

Monday
8 June 2026

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HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)

Monday 8 June 2026

The following abbreviations are used to show a Member's party affiliation:

Abbreviation	Affiliation
Alliance	Alliance Party of Northern Ireland
Con	Conservative Party
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
Green	Green Party of England and Wales
Ind	Independent*
Lab	Labour Party
Lab/Co-op	Labour and Co-operative Party
LD	Liberal Democrat
PC	Plaid Cymru
Reform	Reform UK
SDLP	Social Democratic and Labour Party
SNP	Scottish National Party
TUV	Traditional Unionist Voice
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party

*The term “Independent” may denote—

Members who have been elected as Independent candidates without affiliation to a political party; or

Members who have been elected after standing for a political party but no longer have the party Whip in the House of Commons.

HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

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(FORMED BY THE RT HON. SIR KEIR STARMER KCB, KC, MP, JULY 2024)

PRIME MINISTER, FIRST LORD OF THE TREASURY, MINISTER FOR THE CIVIL SERVICE AND MINISTER FOR THE UNION—
The Rt Hon. Sir Keir Starmer KCB, KC, MP

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CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER—The Rt Hon. Rachel Reeves, MP

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SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE—The Rt Hon. James Murray, MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EDUCATION, AND MINISTER FOR WOMEN AND EQUALITIES—The Rt Hon. Bridget Phillipson, MP

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SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WALES—The Rt Hon. Jo Stevens, MP

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The Rt Hon. Sir Keir Starmer KCB, KC, MP

CHIEF SECRETARY TO THE PRIME MINISTER, CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER AND MINISTER FOR INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS—The Rt Hon. Darren Jones, MP

PAYMASTER GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR THE CABINET OFFICE—The Rt Hon. Nick Thomas-Symonds, MP

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Dan Jarvis MBE, MP §

The Rt Hon. Anna Turley, MP (Minister without Portfolio)

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James Frith, MP §

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Baroness Twycross §

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Lord Coaker

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Louise Sandher-Jones, MP (Minister for Veterans and People)

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Seema Malhotra, MP §

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Michael Shanks, MP (Minister for Energy)

Lord Whitehead CBE (Minister for Energy Security and Net Zero)

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 MINISTERS OF STATE—
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Baroness Twycross §
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§ *Members of the Government listed under more than one Department*

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SECRETARY—Lynn Gardner

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THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 9 July 2024]

FOURTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HIS MAJESTY KING CHARLES III

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 787

SECOND VOLUME OF SESSION 2026-2027

House of Commons

Monday 8 June 2026

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr Speaker: Before we start today's business, I welcome in the Gallery Her Excellency the President of the German Bundestag.

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Immigration Rules: Economic Impact

1. **Dr Danny Chambers** (Winchester) (LD): What assessment she has made of the potential impact of planned changes to immigration rules on the economy. [900261]

20. **Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): What assessment she has made of the impact on the economy of her proposed changes to immigration rules. [900282]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Shabana Mahmood): Under the previous Government, net migration hit record highs after they lowered entry requirements and opened our borders. My definition of what is best for the UK economy is one where migration is controlled and where there is investment in skills and training for our home-grown workforce, not an overreliance on overseas recruitment.

Dr Chambers: I thank the Home Secretary for her response. We have 104 different nationalities working in Winchester hospital, throughout Hampshire over one third of the workers in the social care sector are born

outside the EU, and we know statistically that we are more likely to be cared for or treated by an immigrant than we are to be waiting behind one for a GP appointment. Does the Home Secretary recognise that the current visa rules for healthcare workers are driving away many of the people who are keeping our NHS and social care services running?

Shabana Mahmood: No one disputes the tremendous contribution that international workers make to our NHS. The picture the hon. Gentleman describes is replicated in constituencies across the country, and we will always welcome that contribution. Overseas recruitment in the NHS is falling primarily because the NHS is leading by example and doing what we want all employers to do: look first at domestic recruitment to ensure that the skills and expertise of the health service are home-grown. I believe that those two systems can go hand in hand, but we have to make changes at the same time.

Christine Jardine: Hospitality, social care and the tech sector are all vital sources of employment and economic stability in my constituency. The companies in those sectors are telling me that, despite their efforts to recruit domestically first, the Home Secretary's changes to indefinite leave to remain are making it very difficult for them to attract the skilled workforce from abroad that they need to keep the sector going. Will the Home Secretary reconsider the changes in the light of that impact and lighten the regulations to make it possible for these companies to survive?

