain. And our young people are not forgotten locally: thanks to the commitment of Dr Jatinder Ubhi from Dentology, multiple young people in my constituency have received essential dental support.

We must not let dentistry become a luxury service only for those who can afford to go private. We need a new approach that is fair, that funds dentists properly, and that delivers accessible care to everyone who needs it.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. Because so many Members wish to contribute and we have to conclude by 5 pm, we will have a time limit of three minutes starting from now. I call Sir Julian Lewis, who I think can manage that—I think you can do it.

3.49 pm

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for that no-pressure introduction. I congratulate the hon. Member for Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes (Melanie Onn) on her speech and I agree with every part of it. I was hoping to quote from individual cases raised by constituents and from the local Women's Institute, but all that will have to go by the board.

I have a wonderful briefing from the British Dental Association and, in the remaining two and a half minutes, I would like to make one pertinent observation, from which everything else flows. Dentistry is a highly skilled profession in which practitioners can charge colossal sums of money in private practice, which gives them a financial incentive to steer clear of working for the NHS. That is the root of the problem.

On 13 March, I put a question to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care about a point made by the Darzi report, last September, which says:

"There are enough dentists in England, just not enough dentists willing to do enough NHS work, which impacts provision for the poorest in society."

I was pleasantly surprised when his reply was:

"NHS dentistry is in a terrible state and, in fact, in many parts of the country it barely exists. There are lots of reasons for that, and it is a source of constant astonishment to me that the dentistry budget was underspent year after year despite that situation."—[*Official Report*, 13 March 2025; Vol. 763, c. 1298.]

In reality, as the BDA points out, the reason why that budget is underspent is not because of the lack of demand, but because NHS practices cannot fill vacancies and are unable to meet contractual commitments. Therefore,

those who do work with and for the NHS are having to deliver dental care at a loss. There is a fundamental requirement for a rewritten constitution and contract by which it becomes worthwhile for people to practice dentistry in the NHS, because otherwise we will see a two-tier society, in which only the rich can get the dental care that people so desperately need.

3.52 pm

Irene Campbell (North Ayrshire and Arran) (Lab): When the NHS was introduced, it made the biggest positive changes ever to the health of the general population. The original “How to use your NHS” booklet from 1948 stated:

“It will provide you with all medical, dental and nursing care. Everyone—rich or poor, man, woman or child—can use it or any part of it.”

On the topic of dentistry, it said:

“After 5th July you can go to any dentist taking part in the new arrangements (there will be a list at your Post Office).”

At that time, 83% of registered dentists signed up to work in the NHS. Currently, in England, approximately 66% are signed up to work in the NHS, a significant reduction since the early days that demonstrates a clear barrier to access.

As a former NHS manager in Scotland, I have seen the importance of early intervention when it comes to health inequalities, particularly in dentistry. Scotland too has an access crisis, with decreasing numbers of NHS participating dentists. Naturally, those lower levels of participation affect patient access to NHS dental services, and dentists lose the chance to pick up early signs of decay, cancers and other serious issues, which results in higher costs for the NHS and worse outcomes for patients.

Additionally, children and adults from the most deprived areas were less likely than their wealthier counterparts to have seen their dentist within the last two years. Recent statistics from Public Health Scotland showed that 55.9% of children from the most deprived areas have seen their dentist in the last two years, compared with 75.8% for children in the least deprived areas. Those figures drop to 42.7% and 53.5% for adults.

In September 2008, the gap in child participation between the most and least deprived areas was three percentage points. That increased to seven percentage points by 2010, 18 percentage points in 2021, and then 20 percentage points in 2023. We cannot let that continue. As oral health inequalities continue to grow, it is important that our NHS strategy involves a focus on increasing participation and access in more deprived areas. Otherwise, we will continue to see further such worrying trends, which cause more serious problems further down the line.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call Ben Maguire. [*Interruption.*] I call Dr Andrew Murrison.

3.54 pm

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I prefer Ben—I have never enjoyed Andrew—but Andrew will do.

Quite honestly, NHS dentists are saints. As my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis) has said, the reason why we do not have any

NHS dentists is that it is far more remunerative to do expensive dental work than the sort of grinding service work that NHS dentistry implies. The reason for that, fundamentally, is the so-called new dental contract introduced in 2006. That is the problem. Units of dental activity have plagued the dental profession and the provision of NHS dentistry all these years.

I am delighted that the Government are revising the dental contract that their Labour predecessor introduced 20 years ago, but, unless they are prepared to underwrite it, I am afraid that we will still be more or less in the same position. It is not as if we are not training dentists—we are training more and more dentists and there are more and more dental schools, and rightly so—but if those professionals are going to practice in the NHS, they need to be incentivised to do so.

Sam Rushworth (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): I agree with the right hon. Gentleman about the 2006 NHS dentistry contract, which clearly needed revision. Why did his party not do that in 14 years in government?

Dr Murrison: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman has destroyed the consensual way in which I was trying to introduce my remarks.

If I may, I will explain that I think there has been a conspiracy of silence all these years on NHS dentistry. What Government have to get to grips with is whether they intend that dentistry should continue to be a universal part of our NHS and whether it will be exempted from the universality that has characterised the provision of healthcare services in this country since 1948.

The Government could decide that dentistry is a bit like ophthalmic optics, which in the 1940s was deliberately excluded from NHS provision. I am not recommending that, but I am recommending to the Minister that we are at least honest with the public. At the moment, we have this pretence around NHS dentistry that says, “Of course you have the right to have your teeth fixed at no cost to you at all up front.” In reality, in most parts of the country, mine included, that is a complete fiction.

When the Government come to their new arrangements, which I welcome very much, can we first have some honesty? Can we have some money behind them? Can we have some idea about what part of current NHS provision the Government intend to deprioritise, if that is their intention, to ensure that we have truly universal provision of NHS dentistry going forward?

3.57 pm

Claire Hazelgrove (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes (Melanie Onn) for securing this debate.

Today marks a year since the general election was called. Over the two-and-a-half years before then, I was out knocking on doors and listening to people across the Filton and Bradley Stoke constituency, as I still do almost every weekend. One of the issues raised with me the most was how hard it had become to find and keep an NHS dentist. Listening and acting on what matters locally, I took that campaign up. I raised those local issues with the then shadow Health Secretary, who kindly raised them here in the House of Commons for us before the election. Still there was no change from the Conservatives, who voted against Labour’s plans to rescue NHS dentistry and, remarkably, continued to do nothing.

[Claire Hazelgrove]

Conservative failure is far from a deterrent. I ran a survey asking local people what their experiences were—I thank fellow residents who took the time to complete it—and the findings were clear. Only 31% of those who completed my survey had an NHS dentist, but almost everyone without an NHS dentist—97%—wanted one. Notably, 65% of those without an NHS dentist said that it was because theirs went private, and nearly all respondents—94%—agreed that Labour’s plans to open up 700,000 more urgent appointments a year where they are most needed would help. Still no action came from the Conservatives, and local people voted for change.

My very first question in this House was about ensuring we have the right infrastructure as our communities grow, including dentists. Living locally, I know how challenging this has become—I do not have an NHS dentist, either. While receiving official designation as a dental desert is not something anyone wants for their community, I am relieved that we finally have a Government who recognise the challenges we face. This Labour Government’s action means that across our integrated care board area we will now have an extra 19,000 urgent NHS dental appointments, and I know this will be just the beginning. The Government will reform the dental contract and examine how we can encourage more dentists to stay within the NHS, getting us back to that place where people can again pop that dentist’s appointment back on the calendar, whether they like going or not.

I will not stand for a future where as many as six in 10 children have rotting teeth by the age of five, as they do in the Britain we have inherited. I will not stand for a future where the most common reason why children are admitted to hospital is tooth decay, as it is in the Britain we have inherited. I will continue to campaign for good access to NHS dentists across my community for as long as it takes, and I am glad to finally have a Government who I can work with—rather than have to fight against—to get the NHS dental services we need locally.

4.1 pm

John Milne (Horsham) (LD): Since being elected to represent Horsham, I have been approached by many residents facing impossible prices for urgent dental treatment. Annie is 67 and caring for a husband with terminal bowel cancer. You would think that she has enough things to worry about, but given the state of dental services in the Horsham area, she has been unable to find an NHS dentist within a 20-mile radius. Forced to go private, she paid £80 for an assessment and was then quoted £150 for an extraction. She asks simply:

“When will an alternative to private dentistry be available?”

I also heard from Sally. Her family were denied NHS root canal treatment, with an £800 private option as the only alternative. She asks:

“How can we trust their advice when it feels like it’s all about the money?”

Of course, this is a crisis not of dentists, but of dentistry. The NHS contract—based as it is on units of dental activity—is simply no longer fit for purpose, if it ever was. The conflict of interest between public and private is the result of more and more dentists being forced to subsidise their NHS contracts through private work. The Government have committed to providing

more support and more urgent appointments, but it is hard to get enough new employees through the front door when so many continue to leave by the back door.

In the area covered by my local integrated care board, there are more people leaving than joining across many key dental roles. Over a six-month period to the end of March last year, there were 41 general dentists in and 43 out; one orthodontist in and two out; 48 dental nurses in and 60 out; and 48 receptionists in and 54 out. In fact, five out of nine roles in dentists’ clinics have been losing staff faster than they can get new ones. The result is ever-declining access to NHS dental services, with children losing their teeth before they even reach the age of 10 and the horror stories of do-it-yourself dental treatment.

I will leave the House with the words of the West Sussex local dental committee, which contacted me just weeks after my election last year regarding the NHS dental contract. Its warning was simple:

“If we don’t act quickly, there may be very little NHS left to adopt a new NHS contract.”

I accept that the present Government were not responsible for causing this problem, but they are responsible for fixing it.

4.3 pm

Ben Goldsborough (South Norfolk) (Lab): A crisis has unfolded in Norfolk, quietly but painfully; a crisis that we can afford to ignore no longer. It is the urgent and worsening state of NHS dentistry. Just 33.6% of adults in Norfolk have seen an NHS dentist over the past two years, well below the national average of 40%. For children the picture is even worse: only 42.7% have been seen, compared with 55% nationally. A&E visits due to dental problems are rising—in the east of England, there have been 152.6 visits per 100,000 people. That is worse than London, the south-east and the midlands. The only region doing worse than us is the south-west.

We now have just 328 dentists in Norfolk and Waveney with any NHS activity, down from 423 in 2019. That is one dentist for every 3,177 people. One of my constituents recently rang 111 with a swollen face from an infected tooth. They contacted six emergency dentists but could not be seen by a single one. They were forced to go private, paying more than £1,000. That simply is not good enough in a modern society.

Luke Murphy (Basingstoke) (Lab): My hon. Friend is setting out eloquently why we need to improve dentistry. Does he agree that today’s access crisis is the result of a decade of underfunding and contract failure? In Basingstoke, as in his constituency, two thirds of adults and nearly half of children did not see a dentist last year. Does he believe this goes beyond a postcode lottery and is in fact a systemic failure?

Ben Goldsborough: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point—as though he had read the next part of my speech.

The Secretary of State has described our area as the Sahara of dental deserts. I agree, but we need more than just a diagnosis; we need solutions. I urge the Government to invest in a new dental school in the Edith Cavell medical campus in south Norfolk. We need to train dentists where they are needed and keep them there. I also encourage all dentists to complete the Government’s

new survey before 16 June. Insight must lead to reform, starting with the broken NHS dental contract. Norfolk has been taken for granted for too long. Our county is ready for change, and I know that my hon. Friends will work together to deliver it, because only by working together can we unlock the dental revolution that we need across Norfolk.

4.6 pm

Alison Griffiths (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton) (Con): It is an honour to speak in this debate and to raise the plight of my constituents, some of whom are struggling in silence, pain and frustration, simply trying to access basic NHS dental care. I thank the hon. Member for Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes (Melanie Onn) for securing the debate, and I share her views on pretty much everything she has said, but in particular the wider impact of poor dentistry on A&E, the NHS more widely and cardiac health.

I have many constituents' testimony to refer to today. Let me begin with the real story of a person who has worked tirelessly her entire life. Now, due to long covid, she is housebound and dependent. When she missed a single NHS dental appointment due to illness, she was removed from the list. She has since been unable to find another NHS dentist. When an infection struck, she waited a week for emergency care at St Richard's hospital, and she is not alone.

In 2023, only 24.7% of adults in the south-east were seen by an NHS dentist in the previous two years—the second-lowest rate in England. In some areas, fewer than one in five adults have been able to access NHS dentistry. The Government have announced recent steps, with 26,546 additional urgent care dental appointments for Sussex—a rise from 245 to 455 a week. We have a £20,000 golden hello relocation incentive to attract dentists to underserved areas. Some 17 of those posts have been approved for Sussex. I welcome those steps, but they are not enough.

The Dental Defence Union and the Public Accounts Committee have made it clear, as have other colleagues, that the NHS contract is broken. It disincentivises dentists from treating those patients with the greatest needs. In 2022, 91% of dentists surveyed felt worn out, and 84% reported burnout. They are walking away from NHS dentistry not out of disinterest, but because the system is unsustainable. How many of the urgent contracts are now available, and when will real contract reform take place?

4.9 pm

Jo Platt (Leigh and Atherton) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes (Melanie Onn) for securing the debate.

For far too long, people across the country have struggled to access NHS dental care, and I have heard heartbreaking stories in my constituency. One constituent has struggled to find an NHS dentist, which has left him without access to the dentures he needs. He told me:

"All I want is to return to work as I have always worked but having no upper teeth is holding me back as I am so embarrassed." Poor dental health should not be a barrier to individuals returning to work, and my constituent's situation is unacceptable. It simply should not happen.

However, there are glimmers of hope. This Government's announcement of 700,000 extra urgent dental appointments is a vital step forward, and nearly 18,000 of those appointments will be delivered in Greater Manchester, including for residents in Leigh and Atherton, who have been waiting for far too long. It is a sign of intent and a recognition that action is overdue, but for all this to work we need the workforce in place, and that is where the challenge remains.

Railway Road dental practice in Leigh has been trying to replace a senior dentist for nearly nine years. Despite advertising, there has been no interest. It is a clear sign that practices, particularly in areas of high deprivation, need better support to attract and retain staff. The Government's golden hello scheme is a smart move, as it offers financial incentives to bring dentists into the areas that need them most. Through the NHS long-term workforce plan, we are increasing dental training places by 40%.

As the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis) said, we must acknowledge the people who have kept NHS dentistry going through difficult times. I pay tribute to Mr Dobranski, a local dentist who has given 53 years of his life to the NHS. His service to the people of Leigh is nothing short of remarkable, and I sincerely thank him for it.

Yes, the challenge is big, but I am encouraged by the steps being taken. The extra appointments, the investment in the workforce and the renewed focus on prevention are all signs that we are finally facing up to the crisis.

4.11 pm

Edward Morello (West Dorset) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes (Melanie Onn) on securing the debate. I was delighted to be able to support her application, because this issue deeply affects my constituents.

Dentistry is in crisis nationally, and nowhere is that felt more so than in rural communities such as West Dorset. In my constituency we have just 15 dental practices offering any form of NHS dental care, serving a population of more than 94,000.

Rachel Gilmour (Tiverton and Minehead) (LD): I have to confess that I rather envy my hon. Friend for having 15 dental practices, as I have a mere nine. In fact, as became evident in the Public Accounts Committee inquiry, which I attended as a Committee member, Minehead has fewer dentists than anywhere else in the United Kingdom. It is really important that we carry on lobbying the integrated care boards, because they can give out contracts.

Edward Morello: I know that my hon. Friend's constituency suffers from a lot of the same issues as West Dorset, given their similarity.

The consequences of the lack of NHS dental care are stark: only 36% of adults in West Dorset have seen a dentist in the past two years, and just 50% of children have had a dental appointment in that time—an alarming 9% lower than in 2019. I know that the Government have announced a rescue plan to provide 700,000 more urgent dental appointments and to recruit new dentists to the areas that need them most. That is welcome news, but how exactly are the areas with the most need being assessed? What specific provisions are being made to

[Edward Morello]

ensure that rural areas such as West Dorset, where the population density is low but unmet demand is high, are not left behind once again?

Steve Darling (Torbay) (LD): In Devon we have a budget of £377,000 to recruit new dentists. Sadly, only two of the 22 dentists have actually been recruited. Does my hon. Friend agree that this demonstrates that the Conservatives' golden hello scheme has completely failed, and that we desperately need a new contract now?

Edward Morello: My hon. Friend is right that a lot of this comes down to the funding model. When funding is allocated under the current model, it is always rural communities that lose out. I ask that the rurality of places such as West Dorset be recognised in both the workplace planning and the resource allocation, because the south-west has the highest rate of dental-related A&E visits—217 per 100,000 people. That is one in every 460 people turning to emergency care because they cannot get an NHS dentist's appointment. Preventable oral health issues are flooding our hospitals because we have failed to resource our community dental services.

The Government have made some minor tweaks to the dysfunctional NHS contract, which is welcome, but morale is at an all-time low. Over 60% of dentists in England are thinking of leaving the NHS all together. The current contract often leaves dentists losing money on every NHS patient they see—for example, a typical dentist loses £42.60 per denture fitted. That is unsustainable, and it is time to reform the system as a whole, because change cannot wait. I ask the Government to come forward with a clear timeline for negotiating on contract reform, and to properly support integrated care boards, as my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Minehead (Rachel Gilmour) said, with ringfenced funding for dental services.

The Liberal Democrats are calling for a comprehensive dental rescue package that would guarantee access to an NHS dentist for everyone in need of urgent or emergency care. It would also ensure NHS dental check-ups for those already eligible, including children, pregnant women, new mothers and people on low incomes. In addition, the package would guarantee that anyone beginning chemotherapy, undergoing a transplant or facing critical treatment receives the essential dental assessments that they need beforehand.

I would like the Government to reverse the cuts to public health grants, which have fallen by 26% in real terms since 2015, to restore funding for preventive oral health programmes, to expand supervised toothbrushing for children in schools and nurseries, and to scrap the VAT on children's toothbrushes and toothpaste. I ask the Government to act now. On behalf of my constituents and all rural communities, I ask that communities such as mine in West Dorset are not treated as an afterthought in the funding model, but are given priority.

4.16 pm

Linsey Farnsworth (Amber Valley) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes (Melanie Onn) for securing this vital debate. This issue touches on every community, but I will focus on how the crisis is playing out in my constituency.

Amber Valley has less than a quarter of the national average number of NHS dentists per 100,000 people. When I speak to residents on the doorstep and in my surgeries, I hear the same heartbreaking stories from people in pain who are unable to access an NHS appointment. Some have become so desperate that they have resorted to pulling out their own teeth. During my campaign, I made a promise to the people of Amber Valley to fight for better access to NHS dental care, and that remains my most urgent pledge. We do have a handful of dedicated, hard-working dentists who are maintaining NHS patient lists against difficult odds—dentists such as Dr Nadia Duarte at Amber Valley dental practice—but most surgeries simply do not have the resources to keep their NHS lists open. This puts huge pressure on the few that do, with waiting lists stretching over two years. Simply put, anyone is extremely lucky to get an NHS appointment in Amber Valley.

Amber Valley dentists have told me that our surgeries received the lowest payment per NHS treatment when compared with neighbouring constituencies. This has made it almost impossible to recruit and retain the quality NHS staff we need. I took this up with the Derbyshire integrated care board, saying not just that this was unfair, but that it had created a crisis of health inequality for Amber Valley. I am grateful that it listened and acted. We have secured an additional £240,000 to address this underpayment, allow our surgeries in Amber Valley to take on more NHS staff and make it easier for us to get the NHS appointments we need. It is a real win for Amber Valley, but nothing less than my constituents deserve, although it is only a small part of the solution and one that will take time to bear fruit. That is why I particularly welcome the Government's commitment to 700,000 additional emergency NHS dental appointments each year, and I urge my constituents to access one of the 16,298 such appointments in Derbyshire.

I promised the people of Amber Valley that I would speak up for them and fight for the dental care that should be their right, so although I am grateful for the progress the Government have made so far, I say to my hon. Friend the Minister: please, let us go further and faster so that no one in Amber Valley has to suffer without the dental care they need.

4.19 pm

Claire Young (Thornbury and Yate) (LD): I thank the hon. Member for Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes (Melanie Onn) for introducing this debate.

Thornbury and Yate is a dental desert. According to a recent newspaper report, not a single dentist in Thornbury and Yate is taking on new NHS patients for the third year in a row, leaving people having to travel long distances for care, or forced to pay for private treatment. I am sure, as a fellow south-west MP, the Minister will be as concerned as I am to hear that in September 2024 the NHS dental activity delivery rate was lowest in the south-west, at 61.6%, compared to the highest in London, at 94.7%. Not surprisingly, in the south-west, around one in every 460 people had to be taken to A&E with a dental problem in 2023-24. That was substantially higher than in London, where the figure was only one in every 860 people. The area covered by the NHS Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire integrated care board is the worst of all worlds, with fewer dentists,

adjusted for population size, and lower dental activity delivery rates alongside higher numbers of A&E visits with dental problems.

I want to highlight two cases that show the impact that is having on vulnerable people. One constituent wrote:

“Despite contacting more than a dozen dental practices in and around South Gloucestershire and Bristol, I have been told by every single surgery that no NHS appointments are available. However, I have been offered private appointments if I am willing to pay...The situation is even more distressing as my wife is currently pregnant and requires urgent dental care, which is crucial for her health and that of our unborn child. Pregnant women are entitled to free NHS dental care, yet this right is rendered meaningless when no NHS appointments are available.”

Another constituent wrote to me: a cancer patient who needed major dental treatment ahead of intense radiotherapy. Bristol dental hospital advised them they would need lifelong follow-up care, but during covid that treatment was stopped and they were discharged back to their NHS dentist. Soon after—surprise, surprise—the practice ceased to provide NHS dentistry and they could not find another, so they were forced to pay for their essential treatment.

Charlie Maynard (Witney) (LD): There seems to be a consensus across the House that the NHS dental contract is broken. That is the consensus across the country as well, including in my constituency. If there is one thing we can get out of the debate today, it is a timeline to which the Government will commit to fixing the situation and to bringing legislation before the House. Does my hon. Friend agree that would be of benefit?

Claire Young: I do. We also need solutions for people like my constituent in the meantime; they have already had to pay £1,400 for treatment and they face another £2,000-worth of work to be able to eat normally. That is a stiff fee when you are reliant on personal independence payment and your spouse's pension. My constituent feels that they have nowhere to turn.

To sum up, patients like my constituents deserve access to an NHS dentist. We need an emergency scheme to guarantee access to free NHS dental check-ups for those already eligible: children; new mothers; those who, like my constituent's wife, are pregnant; and those on low incomes. We need a dental rescue package that brings dentists back into the NHS from the private sector by fixing the dental contract and using flexible commissioning to meet patients' needs in the meantime.

4.22 pm

Chris Webb (Blackpool South) (Lab): Anyone who has had severe toothache knows the unbearable agony. In those moments, it feels like there is nothing worse. But imagine watching your four-year-old child suffer that same pain and being told that he cannot be helped. That was the reality for my constituent, Louise. A single mum, Louise got in touch with me when she was at breaking point. She had to watch her son suffer through constant distress: crying in agony, unable to sleep and refusing his food. When she managed to see an emergency dentist, she was told he would need between four and eight teeth extracted under local anaesthetic, but the wait time for that procedure was up to two years. Louise was left with no choice but to manage her son's pain with daily Calpol and ibuprofen. That is not healthcare—it is abandonment.

Sadly, Louise's story is not rare. In my constituency of Blackpool South, people are being driven to desperate measures. They are turning up at A&E in agony because they cannot get dental appointments. Some are even resorting to pulling out their own teeth at home—DIY dentistry in 21st-century Britain. NHS dentistry was left to decay under the previous Government. I stood over there on the Opposition Benches one year ago today, highlighting the problems we have in Blackpool. In Blackpool South, just 34% of adults have seen an NHS dentist in the last two years. That is a sharp fall from over 50% a few years ago and well below the national average. Only 45% of children were seen in the past year—a figure that is lower than almost anywhere else in England.

People living in poverty are most at risk of poor dental health, and in my constituency, poverty is a daily reality for so many. Children's tooth decay is one of the clearest signs of how deep this crisis runs. In Blackpool, one in five three-year-olds and nearly one in three five-year-olds have visible dental decay—among the highest rates in the country. Behind every number is a child missing class because of dental pain, and a parent like Louise who feels helpless; all this in a town that already faces some of the deepest health inequalities in the country.

I am pleased that the Government have rolled out 700,000 more urgent dentist appointments, and I know the Government are committed to recruiting new dentists in areas that need them most, like Blackpool. I welcome the Government's commitment to reforming the dental contract, but I urge them to act now. The BDA points out that a reformed service will not work if there is no workforce left by the time it is finally introduced. The sector needs a clear timetable for negotiations, a firm deadline for a new system and a sustainable funding model. The Government need to build a system not on crisis care, but on prevention and early access, and it has never been more urgent.

People in Blackpool South are not asking for special treatment. They are just asking for treatment—and the simple assurance that toothache will not become trauma.

4.25 pm

Steff Aquarone (North Norfolk) (LD): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes (Melanie Onn) for securing this debate—the application for which I was pleased to support.

I would like to tell the House about Philip, who wrote to me, in his own words, in “desperation”. He is a proud armed forces veteran and was recovering from a recent surgery for lung cancer when he suffered a fall, which caused him to lose a number of his teeth. After his maxillofacial surgery, he was horrified to discover that there were no dentists taking NHS patients near him, and his previous dentist had simply removed him from their system. He needed dentures—not just for cosmetic reasons, but to be able to eat proper meals—and was facing a future without any of this support.

Cases like Philip's will ring true, I am sure, for far too many people here, and indeed across my constituency. I am pleased to say that in this instance, my team and I got straight on the case and were able to help Philip to secure an NHS appointment with a local dentist earlier this week. We look forward to seeing him with a full

[Steff Aquarone]

smile again soon. However, we cannot do that for the two thirds of my constituents who are not seeing an NHS dentist, and nor should we have to. We need to fix the broken system that is letting down people in North Norfolk.

One exciting prospect on the horizon is the establishment of a dental school at the University of East Anglia, as my near neighbour, the hon. Member for South Norfolk (Ben Goldsborough), has already mentioned. The school has support from Members of all parties in Norfolk, and we are excited for Norfolk to start training and placing its own dentists in the coming years. However, the University of East Anglia needed funding for places from the Government confirmed before 2 May in order to appear in the UCAS applications for students beginning in September 2026, but the Treasury has demanded that any such spending not be confirmed until the spending review in a few weeks' time. For the sake of less than six weeks of bureaucracy, my constituents face yet another full year of delay.

Nevertheless, I am pleased that it was confirmed this week that Cromer will have an expanded dental practice that will take on new NHS patients. The Lib Dem-led North Norfolk district council has worked to secure a new lease with the Dental Design Studio on the former tourist information centre. The new practice will have five surgeries, all at ground level to improve accessibility. After years of decline, we may finally be seeing the green shoots of improvement in North Norfolk's part of the dental desert.

I am pleased to have the opportunity today to stand up for everyone who has struggled with our crumbling system over the past few years—for people like Philip, for the many children facing tooth decay, for all those on waiting lists and for those forced to fork out for private treatment. Things must improve, and they can. I will be fighting hard to ensure that they do.

4.28 pm

Lizzi Collinge (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Lab): NHS dentistry has been a recurring theme for me both before the election and since, as I know is true for most colleagues, which is why this Labour Government have made it a priority. However, we are starting from a very difficult place.

Let me set out just how bad the situation is in Morecambe and Lunesdale. Last year, I knocked on the door of a man in Morecambe who had lost most of his teeth because he did not have access to dental care. Just yesterday, a constituent wrote to me asking me to speak in this debate. She and her husband travel more than 80 miles four times a year just to see their NHS dentist. They are retired and cannot afford to go private, and, like many older people, they need regular and more complex care. We do not have to look far to see the root of the problem—so to speak. Dentists have been telling us for years that the NHS dental contract is not fit for purpose. The contract creates perverse incentives. Dentists are discouraged from treating the patients who need them the most. I appreciate that this is partly because in the '90s and early '00s, the contract incentivised the over-treating of patients, but now the pendulum has swung back too far the other way, and we have to find a balanced approach.

Dental decay is one of the leading causes of hospital admissions in children. In 2023, over 30,000 children ended up in hospital needing their teeth removed.

Paulette Hamilton (Birmingham Erdington) (Lab): The Government have an historic commitment to prevention. Birmingham Erdington is one of the youngest constituencies in the country. Does my hon. Friend agree that we must continue to build on supervised brushing and targeted fluoride applications in early years settings to protect the youngsters?

Lizzi Collinge: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Prevention is always better than cure. When I sat on Lancashire county council's health scrutiny committee, we took evidence that showed that things such as supervised brushing and help with fluoride were some of the most cost-effective interventions, and they could prevent the horror of 30,000 children going into hospital for preventable tooth removal.

Dental health has become a stark marker of inequality. Without ongoing care and access to that preventive care, children in less well-off families are more likely to suffer worsening dental problems.

The contract was a major problem. It locked in those perverse incentives, but the situation was then worsened by over a decade of neglect of all areas of public health under the previous Government. Too many families do not go to the dentist until it is too late and it is very expensive, so we need those preventive measures that my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham Erdington spoke about and we need access to NHS dentists. We know that if people are not able to go to the dentist, it means they turn up at A&E, but they are sent away with painkillers and antibiotics, and that does not fulfil their needs.

I am pleased that our Government are taking this issue seriously. I am pleased that we recognise the scale of the problem, and I am pleased that we are taking action not only on NHS dentistry, but on preventive care. We owe it to families in Morecambe and Lunesdale and across the country to fix this broken system. We need a dental contract that actually works, fair funding for local services and access to care that is available when people need it.

4.32 pm

Caroline Voaden (South Devon) (LD): NHS dentistry is in crisis, and South Devon is no exception. According to the Nuffield Trust, it is now at "its most perilous point in its 75-year history."

Parents are pulling out their children's teeth at home. Pensioners are travelling abroad for basic dental treatment. Hundreds of people in the dental desert of South Devon have simply given up hope of ever seeing an NHS dentist again.

Last year, 13 million adults across the country could not get an NHS dental appointment—more than one in four. In my constituency, the situation is even worse. Over 60% of adults and 50% of children in Devon have not seen a dentist in the past two years. No local practices are accepting new NHS patients, and waiting times can stretch into years.

The crisis is driven by an underfunded and outdated system that is pushing professionals out. In England, NHS dentistry receives just £38 a head. In Scotland,

I am told that it is nearly double that. Each year, hundreds of millions of pounds in dental funding goes unspent, not because it is not needed, but because dental practices cannot recruit or retain staff under the current contract.

The rigid contract system is also preventing dentists coming up with innovative ideas, such as a proposal for a no-frills, low-cost dental service in Dartmouth in my constituency that got nowhere because of NHS red tape. I ask the Minister when will we hear about a reformed dental contract?

The Dental Defence Union has highlighted other issues that are contributing to the collapse. One major concern is falling morale among dental professionals. In a 2022 survey of nearly 500 dental staff, 86% reported experiencing increased workplace pressures over the past two to three years—a clear signal that the working conditions are driving people out of the profession.

Dentists are also losing money to provide NHS care. For every denture they fit, they are out of pocket by more than £40. No wonder over 60% of NHS dentists say they plan to leave. We need urgent action. That is why the Liberal Democrats are calling for real reform. We are campaigning to end dental deserts and to guarantee access to an NHS dentist for everyone who needs urgent or emergency care. Our dental rescue package would bring dentists back to the NHS by fixing the broken contract and using flexible commissioning to meet local needs.

We want an emergency scheme to ensure free NHS check-ups for those who are already eligible, such as children, new mothers, pregnant women and people on low incomes. We are also calling for guaranteed access to dental care for anyone needing treatment before chemotherapy.

The longer this goes on, the worse it gets. South Devon needs proper dental care, not more delays. Yes, preventive dental care costs money, but prevention is always better and cheaper than cure.

4.35 pm

Alex McIntyre (Gloucester) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes (Melanie Onn) for securing this important debate. I also thank the dentists, hygienists, dental nurses and practice staff in my constituency who do so much to look after my constituents.

The reality is that the dentistry system we inherited from the previous Government is broken, and we need to fix it. Time and again when I am knocking on doors in Gloucester, I hear that patients cannot get the dentist appointments they need, that we have people pulling their own teeth out at home, and that there are children with teeth rotting in their mouths.

We need more NHS dentists in Gloucester. This week, I have launched a campaign to get a new dental practice in Gloucester city to deliver for my constituents, and I wrote to my local ICB earlier this week about it. We need to see this new practice as soon as possible, so I would welcome a meeting with the relevant Minister to discuss my campaign to deliver a new dental practice for my constituents.

I recognise that my ICB and this Government have made fantastic progress on urgent dental care in Gloucestershire. We have another 11,000 urgent dental

appointments in my constituency and the wider area, which is already delivering for my constituents who are most in need. But what we really need are regular check-up appointments so that people can be seen more regularly. I welcome reform of the dental contract and the consultation with local dentists, and I encourage all dentists and dental practices in my constituency to get involved with it so that we can deliver a better dentistry system than the one left behind a year ago by the Conservative party.

4.36 pm

Susan Murray (Mid Dunbartonshire) (LD): I thank the hon. Member for Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes (Melanie Onn) for bringing forward this important debate.

In my constituency and across Scotland, families are desperately struggling to access NHS dental treatment. Public Health Scotland figures show that while 87% of children are registered with an NHS dentist, only about 66% have actually been seen by one in the past two years, and in our most deprived areas that drops to only one in two children. This is despite the SNP claiming that 95% of children are registered with an NHS dentist.

When routine care disappears, the consequences are seen in hospitals. Before the pandemic, Scotland was admitting about 8,000 children a year for dental extractions under general anaesthetic, making it the single biggest cause of planned childhood admissions to hospitals. Despite the clear and dire consequences of failing to address dental health and health inequalities in general, the Governments in both Holyrood and Westminster appear to be looking the other way. A recent British Dental Association survey highlighted the financial strain faced by dentists, with 45% of practices saying that they were struggling to stay financially viable and over half saying that the recent Budget had accelerated their move into the private sector.

With that in mind, we must ask why this Government chose to follow through on their national insurance rise for primary care providers such as dentists. It appears that while Labour's manifesto said that they would support local health providers, the reality for those providing care is quite different.

I therefore join my Liberal Democrat colleagues in calling on the Government to reconsider their stance on national insurance. Failing to return national insurance contributions to their former levels will inevitably result in fewer NHS dental appointments, fewer NHS dental providers, and more children on operating tables.

4.39 pm

Peter Prinsley (Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket) (Lab): Is there a better metaphor for the state of this country than the state of dentistry? Fourteen years of neglect left us with a decayed system of NHS provision, with those able to pay the only ones protected. I see it myself with wards full of children with dental abscesses at the weekend.

Residents have told me stories of searching for NHS dental provision that simply does not exist. In my constituency, the number of urgent appointments has increased by 35%, with practices providing urgent dental care services seven days a week and into the evenings, and there are more coming soon, so the Government are making a serious attempt to deal with the decades of decay and drift, but we must go further.

[Peter Prinsley]

We do not have enough dentists and we do not have enough dental service providers, so let us sort out the dental contract, which we have heard about. The right hon. Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), who is no longer in his place, is quite right that NHS dentists are in fact heroes.

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland and Fakenham) (Con): The point has been made repeatedly that dentists can earn a lot more money in private practice than in NHS dentistry, and that is unlikely to change no matter what happens in the renegotiation. Does the hon. Member agree with the last Government's review, which suggested that the roughly £300,000 cost of training a dentist should come with a requirement to work for the NHS for a number of years afterwards?

Peter Prinsley: That is certainly a suggestion that should be investigated.

We must increase the number of dentists, as we have only 24 dentists for every 100,000 people in the east of England. We also need to increase the number of training providers and training places, but even with the opening of a dental school it will take ages for there to be new dentists.

One suggestion is that we sort out the dental accreditation system. Hon. Members may not know that there are only 600 opportunities to take the accreditation exam each year, but there are 6,000 people planning to take the exam—that will take 10 years. We must get the General Dental Council to increase the number of exam opportunities.

We have begun to address this political emergency, but we must go further with a clear and fair offer focusing on what the Minister described as the triangle of patients, practitioners and the public purse, providing a service that ensures that we give excellent, affordable care for all, including prevention, especially for the most vulnerable, and in a way that means we can pay for it. NHS dentistry can be saved. Let us have a sign on the door saying, "Urgent NHS dental appointments available here." Would that not that be great?

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

4.42 pm

Dr Danny Chambers (Winchester) (LD): I thank the hon. Member for Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes (Melanie Onn) for securing this really important debate. Before I was elected, I drove around Winchester, the Meon valley and the beautiful New Forest treating horses as a veterinary surgeon, and a key part of that role is providing regular dental treatment. Horses do not like going to the dentist any more than humans do, but they need to have their teeth brushed every six months—at least every year—or they get ulcers in their mouths and they can get infected tooth roots. When we have to remove a tooth with a root that is three inches long—especially on a hot day like today—we work up a sweat and it takes a long time, but it is really painful for the horse, even though we use painkillers and nerve blocks. Often, all of that would have been avoidable had they had regular dental treatment, and it costs the owner a lot more money. It is exactly the same with human medicine.

There is cross-party agreement, with no one disputing that prevention is better than cure, and when it comes to dental care in the NHS we are failing at even the most basic level of public health. I am not going to go through all the stats that hon. Members have repeated about the numbers of children needing general anaesthetics for dental care.

Alex McIntyre: Will the hon. Gentleman welcome the Government's partnership with Colgate on tooth-brushing in schools so that we can tackle prevention with children and make sure they are not going into hospital with tooth decay because they are learning how to brush their teeth and doing so properly?

Dr Chambers: I absolutely welcome that fantastic initiative.

I visited two dental practices in Winchester, and both told me exactly the same thing: they want to do more NHS work, and they want to be there for their communities, but because of the current NHS dental contract they simply cannot make it financially viable. They are effectively subsidising their NHS patients with income from private work. The British Dental Association estimates that private dentistry in England cross-subsidises NHS care to the tune of £332 million a year, which is due to rise to £425 million if NHS practices are not offered any help with the tens of thousands in additional staff costs brought in by the increase in national insurance. With the NHS work they do perform, they do not have time for the education—the proactive, holistic healthcare—that they want to do. Instead, they have to get people through in a quick turnaround. I say this clearly: dentists are not the problem. They are doing their best within a contract that is outdated and damaging.

I also want to speak to something that is often overlooked in this conversation: oral health is not just about teeth. I know that my dentist colleagues, as in veterinary practice, routinely identify serious conditions such as oral cancers and squamous cell carcinomas during routine dental checks. Those cancers are often aggressive but spotted early, they can be treated. We also know that infections in the mouth can lead to things such as endocarditis, which is not a trivial condition, and there is good evidence that periodontitis can contribute to the onset of dementia. How many cancers are we missing? How many heart problems are we not avoiding by not having routine dental checks?

I will sum up now as I know that we are pushed for time. The Liberal Democrats will continue to fight tooth and nail for an NHS that includes dentistry. I managed to avoid making any jokes about equine dentistry, and Members will be glad to hear that straight from the horse's mouth. We do not want NHS dentistry to be an afterthought; it has to be a core part of a truly universal, holistic health service. Everyone deserves access to routine dental care. Many Members have said that they live in areas that are dental deserts, where NHS dentists are rarer than hen's teeth. It is clear that we have cross-party consensus. Let us get the dental contract reformed and let us make this Parliament the last one during which anyone has to extract their own teeth.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call the shadow Minister.

4.46 pm

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes (Melanie Onn) on securing this debate. Dentistry is important. Dentists do not just deal with our teeth; they deal with our mouth and gums, they identify physical diseases that include cancer and they prevent sepsis. Last month, I visited The Dental Design Studio in Sleaford to celebrate its 20th anniversary of great dentistry and I met some fabulous, committed professionals. Somewhat unexpectedly, given the venue, I was asked to help judge a cake competition. Members and my dentist will be pleased to know that I brushed my teeth very well afterwards.

Access to NHS dentistry has been a problem for a very long time. When I moved house in 2001, there was no NHS dentist available and I travelled two hours to Redcar to see the wonderful dentist Mr Dixon for many years until he retired. After that, there was no dentist at all. Are we therefore short of dentists? No, we are not. The Conservative Government increased the number of new trainee places and the number of new dentists, and although the population increased, there are still more per capita than in 2010. As the Minister for Care has said,

“The issue is not the number of dentists...but the paucity of dentists who are doing NHS work.”—[*Official Report*, 25 March 2025; Vol. 764, c. 766.]

I encourage the Minister for Secondary Care to consider more dental places, because we see that one in 15 of the youngsters who want to become a dentist is turned away and, as such, they go overseas to train or train to do something else. Will she commit to a dental school not just in Norwich, but in other underserved areas, such as Lincoln?

The main problem, as many have identified, is the 2006 contract with the UDA bands for procedures, and there are several issues with that. First, the amounts vary between practices based on historical volume data; secondly, there is a disincentive to treat new or high-need patients; and thirdly, the UDA simply do not cover all the costs. The Conservatives improved that a little bit, ironing out some of the bizarre UDA contract terms and setting a new, higher floor for minimum UDAs. Yet there is much more to do, as we have heard today, to reform it completely. How are the Government getting on with that? Will the Minister give us an update, please? As the Public Accounts Committee notes,

“NHSE and DHSC do not yet know what that reform might look like or to what timescales it can be delivered”,

beyond a vague assertion that some reform is imminent.

Alex McIntyre: Will the hon. Lady give way on that point?

Dr Johnson: I will not because there is not much time at all.

I met Eddie Crouch from the BDA recently, who talked about the national insurance costs. Before today's announced pay rise, dental practices were facing a 9.5% increase in staff costs, again pushing more of them further to private practice. Will the Minister ask the Chancellor to exempt NHS dentists from the national insurance contribution rise? There has also been discussion about compelling dentists to do a proportion of their

work in the NHS, either by compelling dentists who are newly trained or by incentivising with the use of student loan repayments. Have the Government considered that?

We have many overseas trained dentists—some are British students who were trained overseas, some are foreign nationals—but the overseas registration exam has 2,000 people on its waiting list. Somewhat bizarrely, those who pass can work in the private sector, but not in the NHS without supervision. That seems somewhat incoherent. Does the Government have confidence in the exam or not? It is illogical to allow a person to practise as a private dentist but not in the NHS. It is also a clear disincentive to NHS practice. What good discussions have the Government had with the General Dental Council about this issue?

My right hon. Friend the Member for Herne Bay and Sandwich (Sir Roger Gale) has repeatedly raised the issue of Ukrainian dentists. There are 200 Ukrainians dentists in the UK. Why not assess them and allow them to work? It is better for them and for us.

Dentists form part of a wider team of hygienists, nurses, technicians and therapists. What are the Government doing to help people in each of those roles practise at the top of their skill range to provide greater dental care? What are the Government doing to support rural areas since they cancelled the mobile dental vans? What are they doing to ensure they deliver the 700,000 promised appointments a year, since they have delivered hardly any of them so far?

Sam Rushworth: Will the hon. Member give way?

Dr Johnson: I will not give way because there is very little time.

It has been clear today that the NHS is not fit for purpose when it comes to dentistry. The Government need to get grip of this, and soon.

4.50 pm

The Minister for Secondary Care (Karin Smyth): I thank the hon. Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson); I could not have asked for a better set-up. I pay great tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes (Melanie Onn). This is an issue she has pursued for some time, and I am grateful for her securing this important debate. I know many more Members would have liked to speak. I will not take any interventions in the short time I have to respond because I want to address some of the questions raised.

This issue continues to be a matter of great concern to Members and all our constituents. Poor oral health can have a devastating effect on individuals, as we have heard, impacting their mental and physical health alike and, indeed, their opportunities for work, as my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh and Atherton (Jo Platt) made clear. Yet it is a largely preventable issue through good oral health hygiene and regular visits to a dentist. We inherited a broken NHS dental system, and our ambition is to rescue and restore NHS dentistry so that we deliver more NHS dental care to those who need it. Fourteen years of neglect, cuts and incompetence by the previous Government have left NHS dentistry in a state of decay. That is simply unacceptable and needs to change, which it will.

[Karin Smyth]

As of March 2024, more than 36,000 dentists are registered with the General Dental Council in England, and yet less than 11,000 full-time equivalent dentists were working within the NHS. Lord Darzi said in his report:

“There are enough dentists in England, just not enough dentists willing to do enough NHS work”.

That is why this Government are prepared to take strong action. Since coming into office, we have made good progress on our plan for change. We have already taken action to address the immediate needs of patients in pain and requiring urgent dental care through our manifesto commitment to deliver an additional 700,000 urgent dental appointments per year. Integrated care boards started to deliver those appointments from April, and each area has been given expectations for delivery based on their local needs.

That point was noted by my hon. Friends the Members for Filton and Bradley Stoke (Claire Hazelgrove) and for Amber Valley (Linsey Farnsworth), who campaigned studiously in opposition and continue to bring this to the House. ICBs have returned detailed plans for delivering against the expectations, and the Minister for Care is holding regular meetings with officials in the Department and with NHS England to monitor and drive progress against those plans. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Alex McIntyre) for pursuing the matter with his ICB—that is exactly the right thing to do.

To have a truly effective dental system, we cannot focus just on those already in pain. We must have a system that prioritises prevention, particularly for children—a point well made by my hon. Friends the Members for North Ayrshire and Arran (Irene Campbell), for Blackpool South (Chris Webb) and for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Lizzi Collinge). That is why we have invested over £11 million to roll out a national supervised toothbrushing programme for three to five year olds. That will reach up to 600,000 children a year in the most deprived areas of England. Alongside that, we have launched an innovative partnership with Colgate-Palmolive, which is donating more than 23 million toothbrushes and toothpastes over the next five years. That is incredible value for the taxpayer and a fantastic example of how businesses and Government can work together for public good.

We have also taken the decision to expand community water fluoridation across the north-east of England. That is the first expansion for decades and will bring benefits to an additional 1.6 million people in the region.

Our workforce is crucial, as we have heard this afternoon. A strong dentistry system needs a strong workforce, and we recognise the incredible work that dentists and dental professionals do. I pay tribute to Mr Dobranski mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh and Atherton—what amazing service. I also mention my own dentist Aidan Moran, who has been seeing me for the best part of three decades.

A central part of our 10-year health plan will be our workforce and how to make sure that we train and provide the staff, technology and infrastructure the NHS needs to care for patients across our communities—a point well made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket (Peter Prinsley). We will publish a refreshed workforce plan to make sure the NHS has the right people in the right places with the right skills to deliver the care that people need.

As my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Ben Goldsborough) highlighted, we are all sadly familiar with the term “dental deserts” to describe parts of the country where access is especially difficult. We are continuing to support integrated care boards through the golden hello scheme, but of course dentists are only part of the team; dental therapists, hygienists, nurses and technicians all play a vital role, and we need to make the NHS a better place to work for all of them.

We are committed to fundamental reform of the dental contract. It could have been done sooner; it could have been done at any point over the last 14 years by the coalition or the Tories, but they left it for us to do. It will take time, but I assure everyone here that development of these proposals is under way. We continue to work with the British Dental Association and other representatives to deliver our shared ambitions for dentistry. My hon. Friend the Minister for Care met the BDA recently and they have a productive relationship.

In the spirit of honesty, let me be clear: there are no perfect payment models, and any changes to the complex dental system must be carefully considered, so that we deliver genuine improvements for patients and the profession. It is an immense challenge. There are no quick fixes and no easy answers, but people across the country deserve better access, and we are determined to make that happen.

We know we must deal with the immediate crisis. That is why we will deliver 700,000 extra appointments each year, get more dentists into the communities that need them the most, and make sure that everyone who needs an NHS dentist can get one. NHS dentistry will not be rescued overnight. It will take time, investment and reform, but improving access to NHS dentistry is key to our mission to get the NHS back on its feet and fit for the future.

4.56 pm

Melanie Onn: I am grateful for the number of Members who participated in the debate, and can only apologise to those who were not able to get in or whose time to speak was shortened. I thank the Minister for her comprehensive response. It is clear that we have some way to go before we get the sort of service that people across the country, in all our constituencies, deserve, but I am confident that she will take this forward, having heard all the comments and suggestions made this afternoon.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered access to NHS dentistry.

Diego Garcia Military Base

4.57 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (John Healey): With permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement on the Diego Garcia military base.

For more than 50 years, the joint UK-US military base on Diego Garcia has been a launchpad to defeat terrorists, to prevent threats to our nation, and to protect our economic security. This base keeps Britain secure at home and strong abroad. This afternoon, the Prime Minister has signed a treaty with Prime Minister Ramgoolam of Mauritius that guarantees full continued UK control of Diego Garcia for the next 99 years and beyond.

I pay tribute to the UK's negotiators, to the teams from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and the Ministry of Defence who supported them, and to the Mauritian officials who worked for two and a half years to reach this agreement. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has today laid in the House the full treaty text and his formal exchange of letters with the Foreign Minister of Mauritius that confirm the agreement and the financial arrangements between our two countries. A Bill will be introduced soon.

There has been a great deal of misinformation about this treaty, much of it fuelled by the Conservative party, but the simple truth is that our national security rests on securing a deal that protects the operational sovereignty of this vital military installation. By signing this treaty on our terms, the Prime Minister has ensured that the UK retains full control of Diego Garcia throughout the next century and beyond. It is a deal struck in the national interest and a deal that makes Britons today and generations to come safer and more secure.

The importance of Diego Garcia cannot be overstated. Some of the operations on our joint UK-US base are in the public domain; most, by necessity, are not. But all the work conducted from Diego Garcia plays a crucial role in protecting our nation, our armed forces and our trade routes. Diego Garcia is unique. We do things there that we simply could not do anywhere else. Its airfield allows for strike operations and rapid deployments to the middle east, east Africa and south Asia. Its deep-water port supports missions from nuclear-powered submarines to our carrier strike group. It hosts surveillance stations that disrupt terrorist attacks, protect satellites and provide global intelligence capabilities, and it projects UK-US military power in the Indo-Pacific, to reinforce regional stability and security.

America is our closest security ally, and continued use of this base is fundamental to maintaining the special strength of that relationship. In fact, Diego Garcia is our nation's most significant contribution to the UK-US security partnership that has kept us safe for nearly 80 years. As I have said, this is a joint military base, and almost every operation conducted from it is done in partnership with the US. That is why the treaty has the full-throated support of the US Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, who has said this afternoon:

"This agreement secures the long-term, stable, and effective operation of the joint U.S.-UK military facility at Diego Garcia, which is critical to regional and global security."

President Trump himself has described this as "very long-term" and "very strong".

Diego Garcia also strengthens Britain's economic security. Over one third of the world's bulk cargo traffic and two thirds of global oil shipments are transported through the Indian ocean. Our constant presence in these waters serves to safeguard trade routes, keeping down the price of food and energy for Britons here at home. Diego Garcia is also the permanent location of critical comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty monitoring equipment—a network that watches every moment of every day for evidence of nuclear testing, to hold nuclear and would-be nuclear powers to account. Diego Garcia is one of just four locations in the world to operate ground station antennae for the global positioning system, which everyone from astronauts to motorists and our military rely on to navigate.

Quite simply, the loss of the Diego Garcia military base would be unthinkable. And yet, without action—without this deal—within weeks we could face losing legal rulings, and within just a few years the base would become inoperable. Some have suggested simply ignoring international legal decisions, but this is not just about international law; this is about the direct impact of law on our ability to control and operate this base.

Rulings against us would mean we could not prevent hostile nations from setting up installations around Diego Garcia, on the outer islands, or carrying out joint exercises near the base. No deal would mean we could not guarantee the safe berth of our subs, patrol the waters around the base, control the airspace directly above or protect the integrity of our communications systems. Such developments would deeply damage the security interests of the UK and our allies. It would be a dereliction of the first duty of Government.

Agreeing this treaty now on our terms means that the UK retains full control over Diego Garcia now and for the next century. We have laid before the House the full treaty and the associated costings. Those on the Conservative Front Bench will see how we have toughened the terms of the deal they were doing so it does now guarantee the UK's national interest and national security. At a cost of less than 0.2% of the annual defence budget we have secured unrestricted access to, and use of, the base, as well as control over movement of all persons and all goods on the base and control of all communication and electronic systems. Nothing can be built within a 24 nautical-mile buffer zone without our say so, and we have secured an effective veto on all developments in the Chagos archipelago, and a strict ban will be imposed on foreign security forces operating on the outer islands—all provisions that were not in the draft agreement that had been negotiated by the Conservative party before the election.

I just say to the parties opposite that anyone who would abandon this deal would abandon the base. They would weaken the security of the British people and weaken the strength of the British armed forces. By signing this deal, the British flag will fly over the Diego Garcia base well into the next century. By signing this deal, the relationship with our closest security ally will be strengthened. By signing this deal, our capacity to deter our adversaries and defend UK interests is secured for generations to come. As the world becomes more dangerous, Diego Garcia becomes more important. This Government will never compromise on our national security. With this deal, we have made Britain more secure at home and stronger abroad.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

5.6 pm

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement. Before I go into the detail, however, I wish to place two important points on the record. First, it was beneath contempt for the Prime Minister in his press conference to state that those who oppose this deal are on the side of Russia and China. I am intensely proud of the role that my party has played in supporting Ukraine—I have worn this badge of the Ukrainian flag every day. I and many of my colleagues have been sanctioned by Russia and China and passionately believe that we must stand up to them. Indeed, that is one of the reasons we oppose this deal.

Let us not forget that only last week Mauritius agreed to deepen maritime co-operation with Russia, and this week China said that it wanted to deepen its strategic partnership with Mauritius and that that country was well placed with strategic advantages. This is a democracy: if we as elected parliamentarians choose to take a different view on this issue and vote against the deal, that does not make us pro-Russian or pro-Chinese. Voting against this deal does not make us traitors to this country; it makes us patriots.

Secondly, the Secretary of State and his Defence Ministers have said 26 times on the Floor of the House that the urgently needed strategic defence review would be delivered by the spring, but he has broken that promise. Here we are, at literally at the last sitting moment of this spring, and instead of the SDR he has come to the House to announce a total, abject surrender of our territory and a fundamental betrayal of the UK's national interest. The Government are not surrendering British sovereign territory because of military defeat, or because of a binding legal verdict, but wilfully due to a total failure to take a stand and fight for Britain's interests on the world stage—a complete and utter negotiating failure.

Yes, it is true that we held talks with the Mauritians when in government, but we never signed a deal. Why? Because we fundamentally oppose the idea of spending billions of pounds on a surrender tax to lease back land that we currently own freehold. And it is billions of pounds. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the deal will cost £1 billion over the next five years?

When the Prime Minister recently gave a statement to the House about defence spending, he used the cash figure to state by how much spending would rise. Will the Secretary of State confirm that, on the same basis, this deal will cost UK taxpayers over £10 billion? Will he confirm definitively how much of that cost will come from the Ministry of Defence budget?

Mr Speaker, you will be interested to hear that, on military operations, the treaty confirms that we must “expeditiously inform Mauritius of any armed attack on a third State directly emanating from the Base on Diego Garcia.”

Will the Secretary of State confirm that that means we would need to tell Mauritius if the base were to be used to launch strikes against Iran or its proxies? What guarantees has he received that Mauritius would not tell potential adversaries?

As we all know, the key issue is that the Government fear a binding legal judgment. [*Interruption.*] They are following the legal advice to act definitively to our

detriment, entirely on the basis of hypothetical risk that has not yet materialised and that we could challenge, and that is part of a pattern.

On Monday, with the EU defence pact, the Secretary of State admitted that he has secured only “potential participation” in the rearmament fund, but despite no guarantee of hard cash for defence, the Government have already given up our sovereign fishing grounds for over a decade.

Yesterday, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland refused to explain why this Government failed to appeal the legal decision that now threatens our veterans with a new era of lawfare for the crime of serving this nation and keeping us safe all those years ago.

And today, with Chagos, once again the Government have prioritised heeding the most pessimistic legal advice, even though we have exposed the fact that fear of binding threats from the International Telecommunication Union or the United Nations convention on the law of the sea are overblown. As the hon. Member for Crawley (Peter Lamb), a Labour Back Bencher, said earlier, we are all “Getting real tired of this ‘the courts have settled it’ line of argument”.

It is not so much a case of “no surrender”, as “yes, surrender” every single time, always listening to the lawyers instead of our national interests, even if that means surrendering our veterans, our fishing grounds and the Chagos islands—[*Interruption.*] May I suggest they change the lyrics of their Labour party song, because we all know that they will keep the white flag flying here?

Mr Speaker: Order. I do not want to interrupt, but Mr Gemmell, you are not being helpful to your cause. It is the worst day to be thrown out, so please, I want to hear no more from you—it has been continuous.

James Cartlidge: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman was expecting to hear the strategic defence review, as all of us were, given the Government's multiple promises.

Finally, the Chagossian community has been shamefully sidelined by this Government from start to finish, with only tick-box engagement by junior Ministers. Is it not the case that the treaty offers no protection to the Chagossians whatsoever?

When Labour negotiates, Britain loses. The Government should not be surrendering strategically vital sovereign territory, especially when we face such threats, and they certainly should not be paying billions for the privilege. We would abandon this deal, but we would never abandon the Chagos islands. This is a bad deal for Britain and we will do everything possible to oppose it.

John Healey: I regret the tone that the hon. Gentleman has struck this evening—[*Interruption.*] The Prime Minister was making a simple point: if the base goes, the countries that benefit—the countries that want to see the base go and the deal fail—are China, Russia and Iran. Quite simply, he was asking whose side of the argument—

James Cartlidge: Are we on?

John Healey: Yes, whose side are you on? [*Interruption.*] Frankly, if you do not back the deal, you do not back the base.

Sir James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): Shameful.

Mr Speaker: Order. I will decide what is and is not shameful. I am going to say this once and for all: Mr Cartlidge, you have been pushing and pushing for quite a while. Emotions are running high, but I do not want a continuous barracking and that level of noise coming from you. You should be setting a good example as the shadow Secretary of State, keeping calm and being effective, not bawling.

John Healey: Quite simply, if you do not back the deal, you cannot back the base. There is no viable alternative option than this deal. The senior military figure who was part of the treaty signing this afternoon, General Sir Jim Hockenhull, confirmed that publicly. The shadow Defence Secretary knows that—he was a Defence Minister until the last election. He knows that that was the advice he and the previous Government were given. Even the spokesperson for his party's leader admitted in February that a deal was needed. *Politico's* "Playbook" reported:

"A spokesperson for Badenoch insisted she understands negotiations over the islands are needed due to the international legal position."

That is the job that we have done. The Conservatives conceded the principle that negotiation was necessary and a deal was required to safeguard the long-term protection and control of this base; they conducted 11 rounds of negotiations before the last election.

The hon. Gentleman talks about this being part of a pattern. The previous Government failed to deliver a trade deal with India, and we did it. They failed to deliver a trade deal with the US, and we did it. They failed to safeguard Diego Garcia, and we have done it. We picked up those negotiations and strengthened the defence protections for the UK, and we did the deal today.

The hon. Gentleman asks me about the money. Once again, he was not just a Defence Minister, but also a Treasury Minister before the last election—in fact, he was Exchequer Secretary when the negotiations first kicked off. He knows that the Government Actuary tells us that the full accounting cost of this deal over the 99 years is £3.4 billion. That is the figure reported and laid before the House today.

The hon. Gentleman will know that there is a long-established method—used under our Government, his Government and the previous Government—for accounting for long-term projects, like this base, the nuclear commissioning programme, big infrastructure projects and pensions liabilities. The facts for me, as Defence Secretary, are that the cost of this deal is less than 0.2% of the annual defence budget; that this is an essential deal for our national security that will ensure Britain is better equipped to face down the rising threats we face; and that our armed forces are stronger and safer because of the deal done today.

The hon. Gentleman asks me about the Chagossians. We have been concerned, since we were elected just 10 months ago, to restore good communication and better relations with a wide range of Chagossian groups. The Foreign Office Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), has met them regularly, and he and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met them this morning. The negotiations,

however, were between the Mauritian Government and the UK Government, just as they were under the previous Government. We have worked to ensure that the agreement reflects the importance that Chagossians attach to the islands, so we will finance a new £40 million trust fund for Mauritius to support the Chagossian community.

I will conclude where I started. I say to the shadow Defence Secretary: we have worked together on a cross-party basis on Ukraine, and we have offered him and his party's leader security briefings on any of the big issues that we face. This deal is in the national security interest. That is why, when we were in opposition, we backed his Government when they set out to try to negotiate that deal, just as we backed his Government when he led the UK's support for Ukraine. When he looks at the treaty, considers that there was no alternative and recognises that this is a tougher deal that is better for our base, better for our forces and better for protecting our British people in this country, I hope that he will back it.

Peter Lamb (Crawley) (Lab): In the '60s and '70s, Labour and Conservative Governments removed the Chagossian people from their islands in the interests of national security. In response to written questions, the Foreign Office has confirmed that many certainties that would be required for Chagossians to return to the islands have not been secured as a part of this deal—once more banning them in the name of national security. What should I tell my Chagossian constituents when they ask about the moral basis on which the UK is once again ignoring their right to self-determination while we fight for it in Ukraine for Ukrainians? On what basis can members of British overseas territories feel any certainty that they will retain possession of their islands in the event that our national security interests are suddenly piqued?

John Healey: I have known my hon. Friend for a long time, and he has been a loud and strong voice for Chagossians in this country. I hope he will recognise, first, that this has been a negotiation that the British Government have conducted with the Mauritian Government. I hope he will also recognise and respect the fact that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and the Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth, have tried to set a new tone in relationships and communications with the range of Chagossian groups in this country. Finally, I hope he will recognise that that range of Chagossian groups includes a range of Chagossian views, some of which support this deal and see the need for it. I trust he will be strong in advocating for the use of the trust fund and the programmes we will put in place to help the Chagossian people.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

James MacCleary (Lewes) (LD): Liberal Democrats support the UK complying with international law, but the process for agreeing this deal has been more than a little bit bumpy. While the Conservatives have feigned anger, bordering on hysteria at times, despite it being their Foreign Secretary who first signalled the UK's intention to secure an agreement, this Government have failed consistently to provide any clarity on the progress of the deal. We do not need a running commentary, but we do need to know that public money is being used wisely.

[James MacCleary]

It was also clear that the Government were prepared to give Donald Trump the ultimate veto over any agreement, without regard for the priorities of Chagossians themselves. As the deal has now been reached, can the Secretary of State confirm what issues Chagossians raised during their meetings with Ministers, and how the Government have responded to ensure their voices and issues have been addressed in this deal? In attempting yesterday to humiliate South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa, President Trump proved once again his instincts as unreliable and an unpredictable bully. Having now confirmed this deal on a shared UK-US asset, how confident is the Secretary of State that Diego Garcia will not be used by this White House to advance foreign policy objectives that we deem contrary to our principles and interests?

Hard-working families around the country will rightly be questioning why the Government are reportedly willing to negotiate such significant sums paid to Mauritius at a time when the personal independence payment is being severely scaled back. Will the Secretary of State put on record today the proposed schedule of payments as they relate to the deal, and when it is expected that that schedule will commence?

As the Government have previously confirmed, the treaty must come before the House for scrutiny, especially given its importance to our national security and its implications for the Exchequer. I hope this sets a valuable precedent that could be applied to future trade deals, for instance, so can the Secretary of State confirm when this House will have an opportunity to scrutinise the proposed deal, as well as a chance to vote on its ratification?

John Healey: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is that from this point, this House has the full opportunity to scrutinise the deal. That is why my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has placed the full text of the treaty before this House, together with the financial arrangements.

The hon. Gentleman says that the negotiators have not been giving a running commentary, but he also says that he does not want a running commentary because he respects the fact that in any negotiation, there has to be a private space in which discussions can take place. I have said consistently that when the treaty is ready and put before the House, the full financial information will come alongside it. That has happened today. The proper scrutiny by this House begins today, and when the Bill is published soon, the hon. Gentleman will be able to scrutinise that, too. On the question of the Chagossians, we will provide £40 million so that the Mauritians can set up a new trust fund for those communities.

Let me turn to the hon. Gentleman's question about the US. This treaty has been negotiated between and signed today by our Prime Minister and the Mauritian Prime Minister. It secures a vital defence and intelligence base for Britain, but, as I said in my statement, almost everything we do on this base is done jointly with the US, so of course we have kept the Americans informed and consulted them. At no point has the US had a veto—this is our deal and our decision. I bring it to the House this afternoon because it is in our best national interest and our best security interest.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. Mr Mayhew, did you have a comment to make?

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland and Fakenham) (Con) *indicated dissent.*

Mr Speaker: Shaking your head and making comments—that is certainly not the example I want to see when I am looking to keep the House calm. I do not need the backchat; that has been going on for a while.

Alex Ballinger (Halesowen) (Lab): The Conservatives started negotiations on handing over the Chagos islands because they understood the national security implications of not doing a deal. Indeed, they did 11 rounds of negotiations on this deal. Now, with our closest security partners—the Americans, the Canadians, the Australians and the New Zealanders—all welcoming this deal, why are the Conservatives playing politics with our national security?

John Healey: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. He makes a powerful point in a judicious way. The shadow Defence Secretary could learn a bit from him.

Sir James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): Both the Prime Minister—in his extensive press conference prior to the Secretary of State for Defence coming to the House—and the Secretary of State have said on numerous occasions that this deal is the only way of protecting the military operations on Diego Garcia. When I was Foreign Secretary, I did not see anything to make me agree that this is the only way of protecting military operations on that base. The Defence Secretary suggested in his statement that a judgment could come within weeks that would undermine the operations of the base. From which binding legal authority does he fear that jurisdiction may come? We know it is not the International Telecommunication Union or the International Court of Justice. Who does he believe would prevent us from military operations on that island?

John Healey: The right hon. Gentleman was a formidable and very senior figure in the previous Government. He was in the post of Foreign Secretary during the period when there were negotiations on this deal. By entering into the negotiations, his Government accepted and conceded the principle that a negotiated deal was the way to secure the full operational sovereignty of this base for the long term.

The right hon. Gentleman may well not have been satisfied with the deal that his own people could have negotiated at the time, because when we picked up the negotiations, there was no agreement on an effective UK veto across the archipelago, which we have now; there was no buffer zone accepted in that agreement, which there is now; there was no agreement in that text for 99 years, or the option of an extra 40 years, which we have got in there now; and there was also not an agreement for Mauritius to take on responsibility for any migrants, but there is now. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman looks at the new text of the treaty, and I hope he will back it when it comes before the House.

Amanda Martin (Portsmouth North) (Lab): I rise to welcome this agreement, which safeguards a vital national security asset and cements the United Kingdom's role at the heart of global defence co-operation. Let us be clear: this treaty is about protecting Britain's ability to defend itself and its allies. Diego Garcia is not just a piece of land in the Indian ocean, but the backbone of our joint operations with the United States and a linchpin of the UK's ability to project power, to deter threats and to ensure security in an increasingly unstable world. All our closest allies—the US, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and India—support this deal. NATO supports this deal. They understand what Diego Garcia represents: unmatched strategic certainty. Will the Secretary of State please give us more information about how we will be protecting the area around the islands?