Shabana Mahmood: We have to remember that currently in our country we have more than 1 million young people who are not in employment, education or training, and the hon. Lady and all Members should want us to turn that around and make sure that there are employment opportunities and a positive economic future in their own country for those young people in many of the sectors that she describes. We are the Government who have formalised that link between migration and skills reforms to make sure that companies are investing in the domestic workforce first and foremost before recruiting from abroad.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): It is a fact to be proud of that four of the world's 10 greatest universities in the global rankings are in the UK, including Imperial College London's White City campus in my constituency. We punch way above our population weight and our universities are genuine engines of growth. However, evidence shows that the withdrawal of the post-study work visa coupled with the rumours about changes in indefinite leave to remain are driving some of those brightest brains who have produced such statistics to competitor countries. Will my right hon. Friend meet me, education Ministers and my two vice-chancellors to thrash out a solution? There are real problems, but we do not want to scare off genuine innovators and wealth creators.

Shabana Mahmood: This Government have increased routes at the very top end of the skills spectrum, such as through our global talent visa, to make sure that we are attracting talent from all over the world. We have a good track record in doing so and will continue that. There is work to do with our university sector to make sure that students recruited to this country are on good courses and making a contribution, and obviously we want to make sure that we use the best of that global talent in the future. The changes we are making are not about students—students do not come to attain indefinite leave to remain in our country—but for other parts of the migration system. I will make sure, however, that my hon. Friend gets a meeting with the migration Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Dover and Deal (Mike Tapp) to discuss these matters in more detail.

Mr Jonathan Brash (Hartlepool) (Lab): In Hartlepool we are reversing 30 years of globalisation and taking advantage of the unprecedented falls in immigration, thanks to this Home Secretary, and training our own, whether through our Health and Social Care Academy, our civil engineering academy, our centre of excellence for welding or our nuclear trades academy. Does the Secretary of State agree that rather than seeing it as an economic threat, falling immigration is an economic opportunity to train our own?

Shabana Mahmood: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. At a point when we have over a million young people not in employment, education or training, it is imperative that we make progress in this area. We would be letting our young people down if we did not take this opportunity to ensure that we are investing in our domestic skills workforce. That is a cross-Department priority and the Home Office is playing its full part.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Katie Lam (Weald of Kent) (Con): The latest estimates indicate that 627,000 non-EU migrants, mostly from low-income countries, came to the UK between December 2024 and December 2025. Meanwhile, 61,000 Brits aged 16 to 24 left the UK, as did another 65,000 aged 25 to 34. In recent years, for every young Briton who has been employed, 27 young migrants from outside the EU have also joined the workforce. Does the Home Secretary accept that mass migration has wrecked economic opportunity for young people? How will that inform any changes that she makes to the immigration rules, given that almost two thirds of a million non-EU migrants came to this country last year?

Shabana Mahmood: The employment statistics that the hon. Lady has just used run from January 2020 to December 2025, so I congratulate her on exposing the track record of the Tory Government.

Unite the Kingdom Rally: Policing

2. Douglas McAllister (West Dunbartonshire) (Lab): What discussions she has had with the Metropolitan police on the policing of the Unite the Kingdom rally on 16 May 2026. [900262]

The Minister for Policing and Crime (Sarah Jones): There were several large-scale events in London on 16 May, the Unite the Kingdom rally being one of them. I had several briefings with the Met, who took a robust approach to the Unite the Kingdom rally, and I was in the control room on 16 May to see the operation for myself.

Douglas McAllister: What happens in our capital city has a knock-on effect across our entire country. My West Dunbartonshire constituent, Lindsey, contacted me to express her deep concern and shock at the abhorrent displays at the Unite the Kingdom rally. Participants openly incited racial hatred in inflammatory speeches but, more significantly, there were provocative Islamophobic stunts, involving mocking the religious dress of Muslim women. I understand those responsible were not arrested and I share my constituents' disgust. Is the Minister satisfied with the Metropolitan police response? What future action will be considered to prevent a recurrence?

Sarah Jones: The Metropolitan Police Service maintained public order and kept Londoners safe on a day when there was an unprecedented number of large-scale events. Some 43 arrests were made at the Unite the Kingdom rally and the Nakba 78: March for Palestine. In advance, 11 foreign nationals were prevented from entering the UK to speak at the event and were prevented by the Met from broadcasting to the event. Of course I understand the concerns that my hon. Friend's constituent raises, but the Metropolitan police, with their 4,000 officers on that day, did a very good job.