John Healey: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Our close allies take a close interest, and they can see that this treaty is the best way of securing—for the UK, for the US and for themselves—a vital base on which we can help both to project military power and to reinforce regional security. My hon. Friend will see the 24 nautical mile buffer zone—an exclusion zone, if you like—that allows us to control the seas and the air. We would not be able to do that, increasingly, without the deal. She will see that sweep and an effective veto on any developments across the archipelago to ranges of at least 100 nautical miles. She will also see the value of a deal that guarantees our full operational sovereignty and therefore prevents any undermining of our ability to use the electromagnetic spectrum. As I said in my statement, that is so crucial to the unique capabilities that this base and its operations offer to this country and to the United States.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): When a former Foreign Secretary asks a sitting Defence Secretary for a direct answer as to which court would be able to make a binding judgment against us on this matter, he is entitled to a direct answer, so will the Secretary of State now give that direct answer?

John Healey: There are a range of international legal challenges and rulings against us. The most proximate, and the most potentially serious, is the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): My right hon. Friend has set out that this deal, which is essential for our national security, will cost less than a quarter of 1% of our national defence budget. Will he also confirm that this deal costs far less than other base deals, such as France's deal with Djibouti, yet offers vastly superior strategic scale and value?

John Healey: I can indeed, and my right hon. Friend is right: this deal will cost less than 0.2% of the defence budget. It compares very favourably with the €85 million that the French paid for their Djibouti base, which by the way is right next to a Chinese base. Diego Garcia is 15 times bigger than the French base in Djibouti and has an exclusion zone around it, which helps to protect our operations and the intelligence services that we have there. My right hon. Friend is right: this is a good investment for the future national security of this country.

Dr Al Pinkerton (Surrey Heath) (LD): This morning, I was at the High Court to listen to the judgment. I was with a very large group of Chagossians, who told me

that they feel betrayed. They also feel that the United Kingdom is acting in exactly the same high-handed, colonial-like manner that led to their dislocation and displacement from the islands in the 1960s. Can those on the Government Front Bench assure us all that when this deal comes back to the House, we are not going to be asked to vote for a new round of colonial practice that will further disadvantage the Chagossians?

John Healey: Of course we are not going to ask that. We deeply regret the way that the Chagossians were removed from the islands. We have expressed that sentiment as a new Government since July. We have made provisions in the treaty to support the Chagossian communities, but the hon. Gentleman will recognise that there is a wide range of views within the Chagossian communities and groups. Some of them see the value of this deal, and some of them support it. The important fact for us is that the legal challenge in the High Court demonstrates some of the legal difficulties that would continue to bedevil the operation of this base without the deal that our Prime Minister has signed today.

Dame Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): I commend my right hon. Friend for explaining—in as much detail as he is able on the Floor of the House—why he believes that this is a necessary act, and I trust him to have the security of the nation as his top priority. However, elements of the treaty cannot be talked about, even at the point when this House may vote on it. There is only one Member of this House who has access to all areas of Government spending: the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, the hon. Member for North Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown). Does my right hon. Friend agree that some areas need deeper scrutiny, and will he support our plan to have a scrutiny Committee that can examine sensitive issues, including this one?

John Healey: My hon. Friend knows that I have had discussions with her and the hon. Member for North Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) about the capability of the House of Commons to scrutinise and hold to account the Government—of whatever party—in areas of necessarily highly secret and confidential activity. She knows that I have a different view about how to deal with that challenge, but deal with it we must.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): The Secretary of State has cited UNCLOS—under pressure from my right hon. Friends the Members for Braintree (Sir James Cleverly) and for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis)—as the reason for this expensive cave-in. I am familiar with UNCLOS, and although I am a layman and so is the Secretary of State, could he explain in lay terms which parts of UNCLOS are responsible for what has happened, because it is not clear to me and it will not be clear to my constituents and to his, who will be paying the bill for this?

John Healey: The judgments of any international tribunal or court do not necessarily just apply to the UK; they are taken by other agencies, other organisations and other nations. In particular, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Prime Minister spelt out this afternoon, if there is uncertainty or a binding finding against the UK about the sovereignty of Diego Garcia, our ability to protect, in particular and most immediately, the

[John Healey]

electromagnetic spectrum on which our sensors, radars, communications and intelligence functions depend is compromised. That is the security assessment and that is the military view. That is why we have taken this step, and recognised that the best and only way of safeguarding the operational sovereignty—the total control and protection—of the Diego Garcia island base for the future is the deal we have struck this afternoon.

Josh Fenton-Glynn (Calder Valley) (Lab): I am alarmed by the passion of Conservative Members for the Chagos islands—

James Cartlidge: Because we care about them.

Josh Fenton-Glynn: Will the hon. Member let me finish? I have on a number of occasions intervened on Conservative Members to ask them to name the Chagos islands, and they have been unable to tell me that there is Diego Garcia, Peros Banhos, the Salomon islands, the Egmont islands—

Sir James Cleverly: Well, you had to write them down.

Josh Fenton-Glynn: I do not share the right hon. Member's passion.

Similarly, the Leader of the Opposition first tweeted about the Chagos islands in October 2024. That was five years after the ICJ ruling and two years after negotiations started. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Conservatives' new-found passion for the Chagos islands perhaps owes more to political opportunism than to any deeply held conviction?

John Healey: I do, indeed, and I have to say that I am relieved my hon. Friend has not asked me to name all 50-plus islands in the archipelago.

Richard Tice (Boston and Skegness) (Reform): The Mauritians have never ever owned the Chagos islands. When they gained independence from the United Kingdom in the 1960s, the UK paid them millions of pounds to cede any future claims over the sovereignty of the Chagos islands. The Defence Secretary has confirmed the strategic importance of the Chagos islands, and we all agree on that, but the truth is that this is the worst ever deal in history by this country. Over 100 years we are paying, with inflation, over £40 billion to give away a strategically important security asset. The truth is, and I confirm it now, that when Reform wins the next general election, we will rip up this deal—tear it up—and stop all future payments. It is a disgrace.

John Healey: That is total rubbish—not just the hon. Member's figures, but his assertion. Our closest ally, which has taken the closest look at the deal we have negotiated, sees this as the way we can secure the joint operations and the control of this base. Through this deal, we can jointly guarantee that for the next century and beyond. We have gone over the cost, and it is less than 0.2% of the defence budget. For this, we get the security of being able to continue operating an intelligence and defence base doing activities and operations that we simply could not do anywhere else. This is a good investment for Britain, and Britain is safer today because of the deal we have struck.

Louise Jones (North East Derbyshire) (Lab): The Conservative party had a terrible record on defence, with abject failure after abject failure. I think we have seen this afternoon that Conservative Members have not learnt from those lessons. Does the Secretary of State agree that in backing this deal, with support from the US, NATO, Five Eyes and some of our biggest allies in the Indo-Pacific region such as India and Australia, the Labour party is showing that it cares seriously about national security, will put the national interest first and, unlike the party opposite, will not make meaningless gestures to put our own party first?

John Healey: I do indeed. This is a base that has saved British lives for over 50 years. It has saved the lives of people at home in this country, because it has been the launchpad from which we have defeated terrorist attacks. It has also been the launchpad for protecting and saving the lives of British forces when they have been deployed to war zones around the world. This deal, which we signed today, means we can continue to exercise the full control necessary to continue to do that for the century to come.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): May I, in all candour, suggest to the Government that having now introduced this new element—the UN convention on the law of the sea and, I presume, the associated International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea—as the decisive factor that might have created a binding ruling, it really is incumbent on the Government to set out in a statement exactly how it would have affected the electromagnetic spectrum or our ability to use it in Diego—[*Interruption.*] The Foreign Secretary might just calm down for a minute. I just want a proper explanation.

I make this forecast. To cut personal independence payments and winter fuel allowances to pay billions of pounds for something that was already British sovereign territory—how is the Secretary of State going to explain that on the doorstep to all his party's voters? I promise you, we will make sure that they never hear the end of it.

John Healey: The hon. Gentleman might just like to remember this and make the comparison: the total cost over the 99 years of the deal we have struck to protect this space and British control over it is less than the value of the personal protective equipment that was unusable and that was burned because the last Government bought it in the first year of the covid pandemic.

Gordon McKee (Glasgow South) (Lab): The US supports this deal. NATO supports this deal. India supports this deal. Does the Secretary of State share my surprise that Opposition Members seem so intent on ignoring our allies?

John Healey: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point very succinctly. I hope this House has heard it and I hope the Conservative party listens to it.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman knows the regard I have for him and for the Foreign Secretary. He knows, too, of my interest and involvement in national security matters. There is no debate across the House about the

salience of Diego Garcia. It is absolutely critical to our national interest. The debate is about the legal advice. Will he, in the interests of scrutiny, provide, where it does not compromise national security, all the information and advice given to him and previous Ministers on the subject of that legal advice? We suspect that that advice could have been challenged, and I suspect that many previous holders of his office and others will have received similar, if not the same, legal advice and resisted it.

John Healey: This House will have plenty of opportunity to test and debate these issues, but the right hon. Gentleman might start by asking those of his right hon. Friends who were in government at the time. They started negotiations and judged at the time that negotiations on the deal were necessary to safeguard the future of Diego Garcia and the full operational control of the base.

Mr Bayo Alaba (Southend East and Rochford) (Lab): I commend the Secretary of State for his calm and measured approach to this really serious topic. Will he expand on the safeguards in the deal, in particular the 24-mile nautical exclusion or buffer zone and the ban on foreign military presence, which guarantee full UK command of the base? I remind Opposition colleagues that it is important to lead and not follow, and to use sensible, measured language, not charged mistruths.

John Healey: The provisions of the treaty, as my hon. Friend will see from the full text, guarantee the rights of the UK in the 24-nautical mile zone immediately around the islands and in the airspace above to patrol and control that airspace. If we saw a succession of legal judgments that started to establish a Mauritian claim to sovereignty, that would undermine and weaken our ability to conduct those patrols, control the skies and protect the base.

Neil O'Brien (Harborough, Oadby and Wigston) (Con): Under this deal, we will be paying billions of pounds for the privilege of having our own territory taken away from us. The Secretary of State talks about the threat to the base as if Mauritius, a country with no navy, is about to steam in or pick a fight with the United States. That is implausible. The whole House will have heard the Secretary of State trying to dodge the question from the former Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Sir James Cleverly), and, on being pressed, scrambling around for a legal argument and coming up with something totally novel and hazy. The truth is that our constituents are going to be paying billions so that the Prime Minister can bask in the warm glow of approval from his fellow human rights lawyers.

John Healey: Absolute rubbish. It is £3.4 billion over 99 years, which is less than 0.2% of the annual defence budget. This is a good investment for a unique capability that has played an essential role in defeating terrorism and breaking up terrorist groups, deploying British forces, protecting our trade routes and monitoring nuclear threats around the globe. This is an essential base. We run it jointly with the US, which is full square behind us—and I hope the hon. Gentleman's party will be the same.

Jim Dickson (Dartford) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for setting out very clearly why this is the right thing to do for the UK. Could he share with the House

any threat assessments that he has, indicating that without guaranteed access to Diego Garcia—and “guaranteed” is the key word—China and other countries could attempt to expand their regional military presence, building installations close to the base?

John Healey: Of course China wants to try to move in on the Chagos archipelago; of course it wants to try to set up operations or activities that would allow it to interfere or monitor what we do from the base. This deal helps to protect the base and helps to prevent that from happening.

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland and Fakenham) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker—I mean it this time. The Secretary of State has asserted from the Dispatch Box that it is the risk of an UNCLOS judgment that is requiring this capitulation of sovereignty. Can he therefore answer this specific question: is he aware of a single case that is live under UNCLOS at the moment against the United Kingdom?

John Healey: Within a few weeks, we expect rulings that will start to weaken our ability to control and maintain our full operational sovereignty over Diego Garcia; within a few years, we expect that to be at a point where it compromises our ability to continue the operations that are so essential to protecting people at home, as well as protecting our forces when they deploy around the world.

Mike Tapp (Dover and Deal) (Lab): National security decisions and debate should be led by facts, not political point scoring, as we have seen today. Does the Secretary of State agree that had the Conservatives performed some sort of miracle and stayed in government at the election, they too would have signed this deal, and we would have supported that in the interests of national security?

John Healey: I do not want to speak for the Conservatives, but, clearly, they were trying to negotiate a deal. They had had 11 rounds of negotiations. Any Government elected in July would have been faced with the challenge of how to secure this space for the long term. It was clear that that was their direction, and that they had conceded that principle in government. I regret the fact that they are not consistent in pursuing that principle, recognising the way that we have strengthened the deal and done the deal that they were unable to secure.

James McMurdock (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Reform): I am concerned about the influence of foreign nations levied through the criminal courts. If it is not too vague, I should like to read out a very brief quote:

“A society grows great when old men plant trees in whose shade they shall never sit.”

Given that this land was always going to be ours and now it will be ours for only 99 more years, who will benefit from that shade in a century?

John Healey: The British people and British forces will benefit from that shade. They will continue to benefit from that shade beyond the 99 years if we choose as a nation at that point to exercise our first refusal to extend the deal for another 40 years. That was a provision that was not in the deal that the Conservatives

[John Healey]

negotiated. It is a provision that extends our ability to control this space for the long term, for our national security.

Deirdre Costigan (Ealing Southall) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. As the Prime Minister confirmed earlier today, the cost of this deal is slightly less than the average annual cost of just one aircraft carrier without the aircraft. Does the Secretary of State agree that this is a price well worth paying to ensure our country's safety and security?

John Healey: It is definitely a good investment for this country. It helps protect our security at home. It helps strengthen our forces abroad. It helps reinforce that very special security relationship that we have with our closest ally, the United States.

Ben Obese-Jecty (Huntingdon) (Con): I hope the Defence Secretary is fully across the detail here. Annex 1, paragraph 3, sub-paragraph c states:

“Mauritius and the United Kingdom shall jointly decide upon the management and use of the electromagnetic spectrum”

in the Chagos Archipelago beyond Diego Garcia. Given that Diego Garcia shall be represented by Mauritius at the International Telecommunication Union—as per Letter No.1 on 22 May 2025—how will control and management of the electromagnetic spectrum be reflected as per annex 1, paragraph 1, sub-paragraph b, clause iv? And given the threat posed by Chinese influence in the Indo-Pacific and the level of Chinese development finance investment in Mauritius, what assessment have the Government made of future lack of co-operation from Mauritius on access to said electromagnetic spectrum?

John Healey: I will have a word with my right hon. Friend, the Chief Whip, and just let him know that the hon. Gentleman has made an early bid for membership of the Bill Committee.

Gregor Poynton (Livingston) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State agree that it is telling that one of the many Tory Prime Ministers that we had over their 14 years in Government, the right hon. Member for Richmond and Northallerton (Rishi Sunak), said in 2023 that he wanted to conclude a deal soon. Is it not the case that the bluster and the red faces that we have seen from the Conservative party today is nothing more than the worst type of political hypocrisy?

John Healey: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend who has a quote that I have not managed to get, and I will ask him to pass it on to me. He makes a very powerful point to this House and to the Conservative party, a number of whom served under the right hon. Gentleman who was Prime Minister at the time.

Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst (Solihull West and Shirley) (Con): The Government's position appears to be predicated on a hypothetical judgment to a hypothetical claim. In this hypothetical scenario, why would the Government not simply appeal?

John Healey: The jeopardy and the uncertainty over this space is putting at risk security operations that are essential to us and our allies. We are not prepared to

take that risk with national security. We have done a deal in order to secure for the long term the guaranteed full operational continuing control of Diego Garcia and that military base.

Mark Ferguson (Gateshead Central and Whickham) (Lab): America backs the deal. Canada backs the deal. Australia backs the deal. New Zealand backs the deal. Our relationship with the Five Eyes countries is our most crucial intelligence relationship, so does the Secretary of State agree that it would have been a dereliction of duty to our country and those four countries to have failed to do this deal?

John Healey: Well said, and I would add that India supports the deal. Those countries, which are our staunchest allies, are our strongest supporters on this deal. The countries that are our adversaries, that do us harm and that want to be able to move into the part of the world of this archipelago do not want us to have the base and do not want the deal. So there is a question: whose side of the argument are you on?

Dr Luke Evans (Hinckley and Bosworth) (Con): I respect the expertise of the Defence Secretary, so I hope he can help me here. The ICJ said that it was a non-binding decision. The International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea is the court that he is worried about. The country will wonder why he would not challenge this in the court, stand by it, and see what that process would look like. If he was worried he would lose, will he publish the documentation that shows why he was advised that he would lose, so that the country can understand why he is not making that challenge? If he failed in that challenge, he could appeal as well. To the public it looks like we are just giving into the deal without even using the courts that we could legally use.

John Healey: The Chief Whip has a second volunteer for the Committee stage of this legislation! There is an accumulation of legal challenge, and there is a serious risk of legal rulings. This is not just a matter of international law; it is about the direct impact on the operations of this base that is essential to our national security. The risk that this poses puts the future operation of the base in jeopardy, and no responsible Government can stand by and simply say, “We cannot act”. No action is not an option, and that is why we struck the deal and signed the treaty today.

PETITION

Location of the Torbay and South Devon NHS out-of-hours Primary Percutaneous Coronary Intervention Services

5.57 pm

Caroline Voaden (South Devon) (LD): I rise to present a petition on behalf of the residents of South Devon concerning the proposed temporary co-location of the Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation trust's out-of-hours primary percutaneous coronary intervention services at the Royal Devon and Exeter hospital. This change would significantly increase travel times for patients suffering life-threatening cardiac emergencies, causing deep concern in the community. Many constituents have contacted me fearing delays to urgent care. Quick access to treatment is critical in these situations, and this proposal could endanger lives by reducing access.

The petitioners therefore request that “the House of Commons urges the Government to ensure NHS Devon reconsider the proposed co-location and to ensure that all PPCI services, including out-of-hours, remain accessible within the local area.”

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that the proposed temporary co-location of the Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust’s out-of-hours Primary Percutaneous Coronary Intervention (PPCI) services at the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital will lead to increased travel times and potential delays in emergency cardiac treatment for residents in South Devon; and further declares that the protection of timely, local access to urgent cardiac care is essential.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to ensure NHS Devon reconsider the proposed co-location and to ensure that all PPCI services, including out-of-hours, remain accessible within the local area.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P003075]

A66 Northern Trans-Pennine Project

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

5.58 pm

Markus Campbell-Savours (Penrith and Solway) (Lab): It is a pleasure and a privilege to have secured the last Adjournment debate before recess, especially on an issue that is of great importance to my constituents, Cumbria and the wider region. I start with an apology to the Minister. Recess is starting and half our colleagues have already set off to their constituencies, and I have dragged her in for the graveyard shift. I am sorry, but it is appreciated.

We are rapidly approaching completion of the spending review. Having spent months communicating with officials in National Highways, and along with my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Sam Rushworth) with Ministers in the Department for Transport and the Treasury, I view this as my last chance to help get the project over the line.

In preparation for what is my first Adjournment debate, I noted the last time that a politician with my surname spoke in a pre-recess Adjournment debate. It was 24 years ago, and the then Speaker—perhaps setting an unusual precedent—joined in the debate. If you want to say some supportive words, Mr Speaker, I am sure that my constituents would be very pleased—although, I admit that the extent to which Speaker Martin stuck to the topic of the debate in 2001 is debatable.

The A66 northern trans-Pennine project is the north of England’s largest road project and, at a cost of £1.5 billion, it should come as no surprise to anyone that the new Government are reviewing the business case. I will set out the importance of the project for my constituents and why it must go ahead.

I know that the Minister will not preannounce from the Dispatch Box the outcome of the spending review, but I hope that she will confirm that the A66 project is in the running and has not been shelved, as was claimed by a Conservative politician on BBC television last week. That politician oversaw and left a council on the brink of bankruptcy, and the irony of them now pontificating on the nation’s finances is frankly bizarre.

I take the financial position inherited from the last Government very seriously, and I applaud the Government’s mission of securing sustained growth. The important thing for those of us in the rural north is that we see our fair share of that growth and the investment that enables it. The last decade has given us reasons to worry. The Institute for Public Policy Research North has produced figures showing that between 2010 and 2020, the north missed out on £86 billion in transport investment compared with London—a lost decade that only leaves us weaker at a time when we need growth. Last year the same think-tank calculated that total public spending on transport projects in 2023-24 was £1,321 per person in London, which is more than double the £615 per person spent on the north.

I therefore welcome the Government’s renewed focus on the north and the recent announcements of higher investment in the north of England this year as part of Labour’s plan for change. Indeed, the Prime Minister has indicated that the Government will be spending

[Markus Campbell-Savours]

more than double the money per head on local transport in the north than in the south this year. But I still remember the last Government's integrated rail plan for the north, which made not one mention of Cumbria.

I see this project as a key enabler for delivering growth in my region. The project will see the upgrade of approximately 50 miles of the A66 between the M6 at Penrith and the A1(M) at Scotch Corner, converting single carriageway sections into dual carriageways and improving countless junctions along the route.

I feel obliged to offer some expectation management to my constituents, as not one mile of the road will be dualled in the Penrith and Solway constituency. The major benefits for the residents of Penrith will be the upgrades to the junction 40 of the M6 and the Kemplay roundabout. I cannot count the number of times I have sat in traffic on those junctions, alongside local residents fighting through the commercial and tourist traffic, just trying to go about their daily business, with tourists stuck just at the beginning or end of their holiday in the Lake District national park or north Pennines, and the heavy goods vehicle drivers anxiously thinking about their tachographs. Perhaps they are thinking about dinner and getting home to their families, as I am sure some hon. Members are now. Some are simply travelling down the M6, possibly not even conscious that a bottleneck on an adjacent A road is the cause of their delayed journey.

The planned underpass just outside Penrith will separate the east-west A66 traffic from the north-south flow. That will reduce traffic volumes by 55% and provide major benefits for local people, including pedestrians and cyclists, improving access to Penrith itself and the facilities and businesses around the roundabout. It will reduce delays and queues at the M6 junction 40 and will ensure that visitors have a much better start to their holidays, whether they are travelling by car or taking advantage of the local active travel network.

There will be environmental benefits and economic benefits. We would feel as if the Government had prioritised the rural north, so often neglected by central Government. This project will improve connections between Cumbria, North Yorkshire, the Tees Valley, Tyne and Wear, and beyond. It is the most direct route between the central belt of Scotland and the eastern side of England. It connects cities such as Glasgow and Edinburgh with Leeds, Sheffield and Norwich, if those journeys are made by road.

Safety has been a huge concern along the route and there have been a number of avoidable deaths over the last few years. The junctions of particular concern are in the Richmond and Northallerton and the Westmorland and Lonsdale constituencies, and I know that the hon. Members representing those areas have raised their concerns with Ministers. However, the wider route is regularly used by my constituents and I am acutely aware of the risks that stretches of the road present.

Adjacent to the Kemplay roundabout are the Cumbria fire and police headquarters, with operational elements at both. In the summer, it can take 45 minutes for non-emergency vehicles to travel 100 metres. For our emergency services, that congestion presents a significant issue, and I know that Dave Allen, Cumbria's police,

fire and crime commissioner, fully supports the project not only to improve emergency vehicle access, but to make the A66 safer.

After my election in July, I met National Highways to discuss the scheme, knowing that this Government faced difficult choices. I wanted reassurance that the business case was up to date and would withstand scrutiny. The primary economic benefits come from travel time savings that will be realised by business users. The A66 is an important route for freight traffic, with HGVs comprising a quarter of the vehicles on the route, and the fact that that is more than double the national average highlights the importance of the route for business. The regular closures on the existing route present significant disruption for business-to-business transactions, with many of my constituency businesses directly affected.

During discussions with National Highways, it became apparent that existing Treasury Green Book guidance prevents a distinction being made in the economic case between general road users and business vehicles. That means that the cost-benefit ratio does not distinguish between an individual making a social trip in a car and an HGV delivering vital components to a factory. For a road project so important to business, that is a disaster.

I understand that new guidance is on the way, but not in time for it to be used to appraise this project in this spending review. That limits the ability for the economic case to tell the true story, so efforts have been put in to reflect that within the strategic case. However, that still leaves me uncomfortable that the true benefits of the scheme are not fully articulated. As frustrated as I am, the economic case as it stands still predicts hundreds of millions of pounds of benefits, primarily through cost efficiency and saving to business, and even additional tax revenue through employment.

The project is vital for Cumbria. It will reduce road traffic accidents and deaths on the single-carriage section of the route. It will improve strategic regional and national connectivity, particularly for hauliers—heavy goods vehicles, which account for a quarter of all traffic on the road, are double the national average. It will reduce delays and queues during busy periods and improve the performance of key junctions such as the A66/A6 junction and M6 junction 40. It might even occasionally stop me missing the train. I appeal to Ministers to support this project.

Mr Speaker: Let us come to Minister Greenwood, even though I have been tempted to say that I hope it is not another 22 years before we discuss this again with a Campbell-Savours.

6.8 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Lilian Greenwood): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and Solway (Markus Campbell-Savours) on securing today's debate on the A66 northern trans-Pennine project, and I thank him for his powerful arguments. It has been some time since I travelled on the A66, which tells me that it is time for a trip to the Lake district sometime soon—although I will be rather wary now about how much time to allow for that journey.

My hon. Friend has been an incredibly determined campaigner for this project, which runs through part of his constituency. As he acknowledged, we have already

met to discuss the importance of the project to the region, and indeed its wider national significance. He has written to me to reiterate its value to business users, including freight, and highlighted the need to address safety concerns, which I take very seriously, as does the Secretary of State.

Although the Chamber is rather empty this evening, I am pleased to take the opportunity to thank other right hon. and hon. Members with constituencies along the route, including my hon. Friends the Members for Bishop Auckland (Sam Rushworth) and for Carlisle (Ms Minns), for their correspondence and for our meetings to discuss their aspirations for the A66. I can assure my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and Solway and others that they have convinced Ministers of the overwhelming local support for this important project.

Rebuilding Britain means modernising our transport infrastructure. This Government will maintain and renew our road network to ensure that it serves all users, remains safe and tackles congestion. However, as my hon. Friend acknowledged, the financial inheritance that this Government received is extremely challenging. Communities up and down the country have been given hope for new transport infrastructure with no plans and no funds to deliver them. We will not repeat that mistake.

This Government will rebuild our economic foundations while restoring transparency and public trust. That is why on 30 July 2024 the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a multi-year spending review. But let me be absolutely clear: the A66 project is being considered as part of the second phase, which will conclude on 11 June. A decision on the A66 cannot be taken separately from that process, and whatever has been claimed by other local politicians, I can assure my hon. Friend that the project has not been shelved.

The spending review will support the development of our new long-term strategy for transport, developing a modern and integrated network with people at its heart. Within the north of England, the A66 link between the M6 at Penrith and the A1(M) at Scotch Corner is a key artery in our strategic road network, providing a vital east-west connection across the Pennines. It links ports on the east coast of England with north-west England, southern Scotland and ferry links to Northern Ireland. The nearest alternative east-west motorway is the M62, which is much further south, and, looking northwards, the M8 in Scotland. Today the A66 between the M6 and the A1(M) is approximately 50 miles long and a mixture of single and dual carriageways. Approximately half of the route has already been dualled, leaving six sections of single carriageway to be upgraded.

National Highways notes that collision rates on the single carriageway sections tend to be higher than on the dualled sections and, tragically, a number of lives have been lost on the route in recent years. More than 22% of the vehicles on the route are goods vehicles, which is approximately twice the average proportion of such vehicles on the strategic road network as a whole. As my hon. Friend knows, the A66 is a vital link for people living along the route, enabling them to reach

shops, services and employment in nearby towns. For many living along the route, there is no alternative rail connection.

Upgrading the trans-Pennine A66 would enable traffic to flow more quickly. The scheme would make the A66 a more viable option for freight operators as they move goods across the country, aiding economic growth. As my hon. Friend noted, the economic case for the scheme could be improved if higher values for the freight value of time were included in the transport analysis guidance. We aim to do that in the future, but I am pleased to be able to assure him that the economic assessment of this project for spending review deliberations included a sensitivity test to show the impacts of using higher values for freight value of time. Dualled the remaining sections would make the route more resilient when incidents occur, as most collisions would be confined to one carriageway, allowing traffic to pass on the other—although we would of course prefer that there were no collisions at all.

My final point on the A66 northern trans-Pennine project is that National Highways estimates that the scheme could support the building of thousands of houses and the creation of thousands of jobs as part of growth deals and local plans along the route. It could also support Carlisle's planned St Cuthbert's garden village—an ambitious proposal to provide 10,000 new homes and create economic opportunities.

Until the conclusion of the spending review, the interim settlement is the framework for the £4.8 billion investment for National Highways for the current financial year. The investment includes more than £3 billion for capital enhancements, including the A66 northern trans-Pennine scheme. This is a one-year settlement while we prepare to return to the road investment strategy settlements in a sustainable way.

The A66 northern trans-Pennine project is being considered alongside other future road projects as part of the spending review. Until that concludes, the Department is not in a position to make a judgment on individual schemes, but I can assure my hon. Friend that my Department is committed to putting transport at the heart of this mission-driven Government. I am determined to ensure that we build the transport infrastructure needed to drive economic growth and opportunity in every part of the country, including the rural north.

I congratulate my hon. Friend again on securing this debate, and thank him for the important contribution he has made. I hope that he is reassured that the Department fully appreciates the proposal's importance to his constituents, to people in other constituencies along the route and to the wider country, and that the scheme is being considered carefully. I thank him again for this debate.

Question put and agreed to.

6.16 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 22 May 2025

[ESTHER McVEY *in the Chair*]

BACKBENCH BUSINESS

EU-UK Summit

1.30 pm

Ms Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the EU-UK summit.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms McVey, for a debate on such an important issue. Let me start with what I believe is a truism in British politics: we can learn a lot from Disney and the films of our childhood. In this debate, the words of Elsa from “Frozen” are particularly apposite for those people who are still obsessed with the debates of 2016 and 2019: it is time to let it go. I suspect that many Members across the House would agree with that, because 2016 was a long time ago, and time has moved on.

It was 2016 when President Trump was elected for the first time. It was the year that, sadly, David Bowie passed away. It really is that long ago. Russia was involved in a war in the Donbas, but no further. TikTok did not even exist—that was not until 2019, which is also now a very long time ago and was when we finally actually left the European Union with the deal struck under the trade and co-operation agreement. It was also, of course, the year of “Frozen II” and that famous song “Into the Unknown”, and it was the year that Greggs gave us a vegan sausage roll, Notre-Dame burned down, Boris Johnson was elected as Prime Minister and “Game of Thrones” finally finished—not the Conservative leadership challenges, but the television series.

My point is that so much has happened in our history since the tired old debates were first rehearsed. Let us not do that today, because we have left the European Union. I stand here as chair of the Labour Movement for Europe, seeking not to prosecute an argument to rejoin but to look at the summit and the deal that was struck on Monday. Frankly, I do not believe this country has time to engage in the discussion around rejoining. We need a salvage operation, and I see Monday’s deal as the start of that operation to salvage a future following the impact of Brexit.

Even if we disagree on that salvage operation, I hope we can convince the Minister that there needs to be more scrutiny of our relationship with Europe. We might disagree about the direction of travel, but we are bound together by a recognition that taking back control means that this place needs to have discussions about the deals and the opportunities and what they mean for our constituents. Perhaps, like Banquo’s ghost, the former Member for Stone still lives with us; but actually, we can all show today that were we to have European scrutiny formats in the House, it would be a positive and constructive contribution to the deal-making process.

That is what is on offer today: the opportunity to take us forward, not back. We can now see the impact of the Brexit deal on our constituents. Our constituents need us to ask questions about what will happen next—about the 1.8 million jobs that we are missing as a result of the deal that was struck, the stagnation in the growth of exports and the 16,000 businesses that gave up trading as a direct result of the “benefit” of Brexit, which was paperwork.

The EU is our biggest trading partner: it accounts for 41% of our exports and 51% of our imports. In comparison, the US accounts for just 22% of our exports and 13% of our imports. Clearly, this is a fundamental relationship for the future of British business and British jobs. The summit on Monday was an opportunity not just to look at the trade and co-operation agreement—what was written into the very details of the deal, five years on—but to do something that the public want. Two thirds of the public tell us that Brexit has been detrimental to the cost of living, 65% say it has had a negative impact on our economy, 64% think it has been bad for British business, and 60% think that a closer relationship with Europe is in our interests.

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Highgate) (Lab): My hon. Friend will know my views on Brexit—I represent a constituency in which 87% of people voted to remain and I represent 22,000 EU nationals, who are part of the fabric of our community—but I want to ask her about young people, who she will probably mention at some point. The statistics show that there has been a 30% drop in the number of schoolchildren going to Europe on school trips, and that disadvantaged areas have been hit the hardest—

Esther McVey (in the Chair): Order. I remind Members that an intervention is an intervention and not a small speech. Others have put in to speak, so can we get to the question please?

Tulip Siddiq: The UK is not part of the list of travellers scheme, which is why it is so hard for schoolchildren to go on trips. Does my hon. Friend agree that we should have better access to Europe, like we had when we were growing up?

Ms Creasy: As somebody who still remembers a powerful school trip to Ypres to look at the first world war sites, I know that the dramatic decline in school trips to Europe is harming our children’s education. I am sure the Minister will want to refer to that.

The public are living in the world we are in now, which is why they want us to look at the deal. They recognise that Europe now has the highest employment rate since 2005, whereas elsewhere the second-term Trump Administration have brought tariffs and turmoil, just 121 days in; Putin has now invaded Ukraine itself; there is a horrific conflict in the middle east; and China and Iran now figure in our national security concerns, too. And as ever, technology overruns us all. There are now 159 million TikTok users in Europe, and it is predicted that within three years some 15% of our day-to-day decisions will be made by artificial intelligence. All of us will probably become redundant; I shall leave it to Conservative Members to decide whether that is a good or bad thing. Everybody else has moved on. It is time that we in this House do, too.

[*Ms Creasy*]

In that spirit, let me fail to heed my own words and turn to perhaps one of the most damaging aspects of the Brexit debate. I welcome the Minister's hard work and the deal that has been struck as a testament to the ambitions of the previous Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, and the concept of cakeism. It is truly incredible to see that, far from it being impossible to be pro cake and pro eating it, the new bespoke deal delivers for the UK in many ways that many people had suggested were not possible.

I put on the record my support for the formal security and defence partnership, with the promise of exploring participation in a new defence fund while retaining our red line about not participating in the single market. I will, of course, take an intervention from any Conservative Member who wishes to apologise for the deliberate refusal of the previous Government to put anything about foreign policy or defence co-operation into the previous deal—a decision that has left us uniquely exposed.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): As the Government say, NATO is the cornerstone of our defence, and that is how we co-operate with our European partners on defence. EU defence is an add-on that has been in the minds and the ether of the EU since the Maastricht treaty, but it has never come to anything substantial.

Ms Creasy: I am sure the hon. Gentleman will want to tell that to his constituents. Of course NATO is vital, but we are dealing with a new world. They see the aggression of President Putin and the need to stand up to address the situation in Gaza. They see the leadership being shown by our European colleagues and they wish us to be not playground generals, but grown-ups. That is exactly what the defence deal will mean.

I also welcome the proposals for co-operation on foreign aid, because that is crucial not only to tackling poverty around the world but to preventing conflict. Conflict is driving many to flee persecution, proving how aid is often our best defence against the small boats, rather than the bluster of some Conservative Members.

There has been a resolution to the risk of divergency in our carbon emissions trading schemes, which would have been a death knell for the British steel industry. Energy UK estimates that will mean around £800 million per year of payments going to our Treasury rather than to the EU. It is worth remembering that 75% of our steel exports, worth £3 billion, go to the European Union. Frankly, if we want to save British Steel, we need to save its market, which is what the resolution will do.

The talks will allow us to use e-gates at the borders. Queuing might be a national pastime, but it is not a national sport that any of us enjoy. There will be co-operation with Europol and data sharing on fingerprints, DNA and criminal records. Again, I suspect that in future years many of us will realise how criminal it was that that was not part of the original deal, which made it easier for the people who wish to do harm to our constituents to evade justice by crossing the border.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Creasy: I am sure the right hon. Gentleman is going to apologise to the British public for such an oversight.

Sir John Hayes: Someone once said that the general rule in politics is never to apologise and never to explain, and I am certainly not going to break that rule now. The truth is that the hon. Lady is arguing for co-operation, and we all affirm that. Britain has co-operated with its neighbours, and with countries more widely, over the whole of our history. We began co-operating with Portugal under Edward III, as the Minister will no doubt confirm and speak about in some detail. It is not about co-operation; it is about governance. There is a fundamental difference between collaboration and co-operation, and government from abroad.

Ms Creasy: I am always pleased to see the right hon. Gentleman admit that he is in fact a rule taker, not a rule maker. It is noticeable that the co-operation that his Government did not pursue meant that we did not have access to EU databases such as Eurodac and the Schengen information system, which are critical to stopping cross-border crime and addressing illegal migration. The right hon. Gentleman talks about the fact that we have always co-operated; it was a conscious decision by the previous Government not to do so, and it is a conscious decision by this Government to address that to help to make us safer. Time and again, his Government rejected important security measures just because they had the word "Europe" in the title. This Government will not make that mistake.

All that is before we even get to the basics that I believe most of our constituents will be interested in, including the sanitary and phytosanitary deal, which will see the removal of the vast majority of the paperwork and checks that were killing British food manufacturing and farmers, as well as causing inflation to costs here. Just the removal of export health certificates will save businesses up to £200 per consignment—a cost that was being passed on to our constituents. Again, I offer any Member who wants to defend the previous deal the opportunity to apologise to all those who work in logistics and have had to deal with Sevington, and the queues, delays and confusion about getting goods across the border.

I hope that the Minister will confirm that along with removal of the export health certificates, we are looking again at how we can remove the border operating model that the last Government brought in, which put further charges on top of the export health certificates and meant more delays in getting seeds to British farmers and flowers to market for our British businesses. All our constituents will welcome an SPS deal, because it is a way to tackle the extra £6.5 billion that we have had to spend on food and drink as a result of the charges, on top of other costs, because of Brexit.

Of course, we must talk about fish, because Britain's fishing industry has indeed been battered by Brexit. Boris Johnson promised both prodigious amounts of fish to be caught and EU vessels out of our waters. He delivered neither—fishcakes, indeed. The new deal will start to address the damage done to our fishing industries. It is an honest and fair deal to secure no further loss of access and the restoration of a market for fish. The SPS deal will cut the Brexit red tape that has caused a 29% drop in fish exports to the EU since 2019. I am sure that Members read the words of Ian Perkes, a fish merchant from Brixham, who said that he had a catch worth £80,000 written off because of a dispute over the temperature it had been stored at, and another consignment rejected because the Latin name for Dover sole was spelled wrong.

The deal done by the previous Government would have expired next year. If we want the investment that the industry desperately needs, the stability of terms matters. With 80% of our catch exported—70% of that to the EU—the new deal offers a chance for that stable future for our fishing communities. It is the same with energy. The deal done by the previous Government would have expired next year. As the Prime Minister pointed out, we have been aligning in practice since we left the EU; we just have not had any say in what happens. We have aligned because the standards are high, and because asking businesses to follow two different sets of rules is a recipe for more regulation, not less. Anybody who doubts that needs to look at the record of the last Government.

I stand here as a red against red tape, welcoming the ruthlessness with which the Government have acted. The previous Government tried to introduce the UK charter mark, which they then admitted would cost British business billions of pounds to implement. They then promptly stated that if businesses had met EU standards, they had met British ones too. What a mess! The Product Regulation and Metrology Bill is currently going through Parliament, and I am sure that the Minister will want to update us about what the deal will mean for the Bill and its terms of trade.

Conservative Members will decry the idea that we are rule takers. We were under them, but under this deal we will be consulted. We will have to abide by a dispute resolution system. Conservative Members act as if that is some new phenomenon—something we have never had as part of any other trade deal or, indeed, as part of their trade deal with the European Union. Thankfully, we can look to a non-mythical creature—but one that is certainly at risk—the puffin, to see what the reality might be, because last year the EU took the UK and Holyrood to court for banning sand eel fishing in the North sea and Scottish waters, as they wanted to protect that vital food source for the puffin. That is a noble aim that we can all get behind. The Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague had to decide whether the ban was a reasonable measure and, as a result, rule on our ability to determine fishing in our own seas. The courts upheld that decision to protect puffins and did so on the basis of the European Court of Justice—a process that the previous Government had signed up to already and that is part of the future negotiating deal.

Conservative Members talk of sovereignty as if it is some lump of plasticine that we can hand out, but the truth is that the new deal upholds our ability to make our case and to work with our neighbours within a reasonable framework. It is five years since we left, and we are still talking about and affected by the decisions that Europe makes. We are just not in the room where they are being made.

Dame Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): One of the things still not agreed is getting back into the Erasmus scheme. The Turing scheme, which was proposed instead, cut out youth groups, which has had a big effect in my constituency and around the country. Does my hon. Friend have any further information—I hope the Minister is listening—about the pace at which we might get back into the Erasmus scheme?

Ms Creasy: That is a fair and central question. I was coming to the point that we must ensure that our young people do not bear the brunt of the obsession with

isolation at the expense of influence. That is why it is right to negotiate a youth mobility scheme and to look at Erasmus. I urge the Government to ensure that the scheme prioritises apprenticeships and training opportunities, so that future generations can benefit in the way that many previous ones did by taking a job in Spain or Germany, as well as going there to study.

Ultimately, this is just the start of the process—I am very aware that “Frozen III” is due to come to cinemas soon. There will be much more detail to work out, and I am sure that the Minister will give us a timeline for when decisions will be made and when we will get that detail.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: Will the hon. Lady allow me to intervene?

Ms Creasy: I was about to conclude, but I will give way.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: I want to correct the hon. Lady on a matter of fact. The dispute about sand eel fishing was resolved, under the trade and co-operation agreement, by a bilateral arbitration panel. It had nothing to do with the European Court of Justice. It is a normal trading agreement. There was no involvement of the Court of Justice of the European Union. [*Interruption.*]

Ms Creasy: I can only urge the Member to go and look at the basis for the decision-making arbitration panel. I can hear the Minister champing at the bit to correct him as well.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: She has misled the Chamber!

Ms Creasy: “Misled” is a very serious term, and I hope the Member will withdraw it.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: Would the hon. Lady like to correct the record, because what she said was incorrect? We can prove it afterwards, and she will have to correct the record afterwards if that is the case.

Ms Creasy: I refer to the point about the protection of The Hague and where The Hague takes its judgments from. Ultimately, the decisions were made in the Court of Arbitration. It relies on those rulings. That is part of the process. I suspect the fact that the Member has decried that speaks to the need for us all to have more time to scrutinise and do justice to this issue. I suspect that when he makes his speech, he will continue to make the argument that we do not want to work with the European Court of Justice. The truth is that his Government brought in mechanisms that used the European Court of Justice as part of their framework—[*Interruption.*]

Esther McVey (in the Chair): Order. We must have just one person speaking at a time.

Ms Creasy: As the Minister says, the Windsor framework does as well. It shows where and how it works, and I think our constituents deserve the honesty of how the processes actually work and what the rulings are, rather than the fantasy. The puffins are very real; the puffery is not.

Finally, I have some questions I wish the Minister to address in his summing-up, because there are questions arising from the summit and the deal that has been struck. He will be aware that many of us have been

[Ms Creasy]

championing membership of the Pan-Euro-Mediterranean convention, because that is also about the rules of origin paperwork, which has been so harmful to our supply chains. Could he give us an update on whether there is an opportunity for us to be part of that mechanism again, to help British businesses with all that paperwork?

We also need to understand whether any progress has been made on the mutual recognition of conformity assessments and qualifications. We know the latter is in there, but the agreement matters for both. Finally, can he say a bit more about what will happen to our financial services, which have not been mentioned yet but are the primary driver of growth in our economy?

The new deal will help our constituents finally clear the fog of Brexit: the excessive paperwork, the partnerships that have been damaged and the personal opportunities lost. I welcome the Prime Minister's commitment to use these summits to keep working on our relationship with our neighbours. It is an honest recognition that we can fight many things in life, but geography is not one of them. Our constituents have paid the price of a bad deal, as have many of us—some Opposition Members literally bankrolled the Brexit campaign. It is no wonder the hon. Member for Clacton (Nigel Farage) is not with us today; if I were him, I would not want to be here to admit what a botched deal has been done.

Dame Meg Hillier: My hon. Friend has helpfully laid out a list of issues for the Minister. I would add: what do we do about touring musicians? It has had a really big impact that people are unable to tour in Europe because of the cost of cabotage, visas and so on, as well as the time delays. Does my hon. Friend agree that we should be pushing that issue as well?

Ms Creasy: I do. We may be making Elton John unhappy in the main Chamber, but I hope that in this Chamber the Minister can make him very happy with progress on touring musicians. We welcome the chance to work across the House to fix this through proper scrutiny, debate and discussion. The world is a very uncertain place right now, and our constituents will consider the new deal to offer hope for their future. As much as there is chaos and confusion, we can be crystal clear that both cake and change are possible.

Esther McVey (in the Chair): I remind Members that they should bob if they want to be called to speak, and that I will call the Front-Bench spokespeople just before 4 pm to allow Stella Creasy time to make a wind-up speech.

1.51 pm

Richard Tice (Boston and Skegness) (Reform): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms McVey.

This week will go down in parliamentary history as the week of the greatest surrender. It was bookended by the surrendering at the beginning of the week of the valuable freedoms won from the European Union through the joys of Brexit, and by today's surrendering of our valuable freehold of the Chagos islands, on which there will be a statement later. I think many members of the British public will be confused, because last week the Government were talking about the joys of the freedoms

of Brexit—to be able to do trade deals with India and with the United States—but, all of a sudden, this week they have gone back to the fog of surrender by handcuffing us very closely to the European Union.

There is a rule in business that has been deployed many times by parliamentarians: nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. Normally with the EU there is a last-minute drama, but this time was different, because little was agreed and everything was conceded. That is the bottom line. Little has actually been agreed, and everything has been conceded in an extraordinary act of surrender. To use another expression, it is the thin end of the wedge. The EU cannot believe its luck; it has opened the door and stuck the little wedge in there, and it has now got lots of things that it is still negotiating on. Every time, its representatives will say, "Well, you've got to agree this before we move on to the next one." We have heard it all before, yet the Government have learned nothing.

The first surrender is very dear to my constituents in Boston. My fishermen are raging and furious because they assumed that after the end of this first-phase deal, more quotas would be negotiated back to the UK, they would be beneficiaries and we would take back more control of our waters. Instead, it is all been conceded—for 12 years. It is gone.

Dame Meg Hillier: Are his fishermen not pleased that their export market, which was often turning fish back because of the massively complicated controls, is now open to them again? We were not eating that fish in the UK, and too often it was rotting.

Richard Tice: No, they have not mentioned that at all. Likewise, none of the major logistics firms in my constituency has even once mentioned the so-called delays at the border. This surrender of fishing is completely and utterly inexcusable, and nothing has been gained in return.

The second big surrender is that, apparently, we have negotiated theoretical access to some future EU defence fund, but we do not know how much access. We know that we will have to pay a whole load of cash, but we do not know how much—it all has to be negotiated in future. Little has been agreed and everything has been conceded.

Dame Meg Hillier: The UK has one of the best defence industries in the world. I am disappointed, as a fellow patriot, that the hon. Gentleman wants to downplay our ability to access that money and support UK businesses and jobs.

Richard Tice: I did not say anything about downplaying; I said that if the Government are going to agree a deal, they should agree the terms of the deal. They should not just say, "We'd like a bit of the action. Please tell us how much it'll cost us later," and have no idea how much of the action they will get. That is a terrible deal, and we all know that no deal is better than a bad deal.

The third surrender is about becoming a rule-taker. The hon. Member for Walthamstow (Ms Creasy) referred to agrifoods and the SPS deal, which all sounds very good, except that we now have to take a load of extra rules from Brussels that we have no input into under a process called dynamic alignment, which might mean that we cannot do any further trade deals with great

nations such as the United States. That is instead of arguing for mutual recognition, which can of course exist between nations that have excellent standards of food and products, as we do.

We have gained nothing from those three great surrenders. Indeed, we will probably have to pay more if we want any more rules to be given to us, but why would we pay more when we have given ourselves the freedom not to have to pay? I thought we had done all of that.

If we are not content with that, what about the fourth surrender—the big one? Earlier this year, the Minister said, “Don’t worry, chaps—no plans for any form of youth mobility scheme.” It turns out that he was right, because some clever person rebadged it: “I’ve got an idea. Let’s call it a youth experience scheme.” Well, I am sure it is a lovely experience, but when someone is 30 years old, are they still a youth? Is it a middle age experience scheme? During the negotiation—because it has not been concluded—I can see that it will then become an old age experience scheme. Then, someone will say, “Hang on, if it’s an old age experience scheme, we don’t have the workers to look after the old people from the EU who’ve come over to our glorious care homes.” So then we will have to have more freedom of movement.

Danny Kruger (East Wiltshire) (Con): And dependants.

Richard Tice: And dependants, because the scheme is still open-ended. We do not know the age or number of people involved in the youth experience scheme, and we have no idea about its duration. I am hoping that I will still qualify at the age of 60.

Ms Creasy: I, too, share a burning desire to still be considered young—alas, I have to face the brutal reality. I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman has similar concerns about the 13 other youth mobility schemes that we have with countries around the world. Does he fear the Australians, the New Zealanders, the Canadians, the Japanese and the Uruguayans who come on such schemes in the same way that he fears the Europeans? Or is it that he thinks the Europeans are younger and fitter than him?

Richard Tice: Well, the Europeans may well be younger and fitter than me, but the truth is that proximity makes a big difference to the concerns of my constituents. Boston has received a significant quantity of net immigration from eastern Europe, but it has not seen any Australians. There is a proximity issue, but surely it must be right that if the Government are going to agree a deal, they should agree the terms of the deal. We do not know the numbers, the cap or, really, the duration of the scheme—we know absolutely nothing. We are completely at the mercy of the European Union.

I invite any hon. Member to spend a day with me in sunny Skegness and knock on a thousand doors. I promise them that not a single person who answers the door will say, “I want a youth experience scheme for Johnny or Judy.”

James McMurdock (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Reform): As with anything, when the terms are unclear there is a big risk of unintended consequences. Given that 60 million people in the EU are under 30 and that the scheme does nothing for the immigration issues we are already facing, does my hon. Friend agree that those unintended consequences could be quite severe?

Richard Tice: That is the point—my hon. Friend is bang on. There is a sizeable number of people under 30: it may be 60 million or 70 million—who knows? We have huge pressure on our housing, a determination to increase wages for British citizens, and pressure on our healthcare. Just a couple of weeks ago, the British people clearly expressed their opinion in the local elections and backed Reform UK’s net zero immigration policy. They said, “Actually, we quite like that,” which is why, of course, we did so well. The ability to listen to the British people’s concerns may have been lost.

Sir John Hayes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Richard Tice: I would be delighted to give way to my neighbouring MP.

Sir John Hayes: I can confirm that I have never met an Australian or a Canadian in Boston or in Spalding. Leaving that to one side, is not the real threat even more sinister than the hon. Gentleman suggests? We have, stubbornly, a huge number of young people who are not in education, employment or training—in fact, the trend is slightly up. It is a tragedy that those people are either trapped without jobs or not learning to get them. They will inevitably be competing with people from abroad for their early opportunities to work. We need to back young people. I fear that, unless we get absolute clarity on the length and character of the scheme, it will threaten those young people’s chances.

Richard Tice: That is absolutely right. In my constituency, young people want better and better-paid jobs. They do not want wages to be suppressed.

Alex Ballinger (Halesowen) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman has talked a lot about European young people wanting to come to the UK, but what about the many British young people who want to go to Europe—to Berlin, Paris or Milan? What does he say to people from Boston and Skegness who would like to study overseas?

Richard Tice: As I said earlier, the hon. Gentleman is most welcome to knock on a thousand doors with me in Boston and Skegness. I do not think any of those people would be rushing out to do that; that is not their primary aim. Their primary aim is to get a good job in that constituency, which they are very proud of.

Rachel Blake (Cities of London and Westminster) (Lab/Co-op): I have spent quite a lot of time in Spalding and Skegness, and I would be very happy to knock on thousands of doors there, but that is not what I wanted to ask about. Is the hon. Gentleman absolutely certain that there is nobody in his constituency who would like to take up the opportunity of having an experience in the European Union?

Richard Tice: The hon. Lady implies that we are unable to go to the EU; of course, people can travel to the EU. What I am saying is that people want to get a good job with good pay prospects in their neighbourhood—near home. At the moment, that is not the reality, and that is what people are focused on.

Dame Meg Hillier *rose—*

Rachel Blake *rose*—

Richard Tice: I am besieged by requests. I will give way to the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Rachel Blake).

Rachel Blake: Also known as the hon. Member who wants to go back to Skegness seaside at some point to remember her childhood. The hon. Gentleman has not answered my question: is he certain that there is nobody in his constituency who could benefit from a youth experience scheme, even though that could actually enhance their employment opportunities when they come back to the UK?

Richard Tice: The honest truth is that, yes, there might be some—[HON. MEMBERS: “Ah!”] But the truth is that they do not want 10, 20 or 50 times more coming into Boston and Skegness, taking their jobs and suppressing their wages. That is the reality for my constituents.

Sam Rushworth (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): A moment ago, the hon. Gentleman said he is yet to see a Japanese, Uruguayan or Australian person in Boston and Skegness. What makes him think that European young people would be more likely to pitch up there?

Richard Tice: It is on the basis of experience and history over the last 19 years. Since 2004, and the transition of eight countries, I think, Boston and Skegness has seen a huge inflow of tens of thousands—thousands and thousands—of eastern Europeans.

Moving on to the fifth surrender, which relates to the much-vaunted emissions trading scheme, the reality is that it is, as we speak, driving up the price of carbon tariffs towards the EU’s carbon tariff. Why do we want these tariffs? I know: it is because of net stupid zero.

Tulip Siddiq: Will the hon. Member clarify whether he said that tens of thousands of Europeans were coming in? Is that an accurate figure?

Richard Tice: Yes, I did use that figure. Within my constituency, it is probably more than 10,000—a very sizeable number. It is probably one of the greatest recipients of any UK constituency, so I stand by that number.

The fifth surrender is on the EU emissions trading scheme, which will drive up prices. If we do not subscribe to net zero, however, we do not need any of these carbon tariffs, so that would drive down prices. What will happen now that we have linked and handcuffed ourselves to this EU carbon trading scheme is that the bureaucrats in Brussels will say, “In all these other areas to do with trading, they will have to comply with this, that and the other.” Every time there is something that they do not like, they will say, “No. Under the EU net zero trading scheme, you’re going to have to comply.” That is the thin end of the wedge that we are so concerned about.

Alex Ballinger: The hon. Gentleman has not mentioned the many businesses and confederations of businesses that have welcomed the deal. He is talking about energy. One energy company, Octopus Energy, has said that it will bring down people’s energy bills, rather than increasing them. What would he say to consumers who would prefer their energy bills to be lower?

Richard Tice: The renewable energy industry is receiving subsidies of tens of billions of pounds, which are added to all our household bills. The wholesale cost of energy is between 30% and 35% of the total cost of energy, so all the rest is subsidies, policy costs, transmission costs and profit. If we scrap net stupid zero, we drive down prices. Instead, the deal will handcuff us for evermore to higher bills; it will not reduce bills in any way.

Ms Creasy: As a proud member of the Community trade union, and on behalf of all the other trade unions who represent those who work in the steel industry, including many in the Scunthorpe steelworks, I want to ask the hon. Gentleman what he will say to them when they are campaigning for the deal. They recognise that, as I said, 75% of our steel exports go to the EU. If he cuts off their access to the EU market by making them pay an additional subsidy, he will kill the British steel industry. Does he have any words of comfort for them about where their jobs will go?

Richard Tice: The hon. Lady may have forgotten that it was thanks to our intervention that British Steel and the blast furnaces have been saved. We stood there six years ago, and I said, “Don’t sell British Steel to the Chinese,” but the Conservative Government ignored our advice. British Steel has consistently said to me over the last six years that the cost of energy drives up the price of steel. That is why the quantity of steel that we have produced in this country in the last decade has plummeted—because of our high energy costs due to the ever increasing cost of renewable energy.

The key problem is the cost of energy, which has driven down the production of steel by about half in the last decade. That is why British Steel is so cross about the cost of energy. We have an opportunity to manufacture and sell more steel internally, in the UK, but the tragedy is that the Ministry of Defence, for example, does not use either of our key steel producers—Tata Steel or British Steel—as a critical supplier, which it should do. Why does it not do that? Because those producers are uncompetitive. Why? Because of the cost of energy in our domestic market. The fifth surrender is the EU emissions trading scheme, which will be a serious handicap and handcuff over the next few years.

The sixth surrender is on the use of passport e-gates. I know it caused some interest, but the reality is that, once again, nothing has been agreed. It is supposedly the great benefit, yet it turns out that it is not agreed. We have no idea when it might commence; it might be this year or next year. It also turns out that no country is obligated to sign up to our supposed access through the e-gates—no, it will be a voluntary process. Actually, we have not agreed the benefit that we have all been told is the deal’s greatest opportunity.

In other words, once again, little has been agreed and everything has been conceded. Interestingly, even before the deal, nations such as Portugal already allowed us through e-gates. We already have the opportunity that is supposedly the great benefit of this deal, so why do the deal in the first place?

The deal has been done, despite all of these great surrenders, because we have a Prime Minister who did not want us to leave the EU. More than that, he did not want to trust democracy; he wanted to do it again by having a second referendum. One week, he says that he

wants freedom of movement and more immigration, and the next week, he says he wants less immigration. It is hard to keep up.

Dame Meg Hillier: I am disappointed that we are hearing, from the hon. Gentleman and others on the Opposition side of the Chamber, words such as “surrender”, “sinister” and “stupid”. They are nicely alliterative, but let me give him some other words: “cheaper”, “faster” and “more opportunities”? They are what the deal brings to the young people of Boston and Skegness, as much as to the people of Hackney South and Shoreditch.

Richard Tice: I am absolutely certain that nothing will be cheaper as a result of the deal. Indeed, we have already seen that the carbon price has gone up, which gives us the first indication.

I do not think that the deal will be a great opportunity. It was a catastrophic surrender. We worked so hard to give ourselves freedom of control through Brexit.

Sam Rushworth: Why does nearly every major supermarket disagree with the hon. Gentleman?

Richard Tice: That is a good question. I know that in my constituency, not a single one of the big logistics companies or big farmers, or any of the supermarkets, who all know my position, has got in touch with me and said, “Richard, you’re wrong on this. This is a great deal,” so perhaps the Prime Minister and the Government have oversteated that point.

The great opportunities of Brexit—the ability to take back control, be a sovereign nation and make our own independent sovereign deals, which we got excited about under the Government’s leadership last week—have all now been given up. They have been strangled and handcuffed, and they have been handcuffed to a failing economic model where the biggest economy, Germany, is in recession—it is struggling; it has even more problems than our economy. I ask hon. Members: why would we handcuff ourselves to a failing economic model for evermore?

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Esther McVey (in the Chair): I did not put a time limit on speeches at the start of the debate, but we have had so many interventions and feisty exchanges that have eaten into the time available. I suggest that speeches should take a maximum of eight minutes.

2.13 pm

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to speak with you in the Chair, Ms McVey, particularly in a week when the Government acted in our national interest by ensuring a deal that is good for business, bills and the security of our borders. By contrast, the one struck by the Conservatives was, as I put at the time, thin as gruel. It has been particularly catastrophic for our exports, which have crashed by 21%. The new agreement finally starts to set that right. The measures on carbon trading will boost the Treasury’s coffers while reducing businesses’ outgoings, and the commitments on defence will help to deliver for more communities the kind of once-in-a-lifetime reindustrialisation that we are seeing rightly take place in Barrow.

The proposed measures on youth mobility are not a return to freedom of movement; they are a ladder to opportunity. I would urge the Minister, as they are developed, to particularly focus on ensuring that low-income and working-class Brits can benefit. I benefited from a brief period studying in France. I hope that the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Richard Tice) will not mind if I mention that I believe it is a matter of public record that he worked in France. I do not believe the ladder to opportunity that we both benefited from should be kept down on the ground for others.

I am aware that many elements of this deal are still being worked on. I commend my hon. Friend the Minister for his endeavour in that regard. In the remainder of my hopefully brief speech, I want to underline two critical areas of additional focus for the Government. First—this has already been remarked on by my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Ms Creasy)—it is important that the automotive industry’s concerns, given the integrated nature of its supply chain, are at the front of the Government’s mind. I understand the head of the Society for Motor Manufacturers and Traders has rightly said:

“The EU remains the UK automotive industry’s largest and closest trading partner”.

In his words,

“progress...towards a deeper strategic partnership is significant”.

As we move forward, I urge the Government to keep engaging with the SMMT, as I know my hon. Friend the Minister has been, and with the broader automotive sector—yes, on the critical issue of rules of origin, as my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow rightly mentioned, but also on the development of the battery value chain and the improvement of supply chain resilience. I hope those discussions can also include relevant trade unions, and I know that workers at BMW Cowley are rightly keen for that to be the case.

Secondly, I have also already called in this place for the Government to consider undertaking a structured dialogue on tech regulation and the defence of democracy with the EU. That is not so we take on each other’s rules and regulations. We have distinct rules and regulations in this area; our Online Safety Act 2023 is not the same as the Digital Services Act, although they share many similarities. A dialogue would enable us to share information, particularly in the face of the kind of onslaught of disinformation and misinformation that our democracies have not seen for decades.

The reality is that the leadership of many tech companies believe they are above accountability to democratically elected national Governments. I saw that painfully last week when I was in Moldova with a Conservative colleague for an Inter-Parliamentary Union visit; it has been subject to sustained Russian-sponsored disinformation campaigns. We have seen the same kinds of campaigns, albeit at far lower intensity, in many other democracies, including in our country and many EU nations. We have to recognise that the kind of free and fair elections that are the right of people in our country are also an essential element of our security, just like the other matters covered in this propitious deal.

Dame Meg Hillier: My right hon. Friend is making a compelling point. In contrast to the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Richard Tice), she seems to be leaning into co-operating in order to protect. That does

[*Dame Meg Hillier*]

not mean rule-taking, surrendering or being stupid; this is leaning in and working with others to protect us all on our own terms.

Anneliese Dodds: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend; she is absolutely right that sadly we face the same threats from autocrats and those who seek to support them and disrupt free and fair elections. We need to ensure that we are sharing information, particularly given the speed of change. It has already been mentioned that, with the development of AI in particular, we are seeing increased threats to our democracies. We need to make sure that we are sharing information in that regard. I hope the Government will keep discussions on these matters open. I commend this deal.

2.29 pm

Greg Smith (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms McVey, and to take part in this debate this afternoon. Having been first elected to this place in 2019, I feel I missed out on the meaningful votes and the main Brexit wars of a few years ago. However, I had the privilege, for the whole four and a half years of the 2019 to 2024 Parliament, to be a member of the European Scrutiny Committee under the wonderful chairmanship of Sir William Cash. His choice to retire before the last election leaves this debate and indeed the whole House of Commons poorer. I am sure that he would have had many points to make in the debate.

The reason that I refer to the European Scrutiny Committee is the detailed work that Committee did to truly understand the way that EU law pre-Brexit and indeed post-Brexit, and the involvement of the European Court of Justice post-Brexit, still pervaded our nation, our country and the way that many of our laws were made.

After Labour won the election last July, the Government took the deeply regrettable decision to disband that Committee. We lost not just that parliamentary scrutiny, which would have been invaluable in considering the deal that we are debating today, but the expertise of the Clerks and the expert advisers who served that Committee, and who often ensured that parliamentary debate on all matters between ourselves and the European Union was well informed.

If the Government do anything after this new deal has been struck—a deal that I do not support and that I believe sells out the decision of 17.4 million people in 2016—it should be to re-establish the European Scrutiny Committee, so that each and every one of those rules that we will now take is scrutinised line by line, and reported to the whole House and the relevant Select Committees. Then, whatever side of the Brexit debate we fall on and whatever our view of the world may be, we can all understand where those rules have come from and what they mean to our constituents and our country.

Dame Meg Hillier: I am slightly perturbed that the hon. Member says, “whatever side of the Brexit debate we fall on”. As my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Ms Creasy) said, Brexit has happened. We are now in the real world of today, in which there is a war in

Ukraine and huge issues because of the energy crisis, and it is absolutely vital that we work with partners across the world, whether that is through the India trade deal or this one. Can he not acknowledge that we are now living in a different world and that the word “Brexit” is of no use to us any more?

Greg Smith: I am grateful to the hon. Member for her intervention, but I am not sure that I fully agree with her analysis. This deal is relitigating Brexit. It is reintroducing dynamic alignment and a role for the European Court of Justice in many ways that we thought we had put behind us after the last Government delivered on Brexit, which meant that we left the European Union.

Sam Rushworth: Inevitably, in any deal, you have to put something on the table in order to get the benefits of that deal. Could the hon. Gentleman give me an example of a UK trade agreement where the UK has not had to put something on the table?

Greg Smith: Clearly, in any trade negotiation an agreement is made between two countries. The difference with a negotiation on, for example, our accession to the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership, or the trade deal-lite that the Government managed with the United States and the Trump Administration, or indeed the India trade deal, is that there is no dynamic alignment. No foreign court will be the arbiter of UK law, UK standards and our sovereignty.

The principle on which I believe people voted for Brexit was that we would be in control. There was a very good reason why the Vote Leave campaign came up with the “Take Back Control” slogan; it resonated with the British people. However, that slogan will only ever mean something if we actually are in control. This deal, which we saw being announced with some glee by the Prime Minister the other day in the Chamber of the House of Commons, gives control in many areas—certainly on agrifood and the carbon trading mechanism—back to the European Union, and takes it away from this House and this Parliament.

Chris Murray (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman talks about control, but that result was mainly motivated by immigration. After the Brexit vote, annual migration tripled to 900,000. Does he call that control? Also, does he welcome the fall in net migration to 400,000 that was announced today? If he does, would he call that reasserting control on migration?

Greg Smith: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was a leave voter himself, as I know many traditional Labour voters around the country voted for Brexit. I certainly voted for Brexit and campaigned for it. I think the hon. Gentleman is making some presumptions as to why people voted. My central pitch when knocking on doors in that referendum was the point around control and sovereignty, and that it would be this Parliament that set our laws. Dynamic alignment blows a huge hole in that.

I will touch briefly on a couple of other factors that have come up in the debate. There is a point that is made that somehow Brexit has been economically damaging. In the Government’s own rationale—[*Interruption.*]

It is always good to have an audience laughing, but I am going to quote from the Government's own rationale. They talk about declining trade and so on from 2018. I hate to break it to them, but we had not left the European Union in 2018. The withdrawal Act did not come into effect for years after that. Figures from the Office for National Statistics show that in 2018, for example, UK food exports were £10.6 billion. Guess what had happened by 2024? They had gone up to £11.34 billion. We need a little greater clarity in this debate where we get the dates right and compare apples with apples, rather than apples with pears.