Shockat Adam (Leicester South) (Ind): Many in the Muslim community are feeling bewildered, besieged and beleaguered. When they exercise their democratic right to vote and the results do not go a certain way, they are accused of sectarianism. When they take to the streets to protest peacefully against genocide, they are accused of going on hate marches, all the while witnessing not one but two Unite the Kingdom marches, where there were open calls for their expulsion from this country, which are met with apparent indifference. What steps is the Home Secretary taking to protect the Muslim community from further alienation and what message does she send to those who incite hatred against them?

Sarah Jones: This Government are committed to tackling all forms of hate crime, including anti-Muslim hostility. We are actively seeking to ensure the safety and protection of all individuals and communities. The UK has a proud tradition of racial and religious tolerance within the law, and this Government are absolutely committed to building the strong and integrated society that we all want to see.

Naushabah Khan (Gillingham and Rainham) (Lab): Last week, I met one of my constituents who had faced horrible racist abuse on the train home from people who had been on the Unite the Kingdom rally. As someone of mixed white and middle eastern heritage, she told me that for the first time she felt scared in her own country. Does the Minister agree with me that we have a responsibility to tackle racial division across our country and not to ignite the situation, and that when the leader of Reform UK takes to the airwaves in the aftermath of heightened racial tensions to tell the public that they must react with “pure cold rage”, it is people such as my constituent who pay the price?

Sarah Jones: My hon. Friend’s story about her constituent will not be the only one we hear about. I notice that Reform UK is quick to slam into the television stations as soon as something occurs, but its Members do not then come to this place to debate it in the normal way. Members of this House and those beyond have a critical role to play in building the strong and integrated society that we all want to see, one that is not fuelled by hatred and division.

Lisa Smart (Hazel Grove) (LD): I think the Minister speaks for the whole House in thanking the Metropolitan police for policing riots and protests that go beyond the realms of what is legally appropriate or acceptable, and that should happen to everybody, whatever the subject of their protest. Does the Minister agree that the rules on donations to fund these rallies—one of the organisers of the rallies, Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, who has thanked his donors, is a prominent member of a political party—should apply to the organisers as much as they do to anybody involved in politics, and that those donations should be declared with the transparency expected by this House and my constituents? Does the Minister agree that anybody receiving money from domestic or foreign sources should declare it?

Mr Speaker: Order. I am not quite sure that that question relates to the policing of rallies. It is a very good question, but it is not one for today.

Identity Fraud

3. **Mr Luke Charters** (York Outer) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to help tackle identity fraud. [900264]

The Minister for Security (Dan Jarvis): We have launched a new £250 million fraud strategy focused on preventing fraud, protecting victims and strengthening enforcement. We are working closely with the City of London police to establish referral routes so that identity fraud victims can access identity repair services, and we will continue to develop guidance, tools and partnerships to help victims to recover quickly and to reduce repeat harm.

Mr Charters: Several of my constituents have had their identity stolen, leading to devastating consequences. A serving member of our armed forces had his house purchase delayed after his credit file was marked as a risk. Too often, identity theft is bundled into other offences such as computer misuse and not pursued at all. Having been a counter-fraud specialist, I know how widespread this issue has become. Will my hon. Friend meet me and campaigners to discuss the case for identity fraud becoming a stand-alone offence?

Dan Jarvis: My hon. Friend speaks with real authority on these matters. He will know that the theft of personal information is already criminalised in legislation, including the Fraud Act 2006, the Computer Misuse Act 1990 and the Data Protection Act 2018. To ensure that those laws remain effective, we commissioned an independent review of disclosures and fraud offences. The review has submitted its final report to the Government and will be published shortly. We will consider its findings carefully and what further action may be needed to strengthen our response to identity fraud. I am sure that the noble Lord Hanson will happily meet my hon. Friend.

Gregory Stafford (Farnham and Bordon) (Con): At my constituency surgery on Friday, Mr De Mesquita spoke to me about his concerns that Report Fraud was not passing on to local police forces information about victims of identity fraud. Given that those victims are often vulnerable and likely to be victims of other crimes, will the Minister let us know what he is doing to ensure that Report Fraud is passing on to local police forces the details of victims of such crimes?