Alex Ballinger: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Greg Smith: I have given way several times. I may well come back if time allows, but I am aware of the time limit that you have set, Ms McVey.

My constituency could pretty much not be further from the sea, but we do enjoy a lot of fish in Buckinghamshire. I am very much aware of just how angry fishermen around the country are, particularly Scottish fishermen. Yesterday, I debated with SNP Members on the BBC, who confirmed how angry fishermen in Scotland are at this deal. Once again, it is important that we look at some facts. The crude trade gap for fish is actually about 274,000 tonnes in the EU's favour. The key point I make to those who argued that the deal is somehow good because it means we can export more fish to the European Union is that we cannot export that which we have not been allowed to catch in the first place. I would invite hon. Members that have made that point to reflect on it a little more.

Sam Rushworth: "Angry, disappointed and betrayed" are the words that the chairman of the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations used to describe the Brexit deal that the hon. Gentleman voted for. Why did he vote for that deal?

Greg Smith: The hon. Gentleman is trying to relitigate the past again. The deal that the last Government did would have seen us able to take back full control of our waters in a year's time. Instead, we have a 12-year deal that gives the EU rights to our fishing waters. That is the point to be angry and dismayed about, not a deal that could have returned total control of our waters next year.

This is not a good deal for the United Kingdom and it is not a deal that honours the referendum result. I invite the new Government to reflect, reverse course—they have managed it on winter fuel and they can manage it on this—and think again. If they cannot do that, at the very least they should reintroduce proper scrutiny of EU law having direct effect in this country through a full-time Select Committee.

2.28 pm

Sarah Edwards (Tamworth) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms McVey. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Ms Creasy) and the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Richard Tice) on securing this important debate.

I am delighted to join my parliamentary colleagues in celebrating the new agreement that our Government have confirmed with the European Union. While the

Opposition try to figure out why, all of a sudden, they are against the fishing deal they wrote, working people such as my Tamworth constituents are relieved that they have a Government delivering on what is important to them—cheaper food in the supermarkets, better policing of our borders and less needless bureaucracy getting in the way of free trade. As a member of the Business and Trade Committee, I am doubly heartened to see that the Government's work is in line with many of our published recommendations. In feedback submitted to the Committee, the Agricultural Industries Confederation stated:

"An SPS veterinary agreement has the biggest potential to positively impact UK agricultural supply chains businesses."

The Government's phytosanitary agreement will enable our farmers to trade and shave pounds off every weekly shop.

In collaboration with the Energy Security and Net Zero Committee, I am actively investigating avenues for reducing commercial energy costs. National Grid estimates that bringing the European and British energy markets into closer alignment could save the economy £350 million a year. I therefore commend the announced link between our emissions trading systems as a positive first step towards reducing consumer and business energy costs.

After years of unreasonable Governments embarrassing us abroad and stifling business at home, Britain is back as a proud, sovereign, free-trading nation. While some in this place try to spin a £360 million investment in our seaside communities as bad for fishing, my constituents and I will be celebrating cheaper food in our supermarkets, more efficient energy markets and shorter queues at the airport.

2.31 pm

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I am grateful to be able to make a short contribution to this debate. I will not repeat everything I said in last week's debate, but I want to make this point.

The hon. Member for Walthamstow (Ms Creasy) said that we do not want to go back to the old arguments we had about Brexit at the time of the referendum and while we were negotiating the trade and co-operation agreement before we finally left, but that is exactly what the Government are doing. Who is trying to turn back the clock? Who has decided that we should rejoin the single market for food and agriproducts, having promised that we would not rejoin the single market? It is this Labour Government.

The idea that the Government should be able to wash their hands of their responsibility to voters for honouring the referendum result is an absolute absurdity. Let us remind ourselves that these are the same people who hated the idea of leaving the EU, who campaigned passionately to stay in the EU for ideological reasons, who refused to accept the referendum result, who desperately tried to pervert the referendum result or get a second referendum, and who, in their hearts, have never really accepted the referendum result.

They long to rejoin. That is the motive behind this: they know they cannot rejoin the European Union because they know the voters will not have it, so they are rejoining by stealth. That is what they are doing. They have rejoined the single market for food and agriproducts, which means we are effectively back in the European Union as far as the regulation of food and

[Sir Bernard Jenkin]

agriproducts is concerned, only we do not have a say on the new laws that will be made and imposed on all British food businesses.

James McMurdock: On that point, I invite the hon. Gentleman to elaborate on what he thinks it might mean that the Government scrapped the European Scrutiny Committee.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: The House of Lords still has a European Affairs Committee, which held an inquiry in the run-up to the reset. There has been no inquiry into the reset by any Select Committee of the House of Commons, apart from the Business and Trade Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Buckinghamshire (Greg Smith) and my hon. Friend the Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock (James McMurdock) are absolutely right that we need to reinstate the European Scrutiny Committee, because there will be a flow of new regulations coming out of the European Union that should be scrutinised in the proper way, as they were when we were a member of the European Union. Without that, there is no proper scrutiny in this House at all.

I will now move on briefly to the question of how bad Brexit really was as an economic event. We were told that the British economy would fall off a cliff, that the housing market would collapse, that interest rates would rocket—actually, none of those things occurred. When we left the European Union at the beginning of 2021, the dial hardly moved. Our economy was growing at roughly the same rate as other economies in the European Union.

Rachel Blake: I am interested in the hon. Member's economic analysis. Does he really think that the economic consequences of Brexit could only have started in 2021, at the moment when we actually left the European Union, and not when the decision was made?

Sir Bernard Jenkin: We were told by the Office for Budget Responsibility that there might be a 4% reduction in what our GDP would otherwise have been. That has not occurred—the OBR was wrong. Our economy has continued to grow at roughly the same rate as the other EU economies. Of course, there have been adjustments because the economy has a different trading relationship with the EU. We now have a very deep and comprehensive trading relationship with the EU, as opposed to being in the single market, but there are swings and roundabouts. There have been gains in other areas. The other big advantage is that our contribution to the European Union, which used to be very substantial, pushing up to £20 billion a year, is now right down, which is a huge advantage.

Given all the exaggeration about how bad Brexit was going to be and how bad Brexit is, how seriously should we take what the Government are now saying about the huge benefits of this so-called reset?

Anneliese Dodds: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Bernard Jenkin: I will give way once more, because I need to be brief.

Anneliese Dodds: I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman, and I want to ask him specifically about goods exports—this relates to the comments made by the hon. Member for Mid Buckinghamshire (Greg Smith). I just looked at the House of Commons Library analysis, which states:

“Goods exports to the EU exceeded £215 billion in 2017, 2018 and 2019 but have not done so in any calendar year since”—

that came out in April 2025—

“and were £177 billion in 2024”.

Our goods exports to non-EU countries have not recovered, either. Does the hon. Gentleman recognise those figures?

Sir Bernard Jenkin: The Library does not say that Brexit is the cause of those declines. [Interruption.] It does not say that, and there are all sorts of factors. For example, we are closing down the North sea and exporting far less fuel. We used to import a lot of uncut diamonds and then export them to the EU, but we do not do that any more. That was worth £1 billion a year.

Alex Ballinger: Will the hon. Member give way?

Sir Bernard Jenkin: I am not giving way again. The basis for recalculating our trade statistics has changed. There is also what was known as the Rotterdam effect. The point is that our underlying economic growth is broadly the same.

In Tuesday's statement, the Prime Minister claimed:

“The deal means that British goods that have long been off the menu in Europe can regain their true place, including shellfish”.—[Official Report, 20 May 2025; Vol. 767, c. 890.]

He went on to say, and he mentioned this several times:

“Under the Conservatives' deal, shellfish was locked out, but it can now be sold back into the market”.—[Official Report, 20 May 2025; Vol. 767, c. 897.]

So what are the statistics for shellfish exports to the EU? They declined very substantially between 2019 and 2021, from 32 million tonnes to 25 million tonnes, largely because of covid, I suspect. In 2022 they declined a little bit more to 22 million tonnes. That is not off the menu—22 million tonnes of shellfish exported to the EU. They went up in 2023 to 23 million tonnes and have continued broadly at that level. They were not locked out. That is just not true.

The fact is we have a different trading relationship. Yes, the EU puts up lots of stupid and time-wasting barriers to trade, but that is because it knows this Labour Government are suckers and have fallen into this trap. The Government think they are going to get rid of all these checks. Well, under this new arrangement, we are going to have EU vets inspecting British farms and British food producers without any authority from the British Government, except through some kind of agreement.

We also know that the agrifood SPS agreement has not yet been agreed. And why has it not been agreed? There is no start date given by the Government. We have not seen the small print. There will have to be legislation, and we do not know how much we will have to pay the EU for this so-called privileged access.

It begs the question, given that shellfish was not locked out, and given that our shellfish exports to the EU remain substantially the same, what else are the Government saying about this deal that is completely untrue? I suspect that, just as they exaggerated and

continue to exaggerate the disadvantages of being outside the European Union, they are also grossly exaggerating the economic advantages of this deal.

I come back to the point: if the referendum decided one thing, it was that we should no longer have our laws made in the European Union and that we should no longer have to contribute to the EU budget. Both of those commitments, which the Government made in their manifesto, have been betrayed. We have rejoined the single market in food and agriproducts, and we are going to contribute money to the European Union once again.

This will have a sting in the tail for the Government. I am afraid that all those so-called red wall seats are now vulnerable to a sense of betrayal among the voters that this Government cannot be trusted on even the most fundamental thing. I remind the Chamber again that 17.4 million people voted leave, which is a good deal more than the 9.7 million who voted Labour, giving them such an extraordinary majority on such a paltry share of the vote—less than 34%. The idea that this is a superior mandate and that the Government now have the right to overrule a referendum result is very dangerous territory. It is playing into the hands of the Reform party, which is the very thing that Labour fears.

It is vital that we have the European Scrutiny Committee back. Now that European regulation will be created and applied once again in the United Kingdom, even though we do not have any say over it, we should be able to scrutinise it properly through a proper scrutiny Committee. I would be grateful if the Minister would address that point.

2.41 pm

Rachel Blake (Cities of London and Westminster) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms McVey. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Ms Creasy) and the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Richard Tice) for securing this debate. I welcome this chance to move on and let it go, and to test and reflect on the outcome of the EU-UK summit. That foundation is also a chance to look to the future.

The Opposition have done their best to make me rack my brain back to the 1990s and the last but one time the Conservatives tore themselves apart over Europe, when they were fighting over whether we were rule makers or rule takers. But I will spend a tiny bit of time talking about the 2016 referendum, and how it uncovered and exacerbated division in our country.

It is fundamentally regrettable that the Opposition have used such divisive language: “surrender,” “stupidity,” “hate,” “suckers” and “dangerous.” That really is not a sensible way to talk about how best to work with our partners in the European Union, which is our largest trading partner. In stark contrast, the EU-UK summit that finished earlier this week was grounded in a pragmatic approach to moving forward. It reached out across our country to do the very best for the whole UK.

In terms of testing and reflecting on the outcome of the summit, the first question for me is whether it sticks to our red lines. In response to the most recent remarks from the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin), the outcome absolutely sticks to those red lines. There is no return to the single market,

the customs union or freedom of movement. Does it support this Government’s missions, which were clearly voted for by the country in an election called a year ago today? Our missions are to secure growth, to support opportunity, to get our country healthy, to tackle climate change and to make our country safer. It addresses each and every one of those missions.

Does the EU-UK summit agreement work for the whole of the UK? Looking around the Chamber, I am proud of how many nations and regions of the UK are represented on the Government Benches, and every single one of us has been able to talk about how the EU-UK summit has benefited our own constituencies. I have been thinking about why the summit is so important for me: I represent an area with a vast number of small businesses that rely on the impact of the summit to reduce the cost of energy and the cost of working in the hospitality sector. That is significant for my constituency, one of the great engines of the UK economy.

As I look across the Chamber, there are ways in which the summit will help the constituents of all Members present. I would like to know whether there is really nobody in Spalding or Skegness who will benefit. Are there really no businesses—haulage businesses, for example—that will see the opportunity for reduced red tape as a result of the summit? I strongly doubt that.

The next test for me is whether the agreement fixes the foundations for the future. Has it put us in a good place to build on for some of the other businesses and areas where we need to see a bit more movement? I think it does; it is a strong first step. Does it make sure that we can get ourselves and our pets on holiday faster? Yes, it absolutely does.

I have spent several minutes on the past and on the present, and now I will look to the future. In another area of important vitality—[*Interruption.*] Is there an intervention?

Esther McVey (in the Chair): That is for you to say.

Sir John Hayes: If I may say so generously, I choose to go for my holidays in north Norfolk and Whitby; I do not need a passport to go to there. It is very pleasant. I think the hon. Lady would be enriched by that kind of experience.

Rachel Blake: I hope that the right hon. Gentleman has a wonderful time on his holidays. I will be spending much of the upcoming recess in the UK at the seaside, and I hope that other people who want to take their holidays in other places will be able to benefit from the EU summit. I am sure that businesses in the UK tourism and hospitality industry will strongly welcome the benefits from tackling the red tape in that sector.

I will probably unite the whole room when I say that I look forward to more detail on the youth experience scheme. I want to know how our young constituents across the country will be able to go to places in Europe to learn about their culture, economy and history as part of their own education. It is important to see some detail on that scheme.

I also want to hear more in future summits about how cabotage and carnet will be made easier—which, again, will help the haulage industry. I hope that they will be discussed at future summits, to secure the vitality

[Rachel Blake]

of our touring orchestras, many of which are based in my constituency, and to ensure that touring artists get over to Europe and that the west end remains a thriving centre of culture in the UK.

I am grateful for the chance to reflect on the summit. I look forward to hearing from the Minister, as well as my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow and the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness, who secured the debate, on how we might move forward.

2.48 pm

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): Joseph Chamberlain, one of my great political heroes, said that in “great deeds, something abides”. Perhaps the greatest deed of my parliamentary lifetime was our decision to leave the European Union, made greater still by the fact that it was a decision taken by the British people against the advice of most of their political leaders from across the spectrum. Suddenly the people spoke—and they spoke clearly—about their intentions, contradicting the long-standing prejudices of most of the British establishment.

What endures of that deed is our right to self-government, which lies at the heart of our short debate today. It is the affirmation of parliamentary sovereignty. That matters, as we all know, because our legitimacy is afforded to us by the choice that people make to send us here, and the fact that we are answerable to them in a way that those who exercise power in the European Union are not—they have never been directly accountable. It is true that we elected MEPs, but almost no one knew who they were. I did not know who the Tory MEPs were, let alone those from other parties. Former MEPs will often say that they had little contact with the people in their constituencies and that their postbag overall was a fraction of what we receive in a single week, let alone over a longer period. Interaction is at the heart of the legitimacy that I have just described, but with MEPs it just was not there.

Of course, much of the governance of the European Union was not done by people who had been elected, for the character of the way rules are made there rests on a very different connection between bureaucrats and elected people. The sovereignty secured by the referendum result is something precious, something that should be valued by every single Member of this House, regardless of their party.

What does this deal do in respect of that sovereignty? I have reservations about the youth mobility scheme, not because I do not think that there are people in Lincolnshire who want to take advantage of it—*[Interruption.]* I did not say that, by the way; I did not say that. I will not defend the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Richard Tice), other than on this basis: the exact figures for his constituency show 13,596 people living there who come from eastern Europe, central Europe or further afield—Bulgaria, Romania and so on. The influx of those people over a short period of time has had a dramatic effect on the character of that part of Lincolnshire.

On immigration more generally, free movement had a devastating effect on this country. It displaced investment in domestic skills, without doubt, and it also changed workplaces—I think it drove down wages, for example, because many people who came were not unionised and

were not able to make their case to their employers with the same confidence that domestic workers rightly do. It also stultified our economy by fixing it in a labour-intensive, low-skill profile. That was bound to damage productivity and make us less competitive. What we needed to build was a high-skill, high-tech economy to compete internationally, and free movement damaged that prospect.

The fear about the youth mobility scheme or the youth experience scheme—it keeps changing names, which in itself leads to a certain degree of scepticism; I will not put it any more strongly than that—is that it will bring people here who will want to work and to compete with our young people in Lincolnshire and across the constituencies represented in this Chamber today. That may be in seasonal jobs, part-time jobs or first jobs for people getting into the labour market. So I have profound doubts about it.

We wait to see the detail, because it may be that the Government share my view; I hope they do, but I can understand entirely the reservations of my neighbouring MP, the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness, about it. Indeed, as I have said, they are reservations that I share.

I will not speak about fishing, because others already have, except to say that fishing is always a bargaining chip in these negotiations. It was Edward Heath, allegedly a Conservative Prime Minister, who sold out the fishermen when we first joined. You will not remember that personally, Ms McVey, because of course you are a very young person—we are back to talking about young people, as the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Ms Creasy) and others did earlier—but you will know of it, and know that that too was a last-minute deal. Edward Heath was so desperate to join the European Union that he was persuaded at the last minute, as we were about to enter it, that he needed to trade off our fishermen’s rights.

Fishing is certainly a concern, but so too is this issue of regulation, because—

2.54 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

3.5 pm

On resuming—

[MARTIN VICKERS *in the Chair*]

Martin Vickers (in the Chair): I call Sadik Al-Hassan.

Sir John Hayes: I was still speaking, Mr Vickers.

Martin Vickers (in the Chair): Sorry—I was told you had finished, Sir John.

Ms Creasy: Sir John was just getting started!

Martin Vickers (in the Chair): Well, none of us would want to deny ourselves the chance to listen to Sir John. Back to you.

Sir John Hayes: I wondered whether the hon. Member for North Somerset (Sadik Al-Hassan) was going to finish my speech for me, Mr Vickers, but I am not sure it would have been quite in the same vein as that in which I intend to continue.

We have talked a bit about the youth mobility scheme, or the youth movement scheme or the youth experience scheme—call it what you will. Of course, it is true that some young people want to go abroad, but many more young people from abroad will want to come here, and we spoke a little before you came, Mr Vickers, about the consequences of that.

Things have changed since we left the European Union. The principal change internationally has been the greater need for national economic resilience, epitomised in the covid pandemic and then the European war in Ukraine that followed. Never has it been clearer that Britain needs to become increasingly resilient, and that means protecting our industries to some degree. It certainly means manufacturing more of what we need and growing more of the food that we consume in this country. Shortening supply lines will have many benefits, environmental and other but, fundamentally, it is about taking a national view of our economic interests.

Of course Britain co-operates and collaborates with others; but, as I said to the hon. Member for Walthamstow when she opened the debate, there is a world of difference between co-operation and governance. In a sense, that has permeated considerations of this subject since we started them back in the late 1950s. For a long time, many of those who favoured European governance pretended that it was a matter of logistics rather than principles, of details rather than essentials and, as we heard again in this debate, of co-operation rather than governance. Fundamentally, however, it is about the difference between supranational Government and collaborative measures—treaties and so on—between sovereign nations. That is at the heart of this debate.

It is unfortunate that when we joined the European Union—as you will remember, Mr Vickers, because you were a campaigner against it even in those distant days—it was labelled the Common Market. There was no sense there that we would be giving up our sovereignty—no sense that it would have any effect on our political structure or system of Government. It was just a trading association.

How things have changed. I know the hon. Member for Walthamstow welcomes that change, because she fought the Brexit referendum result in an honourable, but none the less stubborn way, if I might say so. I wonder whether she is as stubborn now.

Ms Creasy: It is always flattering when people talk about imitation. The right hon. Gentleman's argument was about the difference between co-operation and governance. What is it about Europol and our ability to share information and work together to tackle crime and hold to account those who harm our constituents that he finds distasteful enough that to support not working with Europol? His Government chose, on his argument, not to work with Europol. I believe that that has damaged our ability to tackle crime, and this summit will address that. What was so distasteful about that body that he could not co-operate with it?

Sir John Hayes: I say to the hon. Lady—not in a way that is patronising or pompous at all—that I can speak with a bit more authority about that than she can, because I am a former security Minister, currently a member of the Intelligence and Security Committee,

and I was once responsible for countering serious organised crime in Government, so I came across a lot of the need to co-operate and share data.

The hon. Lady will remember that we were never part of the Schengen arrangement, although we did have access to the Schengen database. We were never part of European governance over security, although we did share information with European partners. She will also know that the key security relationship for us is the Five Eyes relationship with countries beyond the European Union—America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. That is the core security partnership but, of course, we co-operate with other countries across the globe. To be frank, that is not really about governance, is it? That is about exactly the kind of collaboration that, as I described, has always been part of the way that this country has dealt with its affairs internationally. *[Interruption.]* I am not going to take another intervention because I know that even you, Mr Vickers, are beginning to tire—even of me.

I will therefore move rapidly to my concluding remarks, which concern this issue of trade and regulation. It is undoubtedly true that, in my constituency—I think a Member who is no longer in their place asked me to offer a balanced view of this—exporters in the horticultural sector will benefit from smoother transitions at ports. However, it is also true that there is a risk that that will encourage us to import more food at a time when we need to export less. We need to grow, make and consume more of our own food. Yesterday I was at a meeting with the all-party parliamentary group on the UK fresh produce network, which I chair, and a major haulier, farmer and grower said that he feared that that was the problem with this deal. I meet farmers, growers and hauliers in my constituency every single week, such is my diligence, and they are most concerned about the possible impact of that additional ability of the Europeans to flood our markets with foreign food.

I will end with this: Joe Chamberlain also said that we should

“carry on even to distant ages the glorious traditions of the British flag.”

In the end, this is about just that. It is about how one sees the nationhood, and how one regards the national interest. There are those on the left—although I do not say that they are in this Chamber—who are affected by doubt about nationhood, and some even afflicted by guilt about our past who do not see the national interest in the way I do. I do not think that that includes the Minister, by the way, as we will no doubt hear when he speaks. But in the end, we do have to come to the logical conclusion of Brexit and all that has happened since: the national interest ought to be the supreme consideration of any Government.

3.13 pm

Sadik Al-Hassan (North Somerset) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Vickers. After eight years of delay, and no small degree of chaos brought upon us by the previous Conservative Government, we should all be proud of this Labour Government and the strides that they are making to heal the wounds of the past and to start the long and arduous journey of rebuilding those bridges. I am a strong believer in a closer relationship with our nearest neighbours, and welcome further work on this in the future.

[*Sadik Al-Hassan*]

The agreement reached at the UK-EU summit contains progress on many areas, which will be welcome to my constituents in North Somerset. From closer co-operation on defence to greater opportunities for farmers and making life easier for holidaymakers, there is much to applaud.

The previous deal, haphazardly slapped together at the last minute by Boris Johnson, worked for no one. It left our businesses scrambling to cope with delays and excessive red tape. As we embark on undoing the damage he did, I know that many businesses in my constituency based around Bristol port will welcome the progress that this Government are making to reduce friction in trade and reopen opportunities to export to Europe.

The SPS agreement, in particular, is a good first step and will be welcomed by many farmers across the fields of North Somerset. However, we must now build upon this momentum, and take care not to forget the other issues, such as zoo animal transfers, which, for zoos such as Noah's Ark in Wraxall, are a vital part of their conservation efforts—a cornerstone of their identity. Such transfers have declined by 80% since 2019, greatly impacting international conservation and breeding programmes and unnecessarily endangering a great number of species.

The opportunities in this agreement are particularly striking for UK defence companies. As Europe rightly comes together in the wake of Putin's invasion of Ukraine, we must seize the moment and embrace our position as one of Europe's leading militaries, linking arms with our friends across the channel. That will be good not just for our security but for our economy. Our long and prestigious military history has given us a wealth of supremely talented defence companies, not least a plethora of small and medium-sized enterprises in Portishead, for which access to EU defence funds could be transformational.

Whatever way we voted in the referendum, it is fair to say that Brexit has increasingly become a case of buyers' remorse, with many of us wishing we had kept the receipt. I applaud my colleagues and friends in the Government for finally getting the ball rolling. Like many of my constituents, I eagerly await the details of what will come next.

3.15 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Vickers. I thank the hon. Members for Walthamstow (Ms Creasy) and for Boston and Skegness (Richard Tice) for securing the debate and for giving me the opportunity to make some comments.

As usual, it feels as though the Northern Ireland situation is front and centre, yet the Government do not appear to have managed to get it right. I cast my mind back to the 2016 referendum. I know exactly how I voted, and the majority of my constituents in Strangford voted: to leave, yet that was overtaken by the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020 and modified by the Windsor framework of February 2023. We have been put in Euro limbo: we do not know where are. The fact is that we did not get the Brexit we voted for, and that is really disappointing.

The Democratic Unionist party has been urging the Prime Minister to unashamedly make the case for the primacy and integrity of the United Kingdom and its internal market in the discussions with Brussels. For too long, communities and businesses throughout Northern Ireland have been in the Euro limbo zone, paying the price for daring to leave Europe—daring even to think it. This deal will hopefully reset that, yet I am not convinced that that aim has been achieved. Although I welcome some of the Prime Minister's objectives in the negotiations, I am not convinced that Europe is determined to finally do the right thing by this nation, and particularly for Northern Ireland.

In both Westminster and the Assembly, my party will take the time to scrutinise in detail what has been agreed. We will make our judgment solely through the prism of how it impacts on Northern Ireland's businesses and people and our place within the United Kingdom, as is our role and responsibility. Members on both sides of the House have been doing that throughout the long Brexit process.

We believe the Government should be radical in moving on from the Windsor framework. Tinkering round the edges does nothing but make the water muddier. The Prime Minister cannot on the one hand suggest that this deal restores trust between the United Kingdom and the European Union, edging us towards closer co-operation, and on the other continue to build oppressive border control infrastructure at Northern Ireland ports. The limitations on products shipped or parcels posted to Northern Ireland still boggle the mind and test the patience of my constituents, who regularly contact me about them. Yet the fact is that we are hammering away at infrastructure that should not be necessary within this United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

On behalf of my fishermen, I want to express deep disappointment at the Government's decision to grant EU vessels 12 years of continued access to UK waters. That is a real blow for our fishing communities. I speak for places such as Portavogie in my constituency of Strangford and, through fish producer organisations, for Ardglass and Kilkeel too, because their MP does not bother coming here and therefore can make no contribution to this debate. That Short money has amounted to some £10 million over the last number of years, but those places have no representation in this Chamber. On behalf of them, I want to speak up for fishing, which is a vital economic lifeline. This move will create uncertainty.

Sadly, it appears that the needs of our fishing communities have not been uppermost in these negotiations. We have once again yielded to EU demands. The Prime Minister could have done more to protect local fishing businesses, but instead handed over continued access to UK waters until 2038. That must not be allowed to stand. The 12-year deal means foreign vessels continuing to compete for limited stock, more pressure on small operators and another blow to coastal communities already struggling to survive—I cite those in Portavogie, Ardglass and Kilkeel as examples. Therefore I am asking the Government and the Minister urgently to explore how they can support the industry in other ways to alleviate the consequences of that 12-year deal. To be fair to the Prime Minister, in answer to my question on Tuesday about the trade deal, he did mention that £360 million would be available for

fishing communities. Perhaps the Minister can say how much of that will come to Northern Ireland. If it is within his remit to do that, it would be helpful.

The SPS agreement may help to ease the flow of trade between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, but it will not be a silver bullet for the host of problems created by the application of EU laws in Northern Ireland only, because that is what is happening to us. I know that I am the only Northern Ireland representative here today, but I am speaking on behalf of many others who do attend debates in this Chamber and make their contribution. For example, the agreement does not address issues around customs—particularly business-to-business movements—and other barriers to trade, not least in relation to manufacturing, product standards and the supply of veterinary medicines. The problems that have been created for veterinary medicines are absolutely unbelievable. I hope that the Minister can give us a response to that particular point. I know that this Minister always tries to be helpful and I genuinely appreciate that.

These are questions that we are seeking to ask all the time on behalf of our constituents. A body was supposed to be set up to address the veterinary medicines issue, but it never really got off the ground, with the result that we are no clearer about where we are in relation to this. We are only able to receive certain veterinary medicines in Northern Ireland; there are many others that we cannot. The same thing applies to medications for human beings. The whole thing is quite incredible.

We will assess what progress has been made, but we will also assess whether there remains in place architecture that puts Northern Ireland in a different position from the rest of the United Kingdom. The work to see such architecture removed must be a priority of the Government if they are serious about solving what we refer to—not in any funny way—as the hokey-cokey Northern Ireland situation. We are in; we are out; and we have been truly shaken all about. It is time for the dance to end and for us to return to our solid position within the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

When I came to this Chamber in 2010, I made a point of reiterating the position of Northern Ireland. It is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I know that it means a lot to you, Mr Vickers, and it means a lot to us on the Opposition side of the Chamber. I hope that it is equally important to those on the Government side of the Chamber. Time will tell whether that is the case.

Full restoration of Northern Ireland's place within the United Kingdom of course includes removing the application of EU law in our country and the internal, Irish sea border that it creates. I ask the Minister to outline how and when that can take place. I know that the Minister really does try. I genuinely mean that; I am being honest and sincere. I know that when I ask him questions in the Chamber, he always comes back, trying to address the question—I appreciate that; I want to put that on record—so I look forward to hearing what he will say in response today.

The Prime Minister and his Cabinet have a vision for our European co-operation. The right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) referred to this: co-operation is okay, but not when sovereignty is lost, as it seems to be. This vision must have the Northern Ireland scenario in firm focus, with

no more double vision: one nation, one relationship, one way forward and one solution that fits the people of Portavogie, Perth, Portsmouth and Pontypridd equally. That is the way it should be.

3.23 pm

Sam Rushworth (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): As I said in an intervention, the chairman of the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations used the words "angry, disappointed and betrayed" to describe the previous Government's Brexit deal. That was a deal that many of the Conservative Members here voted for, so I am rather bewildered as to why the biggest criticism of the new deal with Europe is that it continues a deal that they voted in favour of.

Sir John Hayes: Many of us on these Benches were not happy with the direction of travel of previous Conservative Governments—let us put that on the record. We did not support the EU. I have never supported the EU; I first campaigned to leave it when I was a student, when we had only just joined it. The hon. Gentleman is right that we did not agree with that situation, and this deal perpetuates it for 12 years. If it was bad then, it is worse now.

Sam Rushworth: I appreciate the right hon. Gentleman's candour, and I share his views on the previous Conservative Government. I would say, however, that to have a grown-up negotiation, we have to put something on the table to get something in return. Clearly, the previous Conservative Government felt that putting that on the table was a price worth paying for some greater benefit. The new deal puts nothing extra on the table.

Greg Smith: It has been reported in the media that a very senior president of one of the biggest regional fisheries committees in France said:

"We couldn't have hoped for better...We are very satisfied and relieved. This changes a lot of things. If we no longer had access to British waters, we would have suffered a significant loss of revenue."

In whose interest does the hon. Gentleman think the deal was actually struck?

Sam Rushworth: Those people are clearly delighted that the situation that the hon. Gentleman previously voted for has continued. That is how international trade works: we buy things and we sell things. Supermarkets such as Asda, Morrisons, Marks and Spencer; producers such as Salmon Scotland, the British Meat Processors Association and Dairy UK; the defence sector such as BAE Systems; British Chambers of Commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses and the Confederation of British Industry are all lining up to say this is a good deal for the economy, so I think many people are confused by Opposition Members, who have nobody backing their side of the argument. Deep down, I think they know that this is a good deal for their constituents.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: May I point out that supermarkets tend to be interested in their balance sheets and profits, and not in democracy and accountability, which this debate is really about? Can the hon. Gentleman explain to the House what concessions the EU made in this deal?

Sam Rushworth: As has been said already, there is increased access for British goods into the European markets. I will come on to some others.

Ms Creasy: There needs to be some cold hard reality about this situation. The previous Government seemed to be suggesting some kind of cod war where our Navy might have been deployed to maintain the idea that nobody else could fish. Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the benefits of the deal that has been struck now is around removing the barriers to selling the fish that we catch? The reason why there has been such a fall—of a third in the exports of fish from the United Kingdom—is the market that there is for our fishery. Our fishing communities face many challenges, not least the myths of the last Government, and we need to give them a market. This deal will do that.

Sam Rushworth: That is 100% correct. I do not think that there is any Member in this place who has not met businesses in their constituency that previously exported to Europe and heard the tales of woe as a result of the deal that the previous Government negotiated. That is why so many people are lining up to say that the deal represents a good deal for them. When my constituents voted for Brexit, they voted for two things: to be better off and to control immigration. I do not like the word “betrayal”, which has been bandied around in this debate, but in the last five years we have seen a betrayal of the promise that was made to them.

In 2010—the year that the Conservatives took office—annual asylum claims were just 18,000; barely anybody arrived in the UK by a small boat. That remained relatively constant up until Brexit—so, what happened? First, because they told people that co-operation with our friends in Europe was the problem, they pulled Britain out of the Dublin agreement, meaning that we could no longer return people to the first country where they claimed asylum. Do not take my word for it; let us hear what the shadow Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp), was found to have said in a recording leaked this week:

“Because we’re out of the European Union now, we are out of the Dublin III regulations, and so we can’t any longer rely on sending people back to the place where they first claimed asylum. When we did check it out, just before we exited the EU transitional arrangements...we did run some checks and found that about half the people crossing the Channel had claimed asylum previously elsewhere in Europe...and therefore could have been returned.”

Sir Bernard Jenkin: Why were they not returned?

Sam Rushworth: I was not in the previous Conservative Government, so I cannot answer that, but it is absolutely clear that what people voted for actually got worse.

Mike Wood (Kingswinford and South Staffordshire) (Con): According to the House of Commons Library, in 2018, out of more than 5,000 requests under the Dublin III regulation, just over 200 were granted. That is not the silver bullet—and never was—that the hon. Gentleman imagines it to have been.

Sam Rushworth: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman is disagreeing with the shadow Home Secretary, because I was quoting his words.

Is it not also the case that Brexit ended our co-operation on policing and ended intelligence-sharing? I welcome the fact that, with this deal, the Government have negotiated access to EU facial imaging data to help to catch people smugglers and dangerous criminals, and to increase co-operation to track down rapists, murderers and drug lords. Is that not also something the European Union has put on the table that Britain benefits from?

Sir John Hayes: The National Crime Agency and the security services work co-operatively with our neighbours in Europe, and always have. That co-operation has perpetuated since Brexit, as it did before. A lot of it, of course, happens under the radar by its very nature, but it is not true to say that we do not have that kind of collaborative relationship with other nations where our national security—and theirs—is concerned.

Sam Rushworth: I am sure the Minister will answer that point in his summing up, but it is my understanding that we do not have access to facial recognition technology, which is really important to help us to better police our borders. This is the simple reality: the Brexit that we were promised did not do the things that people promised it would do. That is why we need a reset in relations.

Ms Creasy: I wonder what the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) might say to apologise to my constituent, who has now been waiting, I believe, for over 12 years for justice to be done in the case of her son’s murder in Greece, and for those responsible to be extradited. The abolition of the European arrest warrant under Brexit has made that harder, which is a real example of the damage done by the previous Government’s approach to crime and security.

Sir John Hayes *indicated dissent.*

Ms Creasy: The right hon. Member is shaking his head. I invite him to meet Sharon Matthews—she is an extraordinary woman who has fought for justice for her son, Tyrell. Brexit has made that harder.

Sam Rushworth: It is so obvious that improved co-operation with all the countries just 20 miles off our shore can benefit our security and trade. That is what the reset is seeking to do. It is not dragging us back into Europe—I think that is nonsense, and I am not hearing any credible person say that.

The right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) says that he holidays in north Norfolk, and I will be joining him there this summer—[*Interruption.*] Not personally, I hasten to add; I mean that my family will be there this summer too.

Sir John Hayes: We should meet up.

Sam Rushworth: Perhaps we could rehash this debate.

We are not here to represent just our own interests; we are here to represent the interests of our constituents. I have constituents who will benefit from the new arrangements, such as on e-gates, and I am also grateful that the measure on pet passports has been negotiated, particularly for those who rely on guide dogs.

In conclusion, it is time to stop playing the greatest hits of 2019. That made people popular at the time, but we have moved on; we have left the European Union, and now it is time to have a mature, sensible and co-operative relationship with our neighbours. That is what will protect British jobs and help our constituents to enjoy cheaper food and a better quality of life.

3.34 pm

Danny Kruger (East Wiltshire) (Con): I pay tribute to the Members who secured the debate: the hon. Members for Walthamstow (Ms Creasy) and for Boston and Skegness (Richard Tice). It is a case of singing the greatest hits of the past—singing the old songs—in a beautiful duet, presaging some appalling coalition.

I pay particular tribute to the hon. Lady; I recognise her expertise and her interest in this topic. Speaking of greatest hits, she invoked Elsa in “Frozen”, and I recognise the self-identification. Of all people, her soul is spiralling in frozen fractals, but she has a warm heart underneath. Of course we do know that, at the end of that film, Elsa returned to the castle. That is the ultimate purpose of some Members speaking in this debate; they want to return to the embrace of the EU.

I honour that, and I accept that some people were not happy with the result of the referendum. I would not have been happy if it had gone the other way, and I would not have given up campaigning to leave. Nevertheless, I wish there was more honesty from the Government Benches in recognising that what is being debated here is the first step to rejoining. That is the underlying purpose, because all the arguments that have been made against the previous deal were really arguments against Brexit, and all the arguments that are being made in support of this arrangement are arguments for rejoining. As it was eloquently put by the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Sam Rushworth), the case for co-operation in Europe is really a case for rejoining.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: The point is, if people are prepared to compromise on dynamic alignment for food and agriproducts, what issue of principle will act as a barrier to prevent them extending that co-operation to other products or other fields of European law where they think it is ideologically convenient to do so? The only problem is that, if they think they are currying favour with the European Union by doing so, they will be disappointed, because the EU will simply ask for more concessions without making concessions of its own.

Danny Kruger: My hon. Friend is right. I will cite a very good article in *The Spectator* last week by Oliver Lewis, who was the deputy negotiator for the Brexit deal and the trade agreement. He wrote rather wearily about recognising the terms that had been agreed by the Government, because they were the terms that the previous Government continually resisted in negotiations. His point, which echoes that of my hon. Friend, was that the way the EU works is to force agreement on headline principles, which, over time, are translated into concrete policy. Where a thin end of the wedge can be driven in, as it can be with this agreement, more and more follows. That is what we should anticipate.

It is worth pointing out how thin the terms of the agreement are and how much detail remains to be worked out. We have conceded a set of principles that

will allow ever closer alignment and submission to the regime that we painfully left some years ago. We see coming submission to the European Court of Justice, an agreement on rule-taking, a return to the single market in agribusiness, as my hon. Friend mentioned, and paying money into the EU budget.

Those were the explicit things that all parties in this House committed to ending when we agreed the outcome of the referendum. In 2019, both main parties agreed to abide by them, and in 2024, they agreed to abide by them and explicitly ruled out submission to the European Court of Justice, paying money and returning to the single market, all of which has now been agreed in principle by the Government. It is only a set of principles, but they are bad principles; they represent the betrayal of Brexit and of our manifestos. I will not go through the specifics, because other Members have done so very well, but I will quickly point out how thin these agreements are.

On e-gates, there will be some benefit for the Dordogne-visiting community that some of us have in our constituencies, but it is not a great achievement. Indeed, it is not even an achievement for this summer, so although I hope the hon. Member for Clacton (Nigel Farage) is enjoying his holiday in France, I do not think he will have benefited from the deal. He will probably have gone through an e-gate anyway, however, because there are already many e-gates that British citizens can use when going to and fro. That arrangement will still need to be negotiated, with each member state operating its own independent policy.

We have discussed food, and I will not go on about that other than to say that we have agreed to take the EU's laws but we do not have any detail yet. Because we export so little, any benefit from a reciprocal arrangement will greatly benefit the EU at the expense of our exporters.

Sir John Hayes: To illustrate that point, looking at the figures the UK is the EU's biggest export market. We receive about €51 billion of goods from the EU and return about €15.4 billion, so there is no doubt about where the balance lies. To emphasise the point made by my hon. Friend, the problem is that so much of this is smoke and mirrors. When we hear about realignment being dynamic or about subsidiarity, as we used to hear, those are terms that are used to disguise exactly the kind of pernicious detail that he set out.

Danny Kruger: I absolutely agree. I am afraid that the argument against EU membership, which was the trade imbalance, remains and has only grown with time.

I will not talk about our unhappy fish; we hear enough about those poor creatures. On defence, there has been no detail in the plan other than an expectation of that new procurement arrangement and that we will be financially contributing to that. There is also no detail on the carbon trading arrangement other than a clear expectation of higher taxes and rule-taking through the emissions scheme. On free movement, we are still unclear. The statement talks about terms to be mutually agreed. What those terms might be—how many people will be coming, what commitments of support there are for them on housing, public services and benefits, and what happens if they refuse to leave—all remains unclear. I am very worried about the direction of travel.

[*Danny Kruger*]

The good news, to conclude, is that none of that is real. Those are all headline principles. Although the expectation is that the EU, having forced our famously legalistic Prime Minister to sign up to a set of agreements, will then induce him to believe that they are binding commitments and that he will have to honour them in practice, I implore him not to. I also implore the Minister to consider that we do not have to fulfil those terrible terms.

Lastly, on the economy, although people talk about the decline of trade since Brexit, trade was declining substantially long before. The EU is a declining corner of the world's economy and the direction of travel has not changed much. The fundamental point is that Brexit has economically been largely a non-event. As my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin) said, the underlying realities have remained largely untouched by it. Obviously, our economy was badly hit by covid, the Ukraine war and subsequently by the very bad Budget, and I admit, by some economic mistakes made by the last Government—let us be honest—but fundamentally the problems have not been related to Brexit.

To invoke some heroes of the last Parliament—particularly John Redwood, the great economic prophet of recent times—John Redwood shrugs at Brexit but Bill Cash rejoices because, fundamentally, it was not an economic decision that the British people made: it was about the restoration of sovereignty. It restored the possibility of good government to our country. I am afraid we did not get good government immediately after Brexit, and we certainly do not have it now. Many mistakes have been made and continue to be made, particularly by this new Government, but we now have the opportunity to govern ourselves in a way that will bring about the prosperity of the British people.

To quickly acknowledge the point made by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), we still have not fixed the ongoing saga of Northern Ireland, and I deeply regret that the arrangements there persist in that most unsatisfactory way. The new agreement is clearly a declaration of intent to move back within the orbit of the EU and ultimately to rejoin.

I end by echoing the call from many hon. Members on both sides, and I honour the hon. Member for Walthamstow for her support. It is very important that we restore the European Scrutiny Committee and I hope that the Minister will agree.

3.44 pm

Chris Murray (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Vickers. I congratulate the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Richard Tice) and my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Ms Creasy) on securing this important debate.

I represent a city that has phenomenal ties to Europe. Edinburgh was made by Europeans and continues to be a big European player, but that predated our membership of the EU, and it endures after Brexit. I am in my late 30s, staring middle age in the face, and throughout my adult life there has been a continual movement of increasing confrontation, aggression and mistrust in the

relationship between the EU and the UK. I hope that this summit marks the point at which that movement stops, and we stop the continued degradation of this most important relationship.

Let me be clear: I am not saying that the pendulum should swing back towards rejoining the EU, no matter how much everyone says that. There are people out there who say the pendulum should swing that way, but I and my party say to those people that they should not fall into the trap that the Brexiteers do: to become too nostalgic, and long for something in the past rather than facing the future. We do not need to go back to our previous relationship with the EU; we need to reset it for modern times. That is what the announcement from the Government and the EU does.

Whatever the structures of our relationship with the EU, on the big, global issues of our time there is huge overlapping strategic alignment. Whether on the role of technology and data, on when we talk about confronting climate change and the energy transition, on the rise of China or on the menacing role of Russia, we very much share strategic interests with the Europeans, and need to work with them to achieve our goals. That is why I welcome these important steps to reset that relationship, particularly on defence and security but also on agrifood, SPS and energy. As other hon. Members have said, it is fantastic to see those steps, and they are particularly important for Scotland.

I am delighted to deliver on the promises that I and the Labour party made to my constituents at the election. It is perplexing that there are no SNP Members at this debate to discuss our relationship with Europe, because they have spent the last 10 years arguing for greater access to the energy market for Scotland, for a youth scheme, for access to Erasmus, and for greater access to EU markets for Scottish food and drink, and those are exactly what this agreement stands to produce. This is exactly what they have been calling for all these years, so of course they have called it a surrender. People say that Reform deals in grievance; let me tell you, it has nothing on the SNP.

In the brief time I have, I want to talk specifically about border security and home affairs. As a member of the Home Affairs Committee, I think that there are some significant steps in the announcement that will, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Rachel Blake) said, be central to the Labour Government's mission to make the streets safer. Dealing with things such as upstream migration and practical solutions to returns, record sharing and cybercrime are utterly critical. Let us be clear: assertions of national sovereignty mean nothing to cross-border criminals. We have to deal with the problem at source. International crime, especially immigration crime, is by definition a cross-border phenomenon and so requires a cross-border response. That means co-operation with neighbouring countries that face the same issues.

Ten years ago, before being elected, I was the justice and home affairs attaché at the British embassy in Paris. We dealt with things such as Europol, European arrest warrants and data sharing on criminals, having a massive impact on the people represented by the House of Commons. I know the importance of those concrete measures that do not grab headlines but that make a real difference to people's lives. We dealt with the UK-France channel and in those days, 10 years ago, we did not have

small boats—they were not something that we had to worry about—but we obviously do now. Something changed in the interim. We need to work out what that was, and address it. I argue that, as we have discussed, the lack of the Dublin convention makes it structurally much harder to deal with the small boats crisis. Nobody in this room would argue that our constituents are not demanding that we deal with that crisis.

Sir John Hayes: The hon. Member is right that there are all kinds of existential threats that face this country and other countries too, but the Government's job is to deal with the effect of those threats as they alter life here in Britain. Co-operation is part of that, but in no way does it absolve national Governments from taking responsibility for those threats in relation to national and local priorities. Mass migration is a good example; I regard it as the greatest existential threat, among many. That has to be dealt with in this country.

Chris Murray: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that the point of a Government is to deal with the challenges that the country faces at the time. That is why I would argue that it was insane to stand like King Canute on the shores of this country asserting that a Rwanda scheme was going to work, when it clearly, patently would not—as all the expert advice said. If we want to deal with the issues that migration brings, access to Eurodac—the fingerprinting scheme—the Schengen information system and the Dublin regulation would make a concrete difference to the immigration threats and challenges that we face. I would argue that simply asserting that we are losing sovereignty any time anyone tries to deal with the issues constructively and substantively does not achieve the point that the right hon. Gentleman was trying to make.

We are running out of time, so, to briefly sum up, we cannot assert control and crackdown on crime without those kind of instruments. I am pleased to see that the agreement deals with that. Can the Minister give us any information on what the plans will be on SIS 2 and Eurodac, and specifically on the Dublin convention? As we have heard, I may be joined in asking that by the shadow Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp), who clearly wants to see us join it too.

As a Member for Edinburgh and the Edinburgh festivals, I have to raise the point that touring musicians and actors contribute massively to the economy and the creative industries, which are one of the UK's greatest strengths. The city of Edinburgh puts on the biggest ticketed event in the world after the Olympics, every year, with the Edinburgh international festival and fringe.

As a beneficiary of Erasmus, I add my support to the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds). There is a situation in this country where middle-class children get to do international travel. As a languages graduate, I absolutely support that, but we need to spread it. There are many children out there who want those opportunities, and we should be facilitating that. So can we make sure that it is as broad as possible?

3.52 pm

Alex Ballinger (Halesowen) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Vickers. I thank the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Richard Tice)

and my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Ms Creasy) for arranging this debate. Maybe it will be the start of cross-party working on the EU.

The people of Halesowen voted to leave at the Brexit referendum of 2016 because they believed the promises that were made by the Brexit campaign, but what they got from the last Conservative Government was a botched Brexit deal, half-baked and deeply damaging. I am proud to come to the debate as we welcome a landmark trade deal with the European Union, one that delivers real benefits for British businesses, workers and families. Labour promised to fix the damage left by the Tories' failed Brexit deal, and this week that is exactly what we are doing.

For years, Britain was held back: 21% fewer exports, rising food prices and businesses drowning in red tape. But this week, that changed. The deal marks a new chapter, ensuring that Britain is stronger, fairer and more competitive on the world stage. It is a game changer for the west midlands, and for my constituents in Halesowen. Nowhere will the benefits be felt more than in the Black Country, an area built on industry. The deal cuts red tape on over 1,500 products, slashes costs, and secures greater certainty for local businesses.

Manufacturing makes up 14% of jobs in my area. It is a massive employer, but in the last 30 years the Black Country has lost over 30,000 jobs in the sector. We were once the engine room of the British economy, but while promises piled up, investments passed us by. This deal, on top of the deals Labour has secured with the US and India, will get our economy turbocharged once again. It is about supporting British steel, protecting jobs, and our future as a manufacturing powerhouse. Labour has cut £25 million a year from tariffs, which will help our steel industry to compete on the world stage and will save steelmaking jobs. It is about bringing down energy costs because we know how critical that is for households and businesses alike. This deal dodges a £7 billion carbon tax, and Octopus Energy tells us that it will bring down household bills and provide relief to normal consumers.

Sir John Hayes: I intervened on my hon. Friend the Member for East Wiltshire (Danny Kruger) to talk about the imbalance in food exports and imports. The EU sells us far more than we sell it. Are we not moving to a less globalist age—a post-liberal age—in which countries will need to be more economically resilient, as I described earlier? We need to shorten supply lines and so on. On that basis, why would we want to make it easier for people from abroad to sell goods to compete with our farmers and growers?

Alex Ballinger: We have been talking in this debate about some of the advantages to British agriculture and the British fishing industry of access to the European market. Of course, it will be fantastic for the people who have been welcoming this deal, and the deal will also be very much welcomed by the many consumers in Halesowen who will see prices on their supermarket shop fall as a result of it.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: What about the extra costs of regulation?

Alex Ballinger: If the hon. Member wants to intervene, he may do so.

[Alex Ballinger]

As a former military man myself, I should also talk about the benefits to defence, including access to £150 billion of defence contracts. Many defence contractors in Halesowen have been cut out from European contracts since Brexit. They are very keen to be involved in this deal.

We should also be talking about the benefits to families. The deal means lower food prices on supermarket shelves in Halesowen, which will put money back in people's pockets. For young people who deserve more than a future limited by bad decisions of the past, the deal gives them back the right to work, study and live across 27 countries. For too long, we have closed the door for young people. This deal opens it up once again.

For those asking whether the deal undermines our independence, let me be clear: we remain in control. We are outside the single market and the customs union, and Britain makes its own laws. This is about making Brexit work—not revisiting old fights but delivering for today. While Labour delivers, the Tories and Reform continue to stand on the sidelines offering no answers and only more chaos and division. This deal does not bring us backwards; it pushes places like Halesowen forward. We are fixing what was broken by the last Government, and we are making Britain stronger, fairer and ready for the future.

3.57 pm

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Vickers. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for securing time for this debate.

The Liberal Democrats were clear about our ambitions for the summit. We repeatedly pushed the Government for a youth mobility scheme between the UK and the EU, we called for a defence and security pact with our European neighbours, and crucially we urged the Government to be much bolder on trade and the economy by seeking a bespoke customs union with the EU.

The Brexit deal was a betrayal. The leave campaign promised that businesses would be able to trade more freely, that farmers would benefit from a new approach to their payments, and that fishing communities would thrive once again. Instead, businesses are caught up in red tape, farmers have seen their payments slashed, and the deal on fishing was a total sell-out. In fact, it has been amusing to hear Members berate the Government this week for an extension on exactly the same terms as the deal that Boris Johnson agreed.

James McMurdock: Would the hon. Lady clarify whether she believes the deal is a good thing for fishing or not? She seems to be bashing it, but also remarking on the 12-year extension.

Sarah Olney: I am assuming that the Conservative Government were happy with the terms that they were able to negotiate, so what is the problem with extending it? I simply reflect on the comments of the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Dame Meg Hillier), who is no longer in her place: the new agreement enables so many more opportunities for exporting to the EU, and that is something that will be very much welcomed by many of our industries, not least our fisheries.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: It is quite extraordinary that the hon. Lady does not understand the difference between a bitter concession that was forced out of the previous Government, wisely or unwisely, that we deeply resented and was time-limited to five years, and an extension of 12 years, which is at least 2.2 times worse, for something freely given away. I remember when the Labour party used to deride the common fisheries policy as an ecological and social disaster. Now it is embracing it, and so is the hon. Lady. I can only assume that she does not represent any fishermen in her constituency.

Sarah Olney: I am so sorry to hear about the resentment that the hon. Gentleman feels at the deal that his Government negotiated. However, he must accept that that is the basis on which the new deal has been struck. That was the starting point for the negotiation. I am sorry to hear it was so terrible, but that was the starting point.

The betrayal by those who advocated for the opportunities of Brexit did not end there. Of course, it was not just the Conservatives, but the leader of the Reform party. The public were promised that immigration would fall. Instead, it has risen to record levels. Far from the economic liberation that the Brexiteers pledged leaving the EU would bring, the OBR has estimated that barriers to trade with Europe will reduce the output of our economy by 4% over 15 years.

More than that, we know how much public opinion has shifted on this issue, as many have come to realise that the promises of the leave campaign were so detached from reality. The leave campaign promised £350 million a week to the NHS, but the truth has become painfully clear. The hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Richard Tice) gave the game away in an interview in December. Speaking about America, he said that “it’s got cheap energy, because it ‘drill baby drills’, they’ve got lower regulations and they’ve got lower taxes.”

That is the real Brexit agenda: environmental vandalism, stripping away regulations that keep us safe and cutting taxes for the rich. I hope Members will acknowledge the extent to which that campaign misled the public.

Richard Tice: We have heard lots about reducing bills, but the hon. Lady has just confirmed that the greatest bill, which affects so much, is the cost of energy, and America enjoys energy prices that are a third of ours because it uses its own domestic energy treasure.

Sarah Olney: I am so glad that the hon. Gentleman raised that point, because what he will need to accept in time is that the way forward for cheaper electricity bills in this country is to invest in renewable energy. That, more than anything else, is what will reduce the cost of energy for consumers and businesses. The more renewable energy we have, including from wind farms off the east coast, the quicker we can get to reduced bills for our constituents.

The Liberal Democrats welcome many parts of the new agreement. It marks a distinct and positive step towards reversing the damage caused by the Conservatives’ pitiful negotiations with Europe, and I welcome the progress on those issues. I am sure that the hon. Member for Mid Buckinghamshire (Greg Smith) will welcome the fact that the Liberal Democrats would echo his call for a return of the European Scrutiny Committee; I agree with his comments on that.

According to a recent study from the London School of Economics, the Brexit deal reduced goods exports by £27 billion, or 6.4%, in 2022. Smaller firms were the most affected. The Government say that the new deal will add £9 billion to the UK economy, and we welcome the decisive step to address the disastrous damage that Brexit brought to our economy.

However, ahead of the last general election the Labour party drew itself some self-defeating red lines. The timidity in negotiations with Europe seems to be driven more by a fear of the Reform party than a commitment to bring forward proposals that would benefit the British people. Joining a new customs union with the EU is one such line. However, they are acting less like lines and more like chains weighing down on UK growth and prosperity.

Sadik Al-Hassan: It seems that the deal is both too much and too little. Perhaps if it were porridge, it would be just right. Does the hon. Lady agree?

Sarah Olney: I disagree; it is too little. Whatever the Government have said, it is too little for the Liberal Democrats. We would have gone further, although I certainly welcome the progress that has been made.

Times change. We know that joining a customs union would unlock vital new opportunities for British businesses and boost our economy in a meaningful way. In fact, even a deep alignment deal would boost growth by 2.2%, which could result in a £25 billion windfall for the public purse, and that would fall short of the benefits that a customs union would provide.

In the years 2020 to 2024, the net change in the number of small and medium-sized enterprises in the UK decreased by 25,495. Since 2019, UK businesses have also had an average closure rate of over 12%, outstripping the rate of new businesses starting up. I have heard about the challenges that businesses have experienced due to Brexit red tape, which is a direct impact of the Conservatives' pitiful negotiation. Successful high street businesses that have operated for four decades tell me that the last 18 months have been the hardest period that they have experienced, due to the exponential increase in import duties and registration fees.

I have also been told time and again by small businesses in my constituency about the damage of Brexit. Far from seeing the freedom promised by the Brexiteers, we have instead seen an exponential increase in bureaucracy, resulting in business-owners spending many arduous hours sorting through additional paperwork, including complex regulatory differences for animal products such as wool.

Those are not isolated cases. Over a third of surveyed UK businesses have reported extra costs that are directly related to changes in export regulations due to the end of the EU transition period. We are glad that some of these issues will be addressed with the new trade agreement. However, the Government must be bolder. We will continue to urge them to be much more ambitious with regard to trade and the economy, and we will ask them to use this agreement as a first step in seeking a new customs union with the EU.

While we know that the long-term wellbeing of the UK is about being back in the heart of Europe, that requires strengthened trading agreements and a customs union.

Closer ties with Europe are also key to our national security. We have long argued for closer alliances on defence in the face of Putin's imperialism and Trump's unpredictability, and we welcome the fact that the Government have committed to a defence agreement. However, I hope that the Minister will agree that that must be just the beginning, and that we must be far more ambitious in strengthening our economic and security ties with our nearest neighbours.

The Liberal Democrats have also repeatedly pushed the Government for a youth mobility scheme between the UK and the EU, so we are glad that the Government have seen sense and will look to introduce a similar scheme, whatever it might be called. We know that a youth mobility scheme is good for business, good for education and good for opportunity. Polling shows that two thirds of the UK population are in favour of a youth mobility scheme.

Red tape at the UK-EU border has prevented schools and children across the country from taking part in overseas educational trips. I think many Members would agree that such trips are a memorable and enriching part of a school career; however, according to the School Travel Forum, between 2019 and 2023 such opportunities reduced in number by 30%.

There are so many reasons to welcome and champion a new programme for young people. Given that the scheme the Government have indicated they will support would mirror existing capped arrangements that the UK already has with 13 countries, including Australia, New Zealand and Canada, I urge them to move with more urgency and to bring forward details and a timeframe for the implementation of such a scheme.

The Minister and I both know that a youth mobility scheme is not a return to freedom of movement. Will he confirm that the Government, who have shown good intention in introducing such a scheme, will not be sidetracked by scaremongering from the Conservative party and the Reform party, and that he will give his full commitment to the introduction of the scheme?

When I asked the Prime Minister on Tuesday for a timeline, he assured me that the Government will move quickly. However, given the thousands of students who hope to travel to Europe to study, the thousands of small hospitality businesses in this country that are struggling to recruit short-term staff and the musicians burdened with huge levels of bureaucratic paperwork, I reiterate my call here today. Will the Minister set out a timeline for the introduction of such a scheme, which will ease travel?

Sir John Hayes: I believe in British jobs for British young people. Should the hospitality industry not first be looking to employ the very large number of young British people who are not in education, work or training?

Sarah Olney: That is an excellent point; the issue is that the hospitality industry frequently seeks to recruit people for short-term work, which is often seasonal. Those jobs are not the kind of jobs that young people who are looking to build a career are necessarily interested in taking up, because come September or October they would be out of work and would have to look for something else. That is the barrier to young people in this country taking up some of those roles. There is no doubt that those industries are experiencing huge shortages

[Sarah Olney]

of workers and a youth mobility scheme could go some way towards addressing that, thereby helping to ensure the viability of businesses in those industries and keeping them going, and keeping the jobs that they provide in our local communities.

Over the last five years, the empty promises spouted by the leave campaign have become increasingly clear as the damage caused by Brexit has unfolded. The Liberal Democrats welcome this step towards reversing some of the damage caused by the last Conservative Government, and we will continue to urge the current Government to go further and to be bolder in their ambitions for our country.

4.9 pm

Mike Wood (Kingswinford and South Staffordshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak on behalf of His Majesty's loyal Opposition, Mr Vickers. The more that we learn about the reset, the clearer it becomes that far from being the win-win that the Prime Minister promised, it is little more than a bundle of missed opportunities wrapped in hollow rhetoric and enfeebled by untenable concessions.

The Prime Minister heralds this agreement with the EU as a monumental win, but in reality it shackles us once more to the whims of Brussels and undermines the very principles underpinning the genuinely historic decision of 17.4 million voters in 2016 to take back control. Instead of taking back control, these agreements entwine us within the jurisdiction of a foreign court. They mean we are beholden to decisions made elsewhere about the quality of British food. That is the very antithesis of taking back control. It is no wonder the Government were so reluctant to let Parliament know what the Prime Minister was planning to concede.

We support efforts to reduce unnecessary trade barriers that clearly damage both sides and to reach an agreement based on mutual recognition between partners that respect each other and their sovereignty, and that work together for mutual benefit. Instead, we are presented with a one-sided deal that sees us forgo rights that are enjoyed by virtually every other independent country in order to sign up to EU schemes on EU terms.

Ahead of the summit, we set out five tests against which we would judge whether the Government's deal actually respected the referendum result, as they promised. There obviously could be no return to free movement, no new payments to the EU, no loss of our fishing rights, no compromise on NATO's primacy in European defence, and no dynamic alignment with EU rules. From the details published so far, it is hard to see how the agreement can possibly meet all five of those vital tests.

On the first test, there is little detail about the youth mobility scheme. We support limited youth mobility schemes with effective controls—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"]—as we agreed in government with countries such as Australia and Canada, but they have to be done right and they need controls. Without controls they could become the back door to free movement.

I hope the Minister will be able to help in his summing up, because the briefings from the Government and the European Union are worrying. It is clear that the two

sides have different ideas as to what is on the table, and the common understanding does absolutely nothing to clear up that ambiguity.

Will the Minister fill in some of those gaps? Will participating EU nationals have to pay the NHS surcharge, or will British taxpayers be left to foot the bill? Will EU students pay the overseas rate or the home student rate for higher education tuition fees? If the latter, will the Government recompense universities for the lost income? Crucially, what does he expect the cap on those numbers to be? Does he expect the number of EU participants to be around the 10,000 mark, as for those who come to the UK under the Australian version of the scheme, or does he expect a higher number?

Sir Bernard Jenkin: There is another question. A truly bilateral youth exchange arrangement would be fine. It would be like the trade and co-operation agreement, with no reference to the European Court of Justice. Or is this going to be an extension of the withdrawal agreement arrangements involving EU citizenship, which is subject to the European Court of Justice and temporary and time-limited? The real question that the Minister has to answer is: what will be the involvement of the European Court of Justice in overseeing this arrangement?

Mike Wood: That is an important question for the Minister to answer. This should not come as news. The Leader of the Opposition was quite clear on Tuesday that of course we support the principle of mobility schemes. After all, we negotiated so many of them, which the Minister did not support when he was shadow International Trade Secretary.

The Government's deal clearly also fails the tests on payments to the EU and on fishing rights. Our fishermen stand betrayed. Instead of the four-year transitional arrangement they had under the previous agreement, they have been lumbered with French, Spanish and Dutch mega-trawlers being handed long-term access to their waters. That will become the new permanent state of being, and it will have to be negotiated away from. From Cornwall to Tobermory, fishermen find themselves devastated by a Government prepared to sell them short. That is not what they were promised, and certainly not what they deserve.

Again, it is difficult to judge from the information published on Monday whether the security and defence partnership could undermine NATO. There is clearly a need for western Europe to take greater responsibility for the security of the region and to improve its collective capability. There is no question but that closer co-operation can bring benefits for Britain—particularly for contractors able to bid for projects funded by safe loans—but of course none of that is ensured in any of the material published so far. It is surely true that our partners will benefit at least as much from the incredible contribution that the British armed forces will make to that security so, given such mutual benefit, there should be no case for additional payments or concessions.

James McMurdock: To my mind, the core of the issue is the sense of suspicion. No one disagrees that trade barriers are a bad thing and that clearing them is a good thing for trade, but there is an awful lot of suspicion about the exact details and about how much the benefits are real benefits, not just the removal of punitive hurdles.

Mike Wood: The hon. Gentleman makes a perfectly reasonable point. There are clearly barriers that it would be in both sides' mutual interest to remove. That should not be difficult to do, but the fact is that it has been difficult. I speak as someone who spent seven very happy years working in a European institution before deciding, on the basis of that experience, that Britain could do better. Sadly, after Brexit, the European Union's negotiating position seemed determined to treat the United Kingdom less favourably than most other third countries, with which it did not have such a strong trading relationship.

That brings me to what is clearly the greatest betrayal of all in these documents, which is the effective surrender of this Parliament's right to decide what laws apply and do not apply in this country. Last July, the Prime Minister promised that he would not accept any deal that meant laws being introduced without the consent of Parliament, but it is clear that he has found a way round that promise by agreeing that the UK will immediately adopt new EU laws in a range of areas, but after the pretence of a vote in which no is not a genuine option.

Worse, judgments about whether Britain complies with those new EU laws will be adjudicated by the EU's own European Court of Justice, so the key difference between this and the puffin case that the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Ms Creasy) referred to is that cases involving dynamic alignment would, by definition, be matters relating to whether the UK is complying with an EU law. As the ECJ is specifically set out as the arbiter on questions of EU law, it will be able to rule on those matters, so it will become the arbiter.

Sir John Hayes: My hon. Friend comes to the nub of the issue, which I described as the debate about governance—it might be said to be a debate about jurisdiction. There is a kind of schizophrenia on the Government Benches: some Members want to say that this is a fundamental change, and a step back towards where we once were—that is clearly what the Liberal Democrats want—while others say that it is a matter of detail and simply a different kind of agreement. Essentially, however, the issue of governance and jurisdiction lies at the heart of this debate. I simply invite my hon. Friend to affirm the fact that on the Conservative side of the Chamber, whatever we have said in the past, we are now absolutely clear that the national interest will always be the supreme consideration of this party and a future Conservative Government.

Mike Wood: My right hon. Friend is clearly right, and the national interest cannot be served by a dynamic alignment that effectively requires us to automatically take on other people's rules. On Tuesday, the Prime Minister either could not or would not tell us what measures would be open to the EU in the event that Parliament chose not to adopt a new EU law under paragraph 27 of the common understanding. Can the Minister do better? Would remedial action be restricted to suspending parts of this agreement, or could it result in a broader trade dispute?

Labour fought Brexit at every turn over the last nine years. The Prime Minister backed a second referendum; he stood on platforms calling for us to stay in the EU, and demanded we entered into a customs union that

would have made the trade deals reached since Brexit impossible. Now he says that he wants to make Brexit work, but his version of making Brexit work is about dragging Britain backwards.

This deal is not about fixing Brexit; it is about reversing it and undermining it. Let us be absolutely clear: this deal resubmits the UK to foreign courts, foreign laws and foreign control. We will pay into EU budgets, follow EU rules and even have our food standards determined by Brussels. We will be paying into EU schemes with no say on how those funds are spent, and taking EU laws with no say over what they are—the worst of both worlds. No vote. No veto. No voice. Taxation without representation. The Prime Minister complains—[*Interruption.*] Sorry, is the hon. Member for Walthamstow trying to intervene?