Dan Jarvis: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that important point, and I assure him that I will raise it with the noble Lord Hanson, who leads on matters relating to fraud. I hope the hon. Gentleman acknowledges that the Government have invested £250 million in working with a range of different organisations to bear down on the levels of fraud that we are seeing. That includes law enforcement, GCHQ, banks, telecommunications and tech partners, and civil society. We have also invested £31 million in a new online crime centre. I will look carefully at the points that he makes and refer them to Lord Hanson.

Indefinite Leave to Remain: Skilled Legal Migrants

4. **Laura Kyrke-Smith** (Aylesbury) (Lab): What assessment she has made of the potential impact of the proposed changes to indefinite leave to remain on skilled legal migrants resident in the UK. [900265]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mike Tapp): Our immigration system must operate in a way that attracts the best and the brightest. Earned contribution will reward those who integrate and contribute to this country, with shorter pathways for higher earners and those in public service roles among others. We are carefully considering responses to our public consultation before setting out the next steps.

Laura Kyrke-Smith: Last month I joined a very generous community event at Herali, a much-loved Sri Lankan restaurant in Aylesbury, which is dependent on staff who are here on skilled worker visas. The proposed changes to ILR put many of my local residents, including Sri Lankans and Indians, in a very uncertain and difficult position. When they arrived, the clear path to settlement was five years, but now they do not know what to plan or hope for. That is equally difficult for their employers, whether in the care sector, nurseries or hospitality businesses such as Herali. Will the Minister tell me what reassurance I can offer to these skilled legal migrants, who are such an important part of our communities?

Mike Tapp: That sounds like a fantastic restaurant. As the Home Secretary has already laid out, there are around 1 million young people currently out of education, employment or training. We are creating a system that is firm, protects the economy, protects welfare from rising further and avoids more pressure on our social housing demands, and also fair, so that it encourages and rewards genuine economic contribution and integration. We have consulted and had 200,000 responses, and we are working on a final solution, which will be announced in due course.

Ben Obese-Jecty (Huntingdon) (Con): Last week, the Government voted against my amendment to the Armed Forces Bill, new clause 5, which would have waived visa fees for the spouses and children of armed forces personnel and veterans. That was, of course, a Labour manifesto pledge—as it was a Conservative manifesto pledge—to ensure that the families of those who have fought to defend this country are allowed to reside here without being charged £3,229 per person just to remain in the country following service. I understand that the reason the policy has not been pursued is a Home Office issue, rather than a Defence issue, so will the Minister explain why it has not been progressed in two years? Could he give an update on whether the policy will be amended when the changes come out later this year?

Mr Speaker: That is not quite your area, Minister.

Mike Tapp: I thank the hon. Member for his question—as a veteran, it is an important question, and I respect it. I am working with colleagues in the Ministry of Defence at the moment to deliver that important manifesto commitment.

Police: AI Trials

5. **Martin Wrigley (Newton Abbot) (LD):** What discussions her Department has had with police forces on the adequacy of competitive tendering for trials of AI. [900266]

The Minister for Policing and Crime (Sarah Jones): As with all new technology, decisions about procuring and using AI are a matter for operationally independent chief constables. The Home Office is supporting the police to adopt AI rapidly and responsibly, with £115 million of investment over the next three years. That includes investing in the national centre for AI, which will help the police make informed decisions.

Martin Wrigley: Palantir appears to have a habit of avoiding competitive tender and scrutiny by using free trials and locking up the contract specifications after getting a foot in the door. I congratulate the London Mayor on stopping the recent potential contract offered by the Met police without a competitive tender process. However, last week, the estimated £17 million contract for the National Firearms Licensing Management System was won by a bid from Palantir of just £7.5 million, just 44% of the expected price. That suggests either a massive error in estimation, or Palantir buying the job, giving it unfettered access to whisper in the ear of all 43 police forces. Will the Minister pause the signing of that contract, which is due this Thursday, so that appropriate scrutiny can take place to ensure that a competitive tendering process has been followed transparently?

Sarah Jones: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that Palantir is not buying the job. In the Home Office we have very robust processes, which were followed in full. The current licence management system is approaching the end of its life, and it is very important that we have a good one to maintain safety. There was an open and competitive process, run by the Police Digital Service and BlueLight Commercial, which do these things on behalf of policing. The hon. Gentleman is right that the contract is yet to be signed, but Palantir is the preferred supplier and all the right processes were followed.

Chris Vince (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the new legal framework around facial recognition technology. We have seen successful trials of this in Harlow, but does the Minister agree it is essential that that technology is deployed lawfully, proportionately and with accountability, and that that is taken into account when any Government contract is granted?