Ms Creasy: I thank the hon. Member for giving way. We have talked about the puffin case; the previous Government, which fought the puffin case, relied on European law in making their argument, and cited it in their own submissions. It was good enough for the previous Government to look at European law and at questions about proportionality, as they did in their submission. The idea that moving to an independent arbitration system, which is what this summit will do, is somehow surrender is misplaced.

Mike Wood: No, I think the hon. Lady misses the point completely. When we are being taken to an international court by an institution such as the European Union, it is a perfectly sensible and effective legal strategy to cite its own rules as evidence that we have not broken either its rule or the international rule that it is citing.

Now, the Prime Minister complains about us doing exactly what we were elected to do—holding this Government to account and calling out where they are getting things wrong. On this, the Government are getting things wrong, and we will not make any apology for doing our duty, which is to oppose these concessions, to honour the will of voters and to retain our sovereignty. It is time to stand firm for the integrity of our democracy and for the ability of our sovereign Parliament to make decisions in the interests of our great nation.

4.24 pm

The Paymaster General and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Nick Thomas-Symonds): It is a real pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Vickers. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for allowing this debate, and pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Ms Creasy) and the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Richard Tice) for securing it.

We are here at the end of three weeks in which the post-Brexit independent trade policy that Conservative Members spent so long arguing for has been exercised. We have been exercising our sovereignty. We have agreed a trade deal with India; hon. Members may recall that a previous Prime Minister promised a UK-India deal by Diwali—to be fair, he did not say which Diwali, but none the less, we know he did not deliver it. This Government did. What about an economic deal with the United States? The Brexiteers promised it year after year. Did they ever deliver one? No, they did not. This Government did. Now, for the hat-trick, we have the improved deal with the European Union.

[Nick Thomas-Symonds]

After all their years of arguing for an independent trade policy, one would think that, when a Government successfully exercised one, Conservative Members would have something positive to say about it—but sadly not.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: Will the Minister give way?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I will certainly give way to the hon. Gentleman, but I want to make some progress first.

I did enjoy the shadow Minister's speech. After hearing his comments in the middle about both the youth experience scheme and working in Europe, if he wants me to go and see his leader and put in a word for him to keep him in his job, I am more than happy to do so. I am not sure that the Back Benchers here got the memo about the line he was going to take, but I am sure they will become a bit more coherent in due course. My hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow quoted the "Frozen" song "Let It Go", but I am afraid, looking at the Conservative party, it is more a case of "Let the storm rage on"—that is clearly what they are doing today.

The hon. Member for Boston and Skegness said what a significant week it was in parliamentary history, and I entirely agree with him. Whenever we have these debates on UK-EU relations, people with a real interest in and passion for it turn up. My sparring partners are here: my good friend, the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes), whom I frequently spar with on these matters, and the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin), who I will give way to in a moment once I have made some progress. He often intervenes on me, and he is always here making the case—but, in this significant week, where is the hon. Member for Clacton (Nigel Farage)? In a supreme irony, he is in the European Union.

The hon. Member for Boston and Skegness also spoke about youth mobility. For me, what makes the difference are the experiences that I hear about from people whose lives have been transformed by having a year or two overseas. I want hon. Members to listen to the story of a young man and what he went on to do, because he spoke about two exciting and challenging years he had spent in France. He had really engaged while there. He said this:

"Living in Paris and working in Paris, taught me a lot".

That young man became the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness. Given the amount of time that both he and the hon. Member for Clacton spend abroad, I am astonished that they want to deny the same opportunity to everybody else.

I know that the shadow Minister is at heart a sensible, pragmatic man. The Conservatives and Reform have made a decisive choice in the last week. We have secured a deal that will lower household bills—hon. Members need not take my word for it; they can take the word of most major supermarkets and retailers. I do not hear their voices in support of the position of the Conservatives or Reform. Energy bills are coming down—here hon. Members can take the word of Octopus Energy, which is saying just that, and the support of the major energy firms for the Government's position.

The right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings is right about the Five Eyes relationship. Nobody could deny the additional tools and information that we will get from this deal to tackle the boats in the channel and to deal with serious and organised crime. That is the deal this Government have secured—good for jobs, borders and bills. Both those parties will go into the next general election promising to reverse it, and they will have to tell each and every one of their constituents why they want to erect trade barriers, put prices up and make our borders less secure.

Mike Wood: I very much admire the Minister's confidence. The Government have already guaranteed that energy prices will be £300 lower by 2029. Given his confidence that this deal will further lower energy bills, how much lower can we expect household electricity and gas bills to be in 2029 than the £300 reduction they have already promised?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I look forward to that debate in 2028 or 2029 with the hon. Gentleman, and indeed with the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness.

Let me come to the other speeches. My right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds), who also benefited from a year abroad, quite rightly spoke about the importance of the automotive sector.

The hon. Member for Mid Buckinghamshire (Greg Smith) talked about scrutiny, an issue also raised by the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex. On that, the SPS agreement will require primary legislation; I am sure I will have a continuing debate with Opposition Members during its passage.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tamworth (Sarah Edwards) spoke about the wide business support for the Government's position. When the Conservative party used to win general elections, it used to claim to be the party of business; it most definitely is not any more.

Now let me come to the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex. I should start by saying that I am getting slightly concerned about him, because not once in his speech did he talk about increasing Conservative votes. He talked about increasing Reform votes. He referred to the hon. Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock (James McMurdock) as his hon. Friend rather than the hon. Member. Are we to see this as a new political direction for the hon. Gentleman? I do not know—but his speech certainly leaned in that direction.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about a democratic mandate. The democratic mandate for what has been agreed with the EU comes from the Labour manifesto. It respects the result of the 2016 referendum: no return to the single market, no return to the customs union and no return to freedom of movement. That is the basis on which this Government have negotiated. People said, "You need to have a Norway deal. You need to have a Swiss deal. You can't negotiate a bespoke deal for the United Kingdom." But that is precisely what this Government have delivered within 10 months.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: Where in the Labour manifesto did it say that we would start contributing to the EU budget once again? How much are we going to have to pay and when will we know?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: We will not be contributing to the general EU budget. We will be contributing on a value-for-money basis in specific areas, just as the last Government did when they started contributing to the Horizon research programme. I supported that when I was in opposition. I do not know whether that was one of the bitter things the Government did that the hon. Gentleman could not stomach in all those years. Where there is a value-for-money case and it is in Britain's interest, that is precisely what Britain would do. It is not about ideology; it is about a ruthlessly pragmatic approach, and that is what we will pursue.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Rachel Blake) spoke about the deal working for the whole of the United Kingdom. She is absolutely right. The Government have secured, for example, the removal of steel tariffs, which is just one example of how different parts of the country will benefit. The SPS agreement on agricultural products, food and drink will benefit constituents up and down the land, as will the work on energy bills.

Richard Tice: To prove that he is so confident the agreement will not mean a return to freedom of movement—given that the vast majority of those who moved under freedom of movement were under the age of 30 and could therefore qualify for a youth experience scheme—will the Minister give us an indication of the sort of number the cap is likely to be set at? Is it 30,000, 50,000 or 200,000 per annum?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: The scheme will be time-limited and capped. I will make two points on that. First, it will be introduced in the context of the Government's pledge to reduce net migration over the course of this Parliament. Secondly, I see it in the same way as the 13 schemes that already exist and are working perfectly well. I do not detect from Conservative Members—although one or two Back Benchers might have a different view—any particular desire to undo those agreements. Nobody is remotely suggesting that because we have a youth mobility arrangement with Uruguay, for example, we have freedom of movement with Uruguay. That would be absurd.

The right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings knows I respect him. We often spar across the Dispatch Box in the House. As ever, he put his finger on a fine historical parallel when he quoted Joseph Chamberlain at the start of his speech. Over a century ago, at the start of the 20th century, Joseph Chamberlain began a debate about trading arrangements that the British public thought would increase the cost of food. That led to a landslide Conservative defeat in 1906 and no pure Conservative Government for 16 years afterwards. Joseph Chamberlain's campaign on trade caused absolute havoc on the right of British politics. Does that sound familiar?

Sir John Hayes: Let us save Joseph Chamberlain's reputation, if we can. Joe Chamberlain was an almost legendary figure in the city of Birmingham. In the first half of his life, he gave that city slum clearance, clean water and unparalleled welfare standards. Later, when he came into Parliament, he began as a radical and ended up as a supporter of the Tory Government. In his age, Chamberlain represented was the defence of what he saw as the national interest. I cited him because, as I said, I believe that the national interest should be supreme.

May I say to the right hon. Gentleman that I suspect that is what the vast majority of his constituents and mine think, too?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I would not disagree at all when it comes to Joseph Chamberlain's record in Birmingham. The right hon. Gentleman knows that I do not doubt for a moment the sincerity of his belief in the national interest, but I am sure that he respects the sincerity of my belief as well. We take a different view as to what actually constitutes the national interest.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Sadik Al-Hassan) talked about the huge benefits of the deal for the farming community. I am sure that the reduction in trade barriers will be welcomed.

I have been passed a note written by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who is no longer in his place. I will make two quick observations. First, the SPS agreement will be of great benefit in reducing the level of checks across the Irish sea. Secondly, I will happily write to the hon. Gentleman on the other method issues he raised.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Sam Rushworth) raised the issue of fish. First, we have stability; and secondly, 70% of our catch is exported to the EU market, and that will be able to be done far more easily. To make sure that our fishers have the opportunity to take advantage of that greater market access, £360 million will be made available to upgrade the fishing fleet.

I give credit to the hon. Member for East Wiltshire (Danny Kruger) for his candid assessment of the previous Government as having made a lot of mistakes. On that, he and I agree 100%. But as I said to the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex, the red lines—not rejoining the single market or customs union, and on freedom of movement—have very much been observed.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh East and Musselburgh (Chris Murray) that this should not be about nostalgia. It is about making a forward-looking, hard-headed and ruthlessly pragmatic assessment of what is in our national interest now.

Greg Smith: Will the Minister give way?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I will, but as we are running out of time it will be the last time.

Greg Smith: As the Minister is talking about pragmatism and the national interest, perhaps I can set him a very brief maths test. On dynamic alignment on carbon trading, the EU's carbon price today is £58.84 per metric tonne, while the UK's price is £38.13. Does that increase or decrease costs on British business?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: If we are not part of the emissions trading system, we will not be able to get an exemption from the carbon border adjustment mechanism, which would cost British business £800 million. If the hon. Gentleman is saying that he wants British businesses to pay those taxes, he should be honest with the electorate about it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen (Alex Ballinger) spoke about bringing down costs. Things such as the export health certificate—£200 per consignment

[Nick Thomas-Symonds]

—were meaning that we were talking about thousands of pounds to get some lorries to move. Those are the kinds of things that we can sweep away.

It must be said that the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney), speaking for the Liberal Democrats, provided a measure of balance to what was said by those sitting to her right. Nevertheless, I have to agree with my hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset that if the Conservatives and Reform are in one position, and the Liberal Democrats are in another, it suggests that we have got the balance absolutely right.

I will conclude because I am conscious of the time. I know that we have gone over the allotted time, Mr Vickers, and my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow needs to sum up the debate. We have made our choice—a ruthlessly pragmatic choice in negotiation. Our choice is that we are going to lower bills and have a situation that is great for jobs. We are getting more tools and information to secure our borders. If Opposition Members wish to be against that, good luck to them.

Martin Vickers (in the Chair): Before I call Stella Creasy, I point out to the Minister that he referred to the Member for Clacton by name.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: Forgive me, Mr Vickers. I will forever reference the hon. Member for Clacton.

Martin Vickers (in the Chair): I am sure he will not take offence.

4.40 pm

Ms Creasy: Thank you, Mr Vickers, and Ms McVey for your able chairing of this afternoon's debate.

I am probably going to show my age and why I am definitely not available for a youth exchange scheme, not by quoting Disney but by making an older reference. Dan Quayle's words about surrender spring to mind when I hear the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Richard Tice) and other Opposition Members talk about Brexit. He said:

"My friends, no matter how rough the road may be, we can and we will, never, never surrender to what is right."

Dan Quayle's method of surrender is the approach of Reform and the Opposition making.

Today's debate has shown why we need a salvage and not a rejoin operation, given the impact of Brexit. We now hear Opposition parties opposing any co-operation at all—moving the goalposts. I am old enough and have been in this place long enough to remember when Opposition Members used to push for some kind of Swiss-style deal. They wanted some form of co-operation; now they seem to want no deal at all. They want to ignore the Shellfish Association of Great Britain, which criticised the impact on Brexit deal shellfish markets. They want to ignore not just the supermarkets—a bad form of reference according to the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin)—but the British International Freight Association. I the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness to go and speak to the association, which talks about that deal as eliciting "a sigh of relief" regarding the practical changes for its members.

I understand that we are now no longer to go to Spain, France or even Italy on holiday—only Norfolk. Let me reassure the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) that I will be in Norfolk this summer, but I do not want to deny my constituents the ability to travel all because of the right hon. Gentleman's obsession with isolation. I do not think we will see no French people go to Skegness. I am sure that if they did come, they would get a very warm welcome. I certainly do not think we want the Henry Ford-approach to arbitration, which says, "Our way or no way at all." This debate has shown the value of a debate on this issue. I hope that the Minister will take back if not the ideas, then the idea that we can talk about these issues in this place once again.

I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds), my hon. Friend the Member for Tamworth (Sarah Edwards), my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Sam Rushworth), my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen (Alex Ballinger), the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex, the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings, my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Dame Meg Hillier), the hon. Member for East Wiltshire (Danny Kruger), my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Rachel Blake), the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), the hon. Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock (James McMurdock), the hon. Member for Mid Buckinghamshire (Greg Smith), my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh East and Musselburgh (Chris Murray), the hon. Member for Kingswinford and South Staffordshire (Mike Wood) and the Minister.

Danny Kruger: Does the hon. Lady share my regret that the Minister did not recommit the Government to introducing the Scrutiny Committee? Does she agree that we should continue to work to that end?

Ms Creasy: Yes, I do, and I know the Minister knows that. It is healthy for us to have these debates and I hope that we can continue to have them.

As I said, I am concerned and interested to see the future possibility of joining the Pan-Euro-Mediterranean convention and tackling the rules of origin paperwork. Mutual conformity will be an issue. I know there are more concerns about security and defence. This is such a big issue with such a potential impact on our future. The deal that the Minister has done this week shows that, because of the benefits it will bring. It is right that this place has that debate so that we can move on from Opposition Members appearing like Prince Hans and wanting to take us back to Weselton, rather than thinking about the future that we could offer to everybody.

I finish by again urging Opposition Members to let it go. "Frozen III" will offer us many new opportunities to revisit Olaf's story and to see what happens to Anna and Elsa. Of course, the hon. Member for East Wiltshire will know that Anna saves Elsa through love. Let me offer some love, so as not to go back into the castle, but to move forward together, because things really will look good when we are older.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the EU-UK summit.

4.44 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 22 May 2025

BUSINESS AND TRADE

Pubs Code and Pubs Code Adjudicator

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Justin Madders): As part of the third statutory review of the pubs code and the pubs code adjudicator, the Department for Business and Trade will today publish a 12-week long invitation to stakeholders to provide their views and evidence on the operation of the pubs code and the performance of the PCA.

There are a range of different types of operating models for pubs and, in 2016, legislation came into force in England and Wales to tackle concerns specific to one type of operating model: the tied pub. Under the tied pub model, the tenant agrees to buy beer and other products and services from their landlord in return for lower rent and other benefits. The Pubs Code etc. Regulations 2016, applying to England and Wales, ensure the fair and lawful treatment of tied pub tenants of large pub-owning businesses. The pubs code also provides the tied pub tenant with certain rights, including the right, in certain circumstances, to require the landlord to offer a change to their commercial contract from a tied tenancy to a free-of-tie tenancy.

The role of the PCA is to investigate and enforce compliance with the code, provide advice, consult on and issue guidance, and arbitrate disputes in respect of compliance with the pubs code. The PCA is appointed by the Secretary of State for Business and Trade.

The Secretary of State are required by the legislation to review periodically the operation of the pubs code and the performance of the PCA. This third review covers the three-year period from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2025.

The invitation to submit comments and evidence can be accessed through gov.uk

<https://gov.uk/government/consultations/statutory-review-of-pubs-code-and-pubs-code-adjudicator-2022-to-2025> and stakeholders have until 14 August 2025 to respond. A report on the findings of the statutory review will be published as soon as practicable and laid before Parliament by the Secretary of State.

The Government announced in March that it would review the performance of the PCA as part of its regulatory action plan. This invitation for comments and evidence, will therefore also seek views to inform a wider post-implementation review of the pubs code. The PIR will consider the code's impact since it came into force in 2016, including the extent to which the regulation is working, if the policy has achieved its objectives, whether the intervention is the most appropriate approach and if intervention and regulation is still required.

The terms of reference for the third statutory review of the pubs code and the PCA have today been placed in the libraries of both Houses of Parliament.

[HCWS653]

CABINET OFFICE

Civil Service Workforce

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Georgia Gould): I am today announcing the Government's decision to accept the recommendations of the Senior Salaries Review Body on pay for the senior civil service for 2025-26.

The Government received the SSRB's 2025 report on 6 May 2025. This is being laid in Parliament today and published on gov.uk.

The Government greatly value the independent expertise and insight of the SSRB and are accepting its recommendation on SCS headline pay for the 2025-26 pay round.

This year, the SSRB has recommended:

that all members of the senior civil service should receive a 3.25% consolidated increase to base pay from 1 April 2025;

setting the following changes to the SCS pay ranges from 1 April 2025:

SCS pay band 1: £81,000 to £130,000.

SCS pay band 2: £100,000 to £163,000.

SCS pay band 3: £130,000 to £209,000.

SCS pay band 4: £155,000 to £220,000;

an anomalies pot, comprising 0.5% of the SCS pay bill; and

a fundamental review and "reset" of SCS pay and reward frameworks is undertaken by the Government with urgency.

The Government have very carefully considered the advice and justifications provided by the independent SSRB. The Government accept its recommendations, but ask that the changes recommended to the pay band maximum for SCS pay bands 1 to 3 are deferred to form part of the SSRB's recommendation for a fundamental review of the SCS pay and reward frameworks. The Government believe that any changes to the pay band maximum for these grades would be best considered as part of this review, and will submit proposals to the SSRB for the 2026-27 pay round on this matter.

In addition, as outlined in the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's letter of 30 September 2024 to the SSRB chair, the recommendations made in relation to the permanent secretary group will be additionally considered by the permanent secretary remuneration committee.

This Government place the highest value on the leadership role that senior civil servants play in driving forward mission-led government and their ambitions on public sector reform. I am grateful to the new chair and members for their report.

[HCWS662]

State of the Government Estate in 2023-24

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Georgia Gould): I have today laid before Parliament, pursuant to section 86 of the Climate Change Act 2008, the "State of the Estate in 2023-24".

This report describes the progress made on improving the efficiency and sustainability of the central Government estate and, where relevant, records the progress made.

The report confirms that the estate comprises 203,300 assets with a total floor area of 159.5 million m². The estate's value increased by 5.6% to £191.5 billion, driven by the health, schools and prison portfolios.

For the central Government estate within the scope of the greening Government commitments, the following changes were reported through that framework against the baseline 2017-18 financial year: by 2023-24 overall emissions had reduced by 40.9%, while direct emissions saw a 14.7% reduction.

Running costs increased by 8.0% to £25.6 billion, primarily due to inflationary pressures. The health portfolio experienced significant cost increases linked to higher demand and inflation-indexed contracts.

The "State of the Estate" report is published on an annual basis.

[HCWS655]

Covid-19 Inquiry Response Costs

The Paymaster General and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Nick Thomas-Symonds): The covid-19 pandemic impacted each and every person in the UK. The work of the UK covid-19 inquiry is crucial in examining the UK's response to and the impact of the covid-19 pandemic. There are evidently lessons to be learnt from the pandemic and the Government are committed to closely considering the covid-19 inquiry's findings and recommendations, which will play a key role in informing the Government's planning and preparations for the future.

The Government recognise the unprecedented and wholly exceptional circumstances of the pandemic, and the importance of examining as rigorously as possible the actions the state took in response, in order to learn lessons for the future. The inquiry is therefore unprecedented in its scope, complexity and profile, looking at recent events that have profoundly impacted everyone's lives.

The independent UK covid-19 inquiry publishes its own running costs quarterly. The chair is under a statutory obligation to avoid unnecessary costs in the inquiry's work—and she has been clear as to her intention to complete her work as quickly and efficiently as possible.

I would like to update the House on the costs to the UK Government associated with responding to the UK covid-19 inquiry.

Figures provided are based upon a selection of the most relevant Departments and are not based on a complete set of departmental figures and are not precise for accounting purposes. Ensuring a comprehensive and timely response to the inquiry requires significant input from a number of key Government Departments, including, but not limited to, the Cabinet Office, the Department of Health and Social Care, the UK Health Security Agency, the Home Office and HM Treasury, many of which are supported by the Government Legal Department. While every effort has been made to ensure a robust methodology, complexities remain in trying to quantify the time and costs dedicated to the inquiry alone.

It should be noted that alongside full-time resource within Departments, inquiry response teams draw on expertise from across their organisations. The staff costs associated with appearing as witnesses, preparing witnesses and associated policy development work on the UK covid inquiry are not included in the costs below.

Breakdown of staff and costs

The Government's response to the UK covid-19 inquiry is led by inquiry response units across Departments. These associated staff costs for Q4 are below, and include retrospective adjustments for Q1 to Q3.

Q4 number of UK covid-19 inquiry response unit staff: 286 full-time equivalents

Q4 cost of UK covid-19 inquiry response unit staff: £5,575,000 (including contingent labour costs)

Financial year 2024-25 (Q1-4), total cost of UK covid-19 inquiry response unit staff: £21,591,000 (including contingent labour costs, and retrospective adjustments from Q1-3).

	Quarter1	Quarter2	Quarter3	Quarter4	Cumulative Total
Cost of UK covid-19 inquiry response unit staff (including contingent labour costs)	£5,051,000	£5,292,000	£5,674,000	£5,575,000	£21,591,000
Number of UK covid-19 inquiry response unit staff (full-time equivalents)	280	284	287	286	N/A

Total inquiry response unit legal costs

Inquiry response units across Government Departments are supported by the Government Legal Department, co-partnering firms of solicitors, and legal counsel. These associated legal costs (excluding internal departmental advisory legal costs) for Q4 are below, and include retrospective adjustments for Q1 to Q3.

Q4 legal costs: £7,947,000

Financial year 2024-25 (Q1-4), total legal costs: £24,954,000 (including retrospective adjustments from Q1-3)

	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter4	Cumulative Total
Total legal costs	£4,956,000	£5,888,000	£6,162,000	£7,947,000	£24,954,000

[HCWS657]

DEFENCE

Armed Forces Workforce

The Secretary of State for Defence (John Healey):

I am today announcing the Government's decision on pay for the armed forces for 2025-26.

Our service personnel make extraordinary sacrifices and work tirelessly to keep Britain secure at home and strong abroad. This Government and the nation are proud of their professionalism and dedication.

We are facing a new age of insecurity, with war in Europe for the first time in years, growing Russian aggression, and increasing global threats. Within three weeks of taking office, we therefore launched a root-and-branch strategic defence review to assess the capabilities we need to meet the challenges and opportunities of the next decade. The Prime Minister has announced the largest sustained increase to defence spending since the cold war, rising to 2.5% of GDP in 2027, and to 3% when economic and fiscal conditions allow, underlining this Government's commitment to our national security. That is why it is more important than ever that we continue to invest in our people.

Since coming into office in July, we have stepped up support for our armed forces and their families. Last year we confirmed one of the largest pay rises for service personnel in over 20 years. This substantial pay deal ensured that all those choosing a full-time career in the armed forces were paid the national living wage for the first time.

We have also announced new financial retention packages to help tackle the long-standing recruitment and retention crisis we inherited. To improve living conditions in service accommodation, we have introduced a new consumer charter to provide homes fit for the heroes who serve our nation. And we have taken steps to establish in law the first ever armed forces commissioner, who will act as a strong, independent voice for personnel and their families and have powers to hold the Government and single services to account.

Along with subsidised accommodation, health and childcare, a generous pension scheme, and world-class training, education and skills development, pay plays a key role in rewarding service personnel for the extraordinary sacrifices they make. To recognise that commitment, I am announcing today that we will be accepting in full the 2025 pay award recommendations for armed forces remuneration made by the independent Armed Forces' Pay Review Body and Senior Salaries Review Body.

We continue to value the AFPRB's and SSRB's independent expert advice and insight, and the contribution the collective membership makes on behalf of service personnel. The AFPRB report has been laid before the House today and published on gov.uk. The SSRB 2025 report, which considers pay for our senior military officers of two-star rank and above, has been laid before Parliament today by my colleagues in the Cabinet Office.

Today's awards, which will benefit the whole of the armed forces, reflect the value that we place upon our military community. We are renewing the nation's contract with those who serve as part of our plan for change.

The recommendations

The SSRB has recommended that all members of the senior military (two-star rank and above), should receive a 3.75% consolidated increase to base pay. They have also recommended no change to the current pay differential arrangements for senior medical and dental officers. The Government are accepting these recommendations in full.

The AFPRB's main pay recommendation was for a 4.5% pay award for all members of their remit group from 1 April 2025. The Government are accepting these recommendations in full.

The AFPRB has also recommended rises and changes to other targeted forms of remuneration, and increases to some accommodation and related charges, which have all been accepted.

Accepting these recommendations represents an annual increase of circa £2,100 in the nominal "average" salary in the armed forces, as well as an annual increase of c.£1,500 in the starting salary for an officer. It also ensures that our most junior sailors, soldiers and aviators who choose a full-time career in the armed forces continue to receive the national living wage. The starting salary for other ranks will increase to c.£26,334, providing an annual increase of c.£1,200 for around 7,800 personnel.

This means armed forces personnel have received a cumulative pay award of 10.5% (8.75% for senior officers) since July 2024.

Although defence spending will be increasing, this is not just about how much we spend on defence, but how well we spend it. For that reason, the Prime Minister has announced that we will publish a defence reform and efficiency plan. This will set out how we are redesigning our organisation, driving productivity across the business, overhauling our processes and reforming our approach to some of our biggest areas of spend. The cost of this pay award will also be factored into our capability planning following the strategic defence review and spending review, to ensure affordability within the overall defence programme.

The complete recommendations of the AFPRB for pay round 2025 are as follows:

Main pay award:

Recommendation 1: That rates of base pay increase by 4.5% for all members of their remit group from 1 April 2025.

Medical and dental officers:

Recommendation 2: That rates of base pay for all ranks within the medical and dental officer cadre should increase by 4.5% from 1 April 2025.

Recommendation 3: The removal of the OF5 higher medical management pay spine and endorse renaming the OF6 higher medical management pay spine as suitable for all substantive OF6 medical and dental officers.

Recommendation 4: That reserve medical and dental officers at OF5 and OF6 should be paid in line with their regular medical and dental officer counterparts.

Recommendation 5: That the value of the medical and dental officers' golden hello should increase to £100,000 from 1 April 2025 for payment to consultants and registrars (specialist training, year three upwards) in specialisms with a declared delivery workforce capability gap.

Recommendation 6: That the value of defence clinical impact awards should increase by 4.5% from 1 April 2025.

Recommendation 7: That rates of trainer pay and associate trainer pay should increase by 4.5% from 1 April 2025.

Bespoke pay arrangements:

Recommendation 8: That all rates of pay on the veterinary officers' pay spine should increase by 4.5% from 1 April 2025.

Recommendation 9: That all rates of pay on the chaplains' pay spine should increase by 4.5% from 1 April 2025.

Recommendation 10: That all rates of pay on the military provost guard service pay spine should increase by 4.5% from 1 April 2025.

Recruitment and retention payments:

Recommendation 11: That all rates of all recruitment and retention payments should increase by 4.5% from 1 April 2025.

Skills and supplement payments:

Recommendation 12: That all rates of the cyber skills payment should increase by 4.5% from 1 April 2025.

Recommendation 13: That all rates of the engineer supplement payment should increase by 4.5% from 1 April 2025.

Financial incentives:

Recommendation 14: The introduction of two retention payments for Royal Navy catering services' personnel for three years from 1 April 2025: £10,000 at four years' service, attracting a three-year return of service; and £15,000 at two years after promoting to OR4, attracting a further three-year return of service.

Volunteer reserves training bounty:

Recommendation 15: That rates of the volunteer reserves training bounty should increase by 4.5% from 1 April 2025.

Compensatory allowances:

Recommendation 16: The introduction of an afloat environmental allowance.

Recommendation 17: That all rates of compensatory allowances should increase by 4.5% from 1 April 2025.

Accommodation and related charges:

Recommendation 18: That service families' accommodation rental charges for combined accommodation assessment system bands A to F should increase by 7.6%. There should be no increase in the current rates of charges for bands G and below. These increases are not to be subject to any backdating.

Recommendation 19: That there should be no increase in the rates of furniture charges.

Recommendation 20: That single living accommodation rental charges for grade 1 should increase by 7.6%, with increases of 5.1% for grade 2, 2.5% for grade 3 and no increase to grade 4 accommodation. These increases are not to be subject to any backdating.

Recommendation 21: That charges for standard garages and carports should increase by 7.6%. These increases are not to be subject to any backdating. There should be no increase in the charges for substandard garages and substandard carports.

For senior military officers only, the SSRB have recommended the following:

Recommendation 5: all members of the senior military (2-star rank and above), including medical officers and dental officers, should receive a 3.75% consolidated increase to base pay from 1 April 2025.

Recommendation 6: no change to the current pay differential arrangements for medical officers and dental officers (MODOs):

2-star MODOs should continue to be paid 10% above the base pay at the top of the MODO 1-star scale, plus X-factor.

3-star MODOs should continue to be paid 5% above the base pay at the top of the MODO 2-star scale, plus X-factor.

[HCWS661]

Defence Nuclear Enterprise**The Secretary of State for Defence (John Healey):**

I am today placing in the Library of the House the Defence Nuclear Enterprise 2025 annual update to Parliament.

This Government have been clear that we are wholly committed to maintaining our nuclear deterrent. This has been reinforced through our triple lock, which guarantees the building of the four Dreadnought nuclear submarines in Barrow-in-Furness, that we will maintain our continuous at-sea deterrent, and the delivery of all future upgrades to ensure the safety and effectiveness of our deterrent. Alongside this triple lock, we are committed to keeping Parliament informed on the work of our Defence Nuclear Enterprise, and to providing regular updates on the progress of our key activities.

The work of the DNE is vast. Bringing together the Defence Nuclear Organisation, the Royal Navy, UK Strategic Command, the Submarine Delivery Agency and AWE Nuclear Security Technologies, the DNE is working on hundreds of projects and programmes across the breadth of the UK, including some of the largest,

most complex and technologically advanced programmes the Government have ever undertaken. The DNE has a supply chain of over 3,000 UK-based businesses and a workforce demand of over 48,000 jobs across the UK, with this demand set to grow to 65,000 by 2030. The DNE's programmes represent a substantial investment in industry and the UK's economy. It spent £10.9 billion in the financial year 2024-25, with final figures subject to audit, and has a projected spend of over £100 billion through UK suppliers over the next 10 years.

Taken together, this work constitutes a national endeavour for the UK, and it is driving economic growth in every corner of the country. I am hugely grateful to other Government Departments for their continued support to us in delivering our deterrent.

In an era of rising global threats and uncertainty and conflict in Europe, it is as critical as ever that we work together to demonstrate our enduring resolve. I look forward to continued engagement with my parliamentary colleagues over the next year as we update you on the progress on maintaining and renewing our nuclear deterrent. Attachments can be viewed online at:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2025-05-22/HCWS659/>

[HCWS659]

EDUCATION**Teacher Workforce****The Secretary of State for Education (Bridget Phillipson):**

I am today providing an update on the steps we are taking to drive high standards for every child and deliver our promise to recruit an additional 6,500 expert teachers across secondary and special schools, and our colleges, over the course of this Parliament.

High-quality teaching is the in-school factor that has the biggest positive impact on a child's outcomes, breaking down barriers to opportunity for every child, so recruiting, retaining and supporting expert teachers is central to delivering high and rising standards.

That is why, despite the challenging financial context and recruitment and retention difficulties for schools, this Government are getting on and delivering our plan for change. Delivery of the pledge started on day one of this Government and we have taken key steps over the past year to encourage more talented people to train to teach in schools and colleges, including:

accepting the School Teachers' Review Body's recommendation for a 5.5% school teacher pay award last year;

delivering a package of bursaries across schools and further education, and retention payments of up to £6,000 after-tax for teachers in shortage subjects;

enabling greater flexibility by allowing teachers to take planning, preparation and assessment time remotely;

supporting schools and colleges to utilise new technologies to help tackle workload and drive excellent outcomes for young people; and

streamlining the postgraduate teaching apprenticeship course to nine months so that it can be completed within one academic year, getting new teachers into classrooms quicker.

We are already seeing positive signs that our plan for change is delivering: this year 2,000 more secondary school teachers started training compared to last year, and additionally we are now forecasting 2,500 more primary and secondary teachers staying in the profession over the next three years. In FE we are also seeing positive signs with almost 6,000 approved claims for the targeted retention incentive payment, the majority in subjects critical to our plan for change, such as construction (1,700), maths (1,400) and engineering (1,200).

Today I am building on this by accepting in full the independent STRB recommendations for 2025-26, implementing a pay award for school teachers and leaders of 4% from September. This means school teachers will see an increase in their pay of almost 10% since this Government took power, and over 22% over the last four years. This will provide a competitive starting salary of almost £33,000, attracting talented graduates into the teaching profession, and we estimate the average teacher can now expect a salary of over £51,000 from September, helping retain talented existing teachers to deliver high standards for children.

I also recognise and value the vital role that school support staff play. The majority of these staff have already been offered a 3.2% pay increase through the National Joint Council for Local Government Services process from 1 April 2025, subject to agreement, and I thank them for their continued contribution to children and young people's education.

I know it is important for schools to understand the implications of a pay award on their budgets as soon as possible. We have delivered on our commitment to confirm the teacher pay award substantially earlier than in recent years, and earlier than any year in the past decade.

Supporting schools and colleges

We recognise that this is beyond the costs for which many schools will have budgeted. Therefore, we are providing additional funding of £615 million this financial year to schools to support them with the costs of staff pay awards, on top of the funding already provided in their existing budgets. This funding has come from existing Department for Education budgets.

Alongside this announcement for schools, I am pleased to be able to announce that we will also invest an additional £160 million in financial year 2025 to 2026 to support colleges and other 16 to 19 providers. This will power our growth mission and enable these institutions to address the immediate challenges they face in recruiting and retaining the expert teachers so essential to delivering on our plan for change.

We have taken tough but fair decisions to ensure that every pound of taxpayers' money is driving high and rising standards for our children. By ending tax breaks for private schools, and undertaking a robust line-by-line budget review to identify poor value for money spend, we are able to deliver this investment in recruiting and retaining more expert teachers in our classrooms. We have driven efficiency through increasing digital capability both inside and outside of the DfE, reducing central headcount and removing duplication within programmes.

As we have made clear throughout the pay process, we are also asking schools and colleges to do their part in ensuring that we are driving productivity across all

areas of the public sector, ensuring that resources are deployed intelligently to maximise support for teaching and learning, freeing up educators to focus on what matters most: providing every child with the high-quality education they deserve.

Schools will be expected to find approximately the first 1% of pay awards through improved productivity and smarter spending to make every pound count. There will be those who say this cannot be done, but I believe schools have a responsibility, like the rest of the public sector, to ensure that their funding is spent as efficiently as possible.

Schools are already making savings and bringing core operating costs down: for example, the 400 schools who participated in the Department's new energy for schools offer will save 36%, on average, compared with their previous contracts, which will free up vital funding to deliver for children and young people. We are also making plans to secure better banking solutions for schools, getting them better returns on their cash balances. Additionally, all schools will be able to access services, such as the "Get help buying for schools" service, to get best value when procuring goods and our teaching vacancies service to save recruitment costs. We will continue to provide them with additional tools, guidance and support.

We know that workforce deployment is the biggest component of school budgets. We will support schools to benefit fully from the tools we already offer to benchmark and integrate resourcing and curriculum planning, such as the financial benchmarking and insights tool. We will also introduce a new toolkit to support schools to adopt evidence-based deployment models. This will focus on data that helps schools identify areas for improvement and support to learn from best practice peers who are delivering strong outcomes for pupils with an efficient deployment model.

Beyond that first 1%, the cost of this pay award will be covered by the additional funding I am announcing today, on top of funding increases already in schools' budgets for this year.

Building a modern profession

The teacher pay award is part of our comprehensive approach to reforming education while valuing those who deliver it. Teachers in our schools and colleges are shaping the lives of our children and young people every day. It is they who will deliver a broader, richer, cutting-edge curriculum that drives high and rising school standards and sets all young people up for life and work. It is they who are working hard in stuck schools where the reforms that we are introducing will deliver faster school improvement, alongside stronger accountability for all schools. It is they who manage the range of needs in inclusive classrooms. An excellent teacher in every classroom is essential for every child to achieve and thrive and to support pupils we are establishing 90 new RISE attendance and behaviour hubs.

We are further supporting talented experienced teachers to stay in the profession by taking action to promote flexible working in schools without impacting teaching time for pupils. By implementing flexible working, such as part-time working, personal or family days, or off-site PPA time, schools can support their staff's working lives in modern, practical ways. This will support teachers to deliver the best possible education for children and

young people. We will make it clear to schools that flexible working should be embraced by introducing a new reference to flexible working into the STPCD, making it clear that schools should aim to support flexible working requests where operationally feasible, while prioritising delivering the best possible education for children and young people.

I am also accepting the STRB's recommendation on teaching and learning responsibility payments for school teachers. This will mean that from September 2026 at the latest, these additional payments will be paid to teachers based on the proportion of responsibility they carry out, rather than their contracted hours. For example, if a teacher undertakes the full role, they will receive full remuneration for this, but if they undertake only a portion of the role, they will receive remuneration in that proportion. I asked the STRB to look at this and I am pleased to be able to improve equality of opportunity for part-time workers, better enabling them to move into leadership roles.

We will continue to work closely with the sector to modernise and reform the profession. Later this year we intend to commission the STRB to look at specific reforms to teacher conditions, learning from innovative approaches that schools are taking to recruit and retain the teachers they need.

I would also like to thank the STRB for its detailed considerations this year on a range of other issues, which officials will take into account in future policy development.

Technical Annex: Further details on funding, the STRB process and recommendations

Funding details

We are providing schools with £615 million in additional funding in the 2025-26 financial year to support them with overall costs. Of this, we will provide over £470 million for mainstream schools, in respect of their five to 16 provision, through the new schools budget support grant; almost £85 million for special and AP schools; and almost £12 million for centrally employed staff. We will provide over £30 million for schools with 16 to 19 provision through 16 to 19 funding allocations. Over £15 million will be provided in respect of early years provision in schools. Mainstream and high needs rates and a calculator tool have been published to help schools understand how much funding they can expect to receive. Budgets for 2026-27 will be subject to the multi-year spending review.

Simultaneously, we are announcing £160 million to support colleges and other 16 to 19 providers with their strategic priorities, including recruitment and retention. Together, that means an additional sum of over £190 million will be distributed through 16 to 19 rates in the 2025-26 financial year. We expect to revise 16 to 19 allocations over the summer and to make updated payments from the start of the 2025-26 academic year.

STRB process, recommendations, and response

The 35th report of the School Teachers' Review Body, responding to the remit issued in September 2024, is being published today. The report will be presented to Parliament and published on gov.uk. I will place a copy of this report in the Libraries of both Houses.

For 2025-26, the STRB recommended an increase of 4% to all teacher pay ranges and allowances. This pay award applies to all teachers in maintained schools. Alongside that, we are amending the provisions relating to TLRs so that, from September 2026, TLR payments must be based on the proportion of responsibility undertaken rather than pro-rated based on contracted hours. Schools will also have the option of implementing this change from September 2025. The Government are accepting these recommendations in full.

The STRB also gave its observations on broader structural issues relating to teachers' pay and conditions. Following its report, from September 2025 the STPCD will be updated to reference that employers should aim to support flexible working requests where operationally feasible. Department for Education officials will consider the full scope of observations in future policy development.

The Department for Education will now consult all statutory consultees of the STRB on the Government's response to these recommendations and on a revised school teachers' pay and conditions document and pay order. The consultation will last for seven weeks, and the STPCD will be updated ahead of the new academic year, removing the need for schools to backdate the pay award.

[HCWS664]

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

Energy National Policy Statements

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Michael Shanks): Today, I am laying before Parliament the draft revised energy national policy statements.

The energy national policy statements were first designated in 2011. They set out the Government's policy for the delivery of energy infrastructure and provide the legal framework for planning decisions in key energy policy areas: fossil fuels (EN-2); renewables (EN-3); gas supply and gas and oil pipelines (EN-4); electricity networks (EN-5); and nuclear (EN-6). They each sit below an overarching energy national policy statement (EN-1), which sets out the need for new energy infrastructure.

The Chancellor announced a review of the current suite of NPSs in July 2024 to provide clarity for industry and stakeholders on the Government's clean energy superpower mission.

We have reviewed all the NPSs and determined that the existing EN-1, EN-3 and EN-5 documents should be amended to reflect the policies set out in the clean power 2030 action plan and support the investment required to build the infrastructure needed for to achieve clean power by 2030 and accelerate to net zero.

A new nuclear national policy statement (EN-7) is in development, with anticipated designation in 2025. Once EN-7 is designated, EN-6 will be reviewed separately. It therefore falls outside of the review of the current suite of NPSs.

On 24 April 2025, I launched a public consultation on the draft revised NPSs, supporting habitats, sustainability reports and associated appendices. These are subject to a five-week public consultation and are all available on gov.uk. The public consultation will close on 29 May 2025.

The relevant period for parliamentary scrutiny will be from 22 May to 22 July 2025. After the relevant period has elapsed, the NPSs will be laid in Parliament in their final form for approval by resolution by the House of Commons, or by deemed consent by the House of Commons following a 21 sitting-day “consideration period”.

[HCWS654]

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

UK Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Stephen Doughty): Baroness Drake has been appointed as a full member of the United Kingdom delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in place of Baroness Taylor of Bolton.

Baroness Brown of Silvertown has been appointed as a substitute member in place of Baroness Wilcox of Newport.

[HCWS658]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Childhood Obesity

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Ashley Dalton): This Government have set a bold ambition to raise the healthiest generation of children ever and take action to address the childhood obesity crisis. As part of this ambition, this Government made a manifesto commitment to implement advertising restrictions for less healthy food and drink on TV and online.

These restrictions are designed to reduce children’s exposure to less healthy products, based on evidence that they contribute to childhood obesity, as well as incentivise businesses to reformulate their products and help create a healthier food environment. Alongside this and in support of this Government’s growth mission, we want to deliver proportionate regulation that balances the health benefits with the impacts on businesses.

My statement on 7 April reconfirmed to the House the Government’s intentions that brand advertising is out of scope of the restrictions and that businesses will still have opportunities to promote their brands, provided that their adverts do not identify a specific less healthy product.

We have listened carefully to the concerns that industry stakeholders have raised around the Advertising Standards Authority’s implementation guidance. We are aware that many brands have prepared advertising campaigns in good faith ahead of the restrictions’ current coming into force date of 1 October 2025 and remain concerned about how these adverts will be affected by the ASA’s approach to implementation.

We want to support economic growth and ensure that industry has confidence to invest in advertising but, at the same time, protect children from advertising of less healthy products. To that end, I am announcing today that the Government intend to make and lay a statutory

instrument to explicitly exempt “brand advertising” from the restrictions. The SI will provide legal clarification on this aspect of the existing policy, as it was understood and agreed by Parliament during the passage of the Health and Care Bill. This will enable the regulators to deliver clear implementation guidance and mean that industry can prepare advertising campaigns with confidence.

To allow time to consult on the draft SI, we will amend the formal date these restrictions come into force to 5 January 2026 instead of 1 October 2025. However, in agreement with the Government, advertisers and broadcasters, with the support of online platforms and publishers, have made a clear and public commitment to comply with the restrictions as though they would still come into force from 1 October 2025.

This means that, from 1 October 2025, and in line with Government’s policy intentions, we would expect adverts for specific identifiable less healthy products not to be shown on TV between 5.30 am and 9 pm or at any time online, and there will be legal clarification on “brand advertising” before the restrictions come into force legally on 5 January 2026, subject to parliamentary approval.

We welcome that industry stakeholders have made this commitment and are working with us to implement this important policy for children’s health. They have signed a letter which will be published today on the Advertising Association’s website and which I have also deposited in the Library of the House. I am grateful for the assistance of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport for working with us on securing these commitments.

This is a successful resolution that enables us to fulfil our manifesto commitment to implement this long-awaited policy while supporting businesses. The restrictions will help protect children from the harms of junk food advertising and help meet our ambition of raising the healthiest generation of children ever.

[HCWS652]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

NHS Workforce

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Wes Streeting): Today I am formally accepting the headline pay recommendations for NHS staff from the NHS Pay Review Body, the Review Body on Doctors and Dentists Remuneration, and the Senior Salaries Review Body. We are working closely with payroll systems to ensure staff receive their backdated pay uplifts from August.

I hugely appreciate the work of so many talented staff across the NHS. Accepting these recommendations gives them the pay rise they deserve. These awards are above forecast inflation over the 2025-26 pay year, meaning that the Government are delivering a real-terms pay rise, on top of the one provided last year, underlining the extent to which we value our nurses, doctors, and other NHS staff. These pay awards sit alongside wider work to improve the support NHS staff receive and their experience at work. This includes our recent announcements on tackling violence and aggression, improving nursing career progression and job evaluation and supporting newly qualified staff. Improving the

experience of work is fundamental to improving the patient experience, from reducing the backlog in elective care to ensuring timely access to GP appointments.

I am grateful to all chairs and members of the NHSPRB, DDRB and SSRB for their thoughtful consideration of the evidence presented to them, and their reports that recognise the vital contribution that NHS staff and leadership make to our country. The pay review bodies have examined the economic picture and evidence on recruitment, retention, motivation and morale to reach their recommendations. Through their deliberations, they have made recommendations above the level we stated as affordable in our evidence. I am however accepting their headline pay recommendations as fair and well-evidenced uplifts for public servants. To maintain financial prudence, I have had to make difficult decisions on other areas of spend to afford these uplifts.

This Government have shown their willingness to make the difficult decisions needed to improve outcomes for the public from the health system. Over the past few months, we have identified how extra funds will be freed up by cutting duplication and waste, and through abolishing NHS England, and reshaping and reducing integrated care board costs by 50% to empower NHS staff and deliver better care for patients. Through NHS planning guidance, I have already outlined a significant productivity and efficiency ask for NHS systems to deliver in 2025-26—that is, through reductions in use of temporary staffing. As a result of the savings found, none of the pay increases will be paid for by cutting frontline services.

The next steps in our plan for reform will be set out in the upcoming 10-year plan and workforce plan refresh, with its laser focus on shifting care from hospitals and into the community, as we work to get the NHS back on its feet and fit for the future. Driving these efficiencies will enable us to deliver on our objective for the NHS as set out in our plan for change—making the NHS work for patients and staff.

Pay awards

The DDRB recommended a headline 4% increase to salary scales, pay ranges and the pay elements of contracts from 1 April 2025. It also recommended that an extra £750 be added to the pay points for doctors and dentists in training. In accepting these recommendations, we have committed to:

- uplifting pay points for doctors and dentists in training (circa 77,000 doctors) by 4% plus £750 on a consolidated basis;

- uplifting the salaries of consultants (c.63,000 doctors) by 4% on a consolidated basis;

- uplifting the pay range for salaried general medical practitioners (c.15,000 doctors) by 4%, uplifting the pay element of the GP contract by 4%, uplifting the minimum and maximum of the pay range for salaried GPs by 4%, and uplifting the GP educators pay scale by 4% all on a consolidated basis;

- uplifting the pay element of the general dental practitioners contract (c.24,000 dentists) and the pay scale for salaried dentists by 4% on a consolidated basis;

- uplifting the pay scales of specialist and associate specialist doctors on all contracts by 4% on a consolidated basis.

- uplifting flexible pay premia by 4% on a consolidated basis.

The DDRB made a further five recommendations, which are not directly related to headline pay, targeted at specific parts of the remit group. We need further

time to carefully consider these, working with our partners to determine the best way forward. To avoid delays to pay uplifts reaching NHS staff, we will advise Parliament separately on our response to these recommendations in due course.

The NHSPRB recommended a 3.6% pay increase to all Agenda for Change staff, alongside a recommendation to provide the NHS staff council with a funded mandate for pay structure reform. In accepting these recommendations, we have committed to:

- uplifting all pay points of Agenda for Change staff (c.1.4 million staff) by 3.6% on a consolidated basis, taking effect from 1 April 2025.

- issuing the NHS staff council with a funded mandate for 2026-27 to begin to resolve outstanding concerns within the Agenda for Change pay structure.

Given the difficult financial landscape, we will need to carefully consider as part of the SR the funding for the mandate for 2026-27, but we will work in partnership with the NHS staff council to deliver these changes from 1 April 2026.

The SSRB recommended a 3.25% cent uplift for all executive and senior managers and very senior managers in the NHS in England from 1 April 2025. In accepting this recommendation, we have committed to a 3.25% uplift for executive and senior managers and very senior managers in the NHS in England.

The SSRB also made two further recommendations. First, they recommended that an additional 0.5% of the ESM and VSM pay bill in each employing organisation be used to address specific pay anomalies, targeted at mitigating the effects of pay overlaps with the Agenda for Change pay scale. We are rejecting this recommendation on the basis that, in the current fiscal context, we believe an award of 3.25% well compensates VSMs and ESMs for the work that they do, and because previous measures of this sort have not seen widespread use by employers. Secondly, the SSRB recommended that the ESM pay framework should be withdrawn. I will be considering this in light of the abolition of NHS England and the consolidation of arm's-length bodies, and will report back to Parliament separately on our response to this recommendation.

This pay award follow publication of the new VSM pay framework on 15 May, which envisages rewards for senior leaders who are successfully improving performance, and will ensure that the NHS continues to develop and attract the best talent to the most senior positions.

We will also bring forward legislation to uplift the member contribution tier thresholds in the NHS pension scheme in line with the Agenda for Change pay award. This will mean that these staff feel the full benefit of the award, and do not move into the next pension contribution tier solely as a result of this pay rise.

Next steps

We have listened to the workforce and know that it is not acceptable that pay awards are not delivered on time. This Government are committed to NHS staff receiving their pay uplifts at the beginning of the financial year. Last year, this Government committed to speeding up the pay review process, remitting the PRBs months earlier than previous years and submitting written evidence earlier too. This means that pay awards for 25-26 will pay in packets two months sooner than last year. But we recognise that there is more to do. That is why, this year,

I am committing to remitting the health PRBs in July, with an ambition to implement awards as soon in 2026-27 as possible.

The reports of the DDRB, NHSPRB and SSRB will be presented to Parliament and published on gov.uk.

[HCWS663]

JUSTICE

Independent Sentencing Review

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Shabana Mahmood): Today, the independent sentencing review published its findings and recommendations. The review was chaired by the right hon. David Gauke alongside a panel of experts, including a former Lord Chief Justice, and representatives from the police, prisons, probation and victims' rights organisations. The Government are grateful for its recommendations, and I will ensure a copy of the review is deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

This statement sets out the Government's in-principle response. But this review must be set in its proper context. This Government inherited a prison system at the point of crisis. Our prisons are, once again, running out of space. If our prisons collapse, courts would be forced to suspend trials, the police would have to stop making arrests, and crime would go unpunished. It is shameful that, in this day and age, we are confronted by this crisis once more. The reasons are clear—the last Government added just 500 places to our prison estate in 14 years, while at the same time, sentence lengths rose. As a result, the prison population is now rising by 3,000 each year and we are heading back towards zero capacity. It falls to this Government to end this cycle of crisis.

That starts by building prisons. Last week, I announced £4.7 billion for prison building, putting us on track to hit 14,000 prison places by 2031. This is the largest expansion of the prison estate since the Victorian era. However, we cannot build our way out of this crisis. Even though we are building as quickly as we can, we expect demand for prison places to outstrip supply by 9,500 in early 2028.

It was in that context that I commissioned the independent sentencing review. Its task was clear—to ensure that the country must always have the prison places it needs, and that there must always be prison spaces for dangerous offenders. At the same time, I asked the review to address the fact that our prisons too often create better criminals, not better citizens. Instead of cutting crime, they are breeding grounds for it. The panel of experts have followed the evidence and looked at examples from countries across the world. Today, I set out an initial response—with further detail to follow once legislation is placed before the House.

The report's central recommendation is to move to a three-part sentence called the "earned progression model". The Government accept this in principle. Under this model, an offender will not necessarily leave prison at an automatic point. Instead, their release date will be determined by their behaviour. If they follow prison rules, they will earn earlier release. If they do not, they will be locked up for longer.

This echoes the model I witnessed in Texas earlier this year, which has cut crime and brought its prison population under control. Under this new model, offenders serving standard determinate sentences with an automatic release of 40% or 50% will now earn their release. The earliest possible release will be at the one third mark, with additional days added for bad behaviour. The review has suggested a new maximum of 50%, but for those who behave excessively badly, I will not place an upper limit beyond their full sentence.

For those serving standard determinate sentences with an automatic release point of 67%, their earliest possible release will be 50%. Again, for those who behave excessively badly, I will not set an upper limit.

We have rejected the recommendation to change the sentence structure for extended determinate sentences

The review also suggested that those serving extended determinate sentences should also earn an earlier release. This we will not accept. Judges give extended sentences to those they consider dangerous, with Parole Board hearings happening no earlier than two-thirds of the way through the custodial sentence. I will not change that. Furthermore, I can also confirm that no sentences being served for terror offences will be eligible for earlier release from prison.

We will increase investment in our Probation Service

In the second part of the progression model, offenders will enter a period of "intensive supervision". This will see more offenders tagged and close management from probation. The Government will therefore significantly increase its funding—by the final year of the spending review period, probation's annual £1.6 billion spend will rise by up to £700 million. This will allow us to tag and monitor tens of thousands more offenders.

We will standardise the length of recall to prison

If offenders do not comply with the conditions of their release, the sentencing review has suggested that recall to prison should be capped at 56 days. We have agreed to this policy, in principle, though the precise details will be placed before the House when we legislate.

In the final stage of the three-part sentence, offenders could still be recalled if a new offence is committed, and I will also ensure that the most serious offenders continue to be subject to strict conditions.

We will reduce the use of short sentences and increase suspended sentences

The review also recommends a reduction in the use of short prison sentences. A compelling case for doing so has been proposed in this House many times. In the most recent data, nearly 60% of those sentenced to a prison sentence of 12 months or less reoffended within a year. With reoffending rates for those who receive community sentences consistently lower, we must ask whether alternative forms of punishment would make the public safer.

It is important, however, to note that the review recommends a reduction in short sentences—not an abolition. It is right that judges retain the discretion to hand down short sentences in exceptional circumstances. We will continue to ensure courts have access to thorough risk assessments for domestic abuse and stalking cases. In addition, breaches of protective orders linked to violence against women and girls will be excluded.

The review also recommends an extension of the length of custodial sentences that can be suspended from two years to three years. During this period, the prospect of prison time hangs over an offender, should they break any of the conditions imposed upon them. Again, we accept this recommendation.

We will make community sentences tougher

The recommendations set out above will see more community punishment. For that reason, it is essential that community punishment works. The review recommends a series of measures to make community punishment tougher and to force offenders to pay back to those they have harmed. We will consider new financial penalties which could see offenders' assets seized, even if they are not proven to be linked to crime, and expanding the use of punishments such as travel and driving bans that will curtail an offenders' liberty.

We also accept the recommendation to expand intensive supervision courts. These courts impose tough conditions, including treatment requirements, that tackle the root causes of prolific offending. In these courts, offenders are regularly brought before a judge to monitor compliance with the conditions set by the courts. This leaves the prospect of prison hanging over them.

However, I believe community punishment must be tougher still. Unpaid work must pay back. Therefore, I will shortly bring together business leaders to explore a model where offenders work for them and a salary is paid not to the offender but used for the good of victims. I will also work with local authorities to determine how unpaid work teams could give back to their communities, whether that be filling potholes or cleaning rubbish.

The number of women in prison will reduce

I also invited David Gauke to consider cohorts this Government believe require particular focus, and I welcome his recommendations on female offenders. Around two thirds of female offenders receive short sentences and around the same number are victims of domestic abusers. I am pleased to note that the review's recommendation on short, deferred and suspended sentences will reduce the number of women in prison.

We will make it easier and quicker to send foreign national offenders back to their country of origin

I also asked David Gauke to consider how we tackle foreign national offenders. Today, our deportation rate is ahead of the last Government's. I welcome the recommendations to make it quicker and easier to deport foreign criminals. Under the existing scheme, foreign offenders are sent back to their country of origin after serving 50% of the custodial sentence. We will bring this down to 30%. We will also conduct further work with the Home Office on how we can deport foreign prisoners serving less than three years as soon as possible after sentencing.

We will expand the pilot of medication to manage problematic sexual arousal for sex offenders

I also asked the review to consider how we manage sex offenders. The review has recommended that we continue a pilot of so-called "medication to manage problematic sexual arousal". I will go further than this, with a national roll-out beginning in two regions, covering 20 prisons. I am also exploring whether mandating the approach is possible. It is, of course, vital that this

approach is taken alongside psychological interventions that target other causes of offending, like asserting power and control.

We will ensure our justice system serves victims

When discussing these issues, it is too easy to focus on how we punish offenders when we should be talking more about victims. I welcome the recommendations to improve the way the system serves victims. Everything I am announcing today is in pursuit of a justice system that serves victims. If our prisons collapse, it is victims who pay the price. By cutting reoffending, we will have fewer victims in future. However, there is also more we must do to support victims today.

The review recommends a number of important measures, including better identifying domestic abusers at sentencing so that we can monitor and manage them.

I also welcome the recommendation to expand the use of domestic abuse specialist courts, where trained staff support victims. To improve transparency in the system, we will extend a pilot in which free sentencing transcripts are provided to victims of rape and serious sexual offences. Again, I want to go further than the review recommends to better support victims. Exclusion zones are an important protective tool, preventing offenders from entering areas where victims might be, but these can place greater limits on victims than they do offenders. I want to change this: locking offenders down to specific areas so that victims know that they are safe wherever else they want to go.

This review sets out major reform. In appointing David Gauke, a former Conservative Lord Chancellor, to conduct this review I hoped to show that two politicians from different political traditions can agree on the reforms that our justice system requires. To end this cycle of crisis we must not only build prisons on a historic scale, deport foreign nationals faster than ever, and speed up our courts, but reform criminal sentencing.

These reforms are designed to ensure that we never again find ourselves in the prison capacity crisis which this Government has faced, and will ensure that we never again run out of prison places for dangerous offenders.

[HCWS667]

Judiciary and Prison Officer Workforce

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Shabana Mahmood): I am today announcing my decision on the pay awards for prison staff and for the judiciary. *Prison Service Pay Award 2025-26*

Having carefully considered the 13 recommendations made by the Prison Service Pay Review Body for the 2025-26 pay award, I can announce that we are accepting in full the recommendations made by the PPSRB for all staff within their remit.

The role of prison service staff in helping to keep the public safe and rehabilitate prisoners cannot be overstated. Acceptance of these recommendations reflects our priority of ensuring that prison service staff can deliver this essential frontline service and recognises their unwavering dedication to continuing protecting the public during the current prison capacity crisis.

The award will deliver a pay rise of at least 4% of base pay for all eligible prison staff between operational support grade and governors (bands 2-11), with a targeted focus on the lowest paid.

The award delivers headline pay increases of:

4% for prison officer grades (bands 3-5)

4% for managerial and prison governor grades (bands 7-12)

4% increase for operational support grades (band 2), in addition to the national living wage increase that band 2 staff received from 1 April 2025. Operational support grades will also receive a temporary increase of 5% to the unsocial hours allowance. This increase will be applied for a maximum period of 2 years, to 31 March 2027, while we consider arrangements for unsocial hours working for future years as part of future pay review body remits.

This pay award will be paid this summer and will be backdated to 1 April 2025. This Government value the vital contribution the almost 6 million public sector workers make across the UK, delivering the public services we all rely upon. The acceptance of the PSPRB's recommendations is expected to further stabilise the recruitment and retention position in the prison service. This is key to ensuring prisons have the staff they need to deal with ongoing capacity pressures.

I would like to thank the PSPRB for their valuable advice and response to the Government's evidence. The report has been laid before Parliament today and a copy is attached. I am grateful to the chair and members of the review body for their report.

Judiciary pay award 2025-26

The Senior Salaries Review Body shared their annual report with Government on 7 May 2025. This will be presented to Parliament and published on gov.uk.

I value the SSRB's expertise and independent advice in recommending a judicial pay award that reflects the important role that the judiciary play across the justice system. When making my decision, I have carefully considered the SSRB's advice alongside the financial implications for my Department.

The SSRB recommended a pay award of 4.75% for all judicial office holders within the remit group for 2025-26. I have decided to reject this recommendation, and instead a 4% judicial pay award will be applied equally to all judicial office holders for whom I have responsibility. This will be backdated to April 2025. This strikes a balance between addressing SSRB's advice and managing the overall affordability to my Department.

The SSRB highlighted their concern over the persistent recruitment and retention issues affecting parts of the judiciary when making this recommendation. I share these concerns. That is why I commissioned the SSRB to undertake the major review of the judicial salary structure. The terms of reference for this review were published on 13 May, and include looking in depth at the specific recruitment and retention issues affecting the judiciary. As I set out in my evidence, the major review is the right place to address these areas through targeted reform, and presents better value than the flat-rate pay uplift of the annual pay review. I look forward to working closely with the SSRB over the course of the major review.

I am committed to strengthening our world-class judiciary. I hope this increase reflects that, and the value I place on their independence and commitment to the delivery of justice and the rule of law.

[HCWS665]

Nottingham Inquiry: Terms of Reference

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Shabana Mahmood): On 22 April, I established an inquiry under the Inquiries Act 2005 into the attacks that took place on 13 June 2023 in Nottingham, which cost Barnaby Webber, Grace O'Malley-Kumar and Ian Coates their lives, and harmed three others.

The inquiry will be chaired by Her Honour Deborah Taylor.

HH Deborah Taylor is a retired senior circuit judge. She served as the resident judge at Southwark Crown court from 2017 to 2022. In accordance with section 3(1) of the Act, this inquiry will be undertaken by HH Deborah Taylor acting alone as chair.

In accordance with section 4(3), I have now consulted the chair on the terms of reference for the inquiry. This process is now complete, and I have today deposited a copy of the terms of reference in the Library of the House.

The terms of reference cover: a comprehensive timeline of events and the actions of and interactions between the various agencies involved, including health, policing and the wider criminal justice system. Rightly, the terms of reference allow for an inquiry that builds on previous reviews and offers scope for the chair to consider gaps and omissions where she considers it necessary to do so.

It is in the public interest—in particular for the bereaved families and survivors whose lives have been devastated by these events—that the inquiry reports in two years.

The inquiry will play a key role in learning the lessons from this terrible tragedy.

The inquiry's investigations will now be a matter for the chair. As the sponsoring Department, the Ministry of Justice will provide support and ensure that the inquiry has the resources that it needs.

[HCWS656]

PRIME MINISTER

Investigatory Powers Commissioner

The Prime Minister (Keir Starmer): I have today laid before both Houses a copy of the annual report of the Investigatory Powers Commissioner, the right hon. Sir Brian Leveson. This report covers the activities of the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office, the former Office for Communications Data Authorisations, and the Technology Advisory Panel for 2023.

The Investigatory Powers Commissioner provides independent oversight of the use of investigatory powers, as outlined in the Investigatory Powers Act 2016. This oversight includes the inspection and authorisation by judicial commissioners of the use of these powers by over 600 public authorities. This includes the intelligence and security services and law enforcement agencies.

Overall, Sir Brian's report demonstrates the good level of operational compliance and respect for the law of our security and intelligence agencies, law enforcement agencies and other relevant public authorities when using investigatory powers. Where the Investigatory Powers Commissioner has identified concerns, our agencies and Departments are working hard to address these. I thank them all for their hard work to protect the UK, at home and abroad.

Now in its seventh year, IPCO continues to provide independent oversight of the use of investigatory powers, providing assurance to both the public and Parliament that privacy safeguards are applied. In March 2024, IPCO merged with its sister organisation, OCDA, to become one organisation, while retaining the IPCO name. While the merger was outside of this reporting period, the work of both organisations is presented as one in this report. I wish to express my sincere thanks to Sir Brian, his team of judicial commissioners and all the staff at IPCO for their work.

Maintaining public trust and confidence in the exercise of investigatory powers is vital for national security and public safety, and a top priority for this Government. This report demonstrates the high quality of oversight over our intelligence and security agencies' use of the most intrusive powers. I am satisfied that our oversight arrangements are amongst the strongest and most effective in the world.

In accordance with section 234(6)(b) of the IPA, I wish to notify both Houses that the report contains no material considered too sensitive to be published. Following consultation with relevant Government Departments and agencies, the contents of this open report are not prejudicial to national security or ongoing investigations.

I will be sending a copy of this report to Scottish Ministers, as required under section 234(8) of the Investigatory Powers Act 2016, and I commend this report to the House.

[HCWS660]

TRANSPORT

South Western Railway: Transfer to Public Ownership

The Secretary of State for Transport (Heidi Alexander): Following my statement in December last year, I can confirm to the House that on Sunday 25 May 2025, South Western Railway's services will transfer into public ownership.

South Western Railway's services are the first to transfer to public ownership under the Passenger Railways Services (Public Ownership) Act 2024, a landmark piece of legislation passed by Parliament in November. From Sunday, operations will be run by a new public sector operator—South Western Railway Ltd. For now, this will be a subsidiary of the public corporation DfT Operator Ltd, which will eventually transfer into Great British Railways, once established.

C2C's services will be next to transfer into public ownership on 20 July 2025, and as previously announced, I have issued an expiry notice to Greater Anglia, confirming that their contract with the Department will now expire on 12 October 2025. Greater Anglia's services will transfer into public ownership on this date.

Sunday marks a watershed moment in the Government's plan to return the railways to the service of passengers and reform our broken railways, ending 30 years of fragmentation. It delivers on our manifesto commitment to bring passenger services back into public control and put passengers firmly at the heart of the railways.

Public ownership will ensure services are run in the interests of passengers, not shareholders, and is a vital step in enabling the Government to bring track and train together. But public ownership alone is not a silver bullet and will not fix the structural problems hindering the railways currently. That will take time.

Under this Government's plan to unify track and train under one organisation, GBR will be the single "directing mind" for the railway, putting passengers and customers first, rebuilding trust in the railway and simplifying the industry.

In February, the Government's consultation on the Railways Bill outlined plans to establish GBR, which will consolidate the 14 different train operating companies, Network Rail and DfTO into a single organisation. The Railways Bill will be laid before Parliament in this parliamentary Session, and I expect GBR to be operational around 12 months after the Bill receives Royal Assent.

[HCWS666]

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