Sarah Jones: I agree with my hon. Friend that live facial recognition is an extraordinarily innovative new technology that helps us catch really nasty criminals in my constituency and in other parts of the country, and we are investing in it through our police reform agenda. We are also legislating for it, because we totally recognise that there is some uncertainty about what it is used for and how it should be used. We want to put that right, be really clear about it, and put it on the face of legislation.

Indefinite Leave to Remain: Proposed Changes

6. **Jack Rankin (Windsor) (Con):** When she plans to implement her proposed changes to indefinite leave to remain. [900267]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mike Tapp): Living in this country permanently is a privilege, one that should be earned, not granted by default. We are currently analysing 200,000 consultation responses, and we expect to introduce major reforms in the autumn.

Jack Rankin: In January 2025, I urged the Government to act on indefinite leave to remain, to prevent the fiscal calamity of locking in the Boriswave. I thank the Ministers for their movement in that regard. It is important that we are transparent with the public about who is using visas as a route to a life on benefits, so can the Minister provide an estimate of the number and proportion of individuals holding ILR who are currently in receipt of universal credit?

Mike Tapp: As of January 2026, 222,000 people with ILR were actively claiming universal credit.

Illegal High Street Trading

7. **Jo Platt (Leigh and Atherton) (Lab/Co-op):** What steps her Department is taking to help tackle illegal trading on high streets. [900268]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Shabana Mahmood): Dodgy shops are blighting our high streets—we all see them in our constituencies—so this Government have announced a new high street organised crime taskforce, investing £30 million in law enforcement action. That will fund more officers and a nationwide unit based in the National Crime Agency, and will strengthen powers to tackle these criminals.

Jo Platt: We welcome the creation of the Government's high street organised crime unit, and in particular its focus on strengthened partnership working between enforcement agencies. In Leigh and Atherton, communities can see that commitment, but they are asking when they will see action on dodgy shops operating in plain sight. Given the national campaign I have launched with colleagues, will the Minister set out when enforcement will begin locally, how partnerships will be delivered and how we will ensure that these criminal enterprises are shut down without delay?

Shabana Mahmood: First, I welcome my hon. Friend's important work in this area. Greater Manchester is one of three hotspot areas selected for an enhanced operational crackdown in addition to the nationwide campaign. I cannot comment on specific dates due to operational sensitivities, but the public can expect to see the start of a major offensive against dodgy shops beginning this year.

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

Dame Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con): The Home Secretary will be aware of the inquiry that the Committee is conducting on the role that organised criminality plays in the crime we see on our high streets. We heard compelling evidence recently about counterfeit goods, the role they play, and the role that forced labour plays throughout that supply chain. Can the Home Secretary explain what she is doing to combat forced labour? I look forward to putting more questions to her when she appears before my Committee before the summer recess.

Shabana Mahmood: It is always a pleasure to appear before the Home Affairs Committee, and I thank the right hon. Member and her Committee for their work on this important area. She will know that the money we announced recently will fund work by trading standards, His Majesty's Revenue and Customs and immigration enforcement. If we pick up cases of forced labour, that will engage our modern slavery obligations. That money is part of a full-spectrum response to a complex issue. I saw some of the counterfeit goods when I joined the police on a raid at the end of last week. It is a real problem, and the Government are ensuring that we fund every aspect of how we fix it.

Extremism

8. **Damien Egan** (Bristol North East) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to help tackle extremism. [900269]

The Minister for Security (Dan Jarvis): The Government are delivering a fundamental reset of how we counter extremism. That includes publishing an annual state of extremism report, which will arm frontline public sector workers with the information they need to tackle extremism in the UK.

Damien Egan: Extremism in the UK is growing at an unprecedented rate. Extreme left and extreme right ideologies, alongside growing Islamist extremism, are being fuelled by increasingly brazen interference from foreign states, and we need to be clear-eyed about those threats. At a recent summit hosted by Wilton Park, I heard how countries such as Norway now treat extremism as a national security priority, linking it more to defence. Will the Minister consider establishing a proper mechanism

so that we can designate domestic extremist groups? Will the Government commit to recognising extremism and social cohesion as a first-tier national security priority?

Dan Jarvis: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his attention to these important matters. As we set out in "Protecting What Matters", the Government recognise countering extremism and enhancing social cohesion as a priority area, and we set out a range of commitments to achieve that. Although there is no explicit offence of extremism, the police have a range of tools and powers to counter the activities of extremists. We are fast-tracking the creation of a new state threats designation power, which will further clamp down on individuals and groups carrying out hostile activity for foreign states.

Sir Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con): I am sure the Minister will have seen footage of a recent attack on Helen Mirren, where she was described—excuse my language, Mr Speaker—as a "Zionist bitch". This is just another example of deliberate extremist intimidation aimed at frightening off anyone in public life from supporting the existence of the state of Israel or defending the Jewish community. While Helen Mirren decided not to press charges, does the Minister agree that the police should treat such assaults with the utmost seriousness, as they are attacks not just on the individual, but on our shared values in this place of freedom of speech and freedom of expression?

Dan Jarvis: The right hon. Gentleman has raised an important point. I have seen the footage. Like, I am sure, all other Members, I was shocked but not surprised by it. The police have an important job to do in cracking down on this kind of activity, but I can give the right hon. Gentleman an absolute assurance of the priority that this Government attach to antisemitism. We have seen a range of abhorrent antisemitic attacks in recent times, and we will do everything we can to stand against them.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Matt Vickers (Stockton West) (Con): We have seen the devastating impact of extremism on our country, with the Jewish community experiencing disgraceful attacks. Does the Minister share my concern about the fact that in recent elections, candidates such as Kate Hollern were threatened with beheading? More recently, we have seen convicted terrorists standing for election. What will the Minister do to prevent that? Does he believe that individuals with terrorist convictions should be allowed to stand for election?

Dan Jarvis: The shadow Minister will know that the defending democracy taskforce, which I chair, is looking carefully at the issues that he has raised, which are indeed abhorrent. He has made a powerful point. The Government are considering whether further action is required, and I should be happy to work with him on it.

Antisocial Behaviour

9. **Jim Dickson** (Dartford) (Lab): What recent progress her Department has made on tackling antisocial behaviour. [900270]

The Minister for Policing and Crime (Sarah Jones):

Through our Crime and Policing Act 2026 we have new and enhanced powers to enable local agencies to tackle antisocial behaviour offenders, and our neighbourhood policing guarantee has ensured that every police force in England and Wales now has a dedicated antisocial behaviour lead and a local action plan to crack down on offenders who blight our communities.

Jim Dickson: Residents of Darenth and other parts of my constituency are facing persistent nuisance owing to the antisocial riding of motorbikes and quad bikes in local woodlands over the last few years. I know from my conversations with the new district commander for Dartford and Gravesham that the police are starting to use the powers in the Crime and Policing Act to seize and crush vehicles and issue community protection notices to offenders. Can the Minister tell Dartford residents how those new powers, and other Government measures, will finally tackle this antisocial behaviour at source?

Sarah Jones: I think we all share the hunger to tackle this awful crime, which blights communities. Through the Crime and Policing Act, we have strengthened police powers to swiftly seize vehicles that are used antisocially. We have stripped away the requirement to issue a warning, which enables officers to act immediately to take vehicles off the streets, and we are introducing new respect orders, which can tackle persistent offenders in this and other areas. We have just carried out a consultation, and will shortly be looking at what we can do to shorten the period for police dispersal so that these things can be crushed more quickly.

Jess Brown-Fuller (Chichester) (LD): In my constituency and across the country we have seen a troubling rise in violence towards wildlife, often with the use of catapults. Wildlife crime is not an isolated incident; it is usually related to something else. Studies have shown that seven out of 10 victims of domestic violence who owned pets said that their domestic abusers were also threatening, harming or killing those pets. Will the Minister please look at Holly's law, which would create an animal cruelty register to deter wildlife crime, which often leads to other violent crimes?

Sarah Jones: We will certainly look at any proposals to tackle wildlife crime. I know that the use of catapults is a particular issue. This week I shall be holding a roundtable with a number of interested parties, including people who will, I suspect, be saying the same thing as the hon. Lady. We fund the national rural crime unit and the national wildlife crime unit, which provides more resources for this purpose, but we will certainly keep all options on the table.

Violence against Women and Girls Strategy: Implementation

11. **Jas Athwal (Ilford South) (Lab):** What recent progress her Department has made on implementing the violence against women and girls strategy. [900272]

16. **Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab):** What recent progress her Department has made in implementing the violence against women and girls strategy. [900278]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Shabana Mahmood):

We have made the landmark commitment to halve violence against women and girls in a decade. The Government have already begun to implement domestic abuse protection orders, which have protected more than 1,000 victims, Raneem's law, placing domestic abuse experts in 999 control rooms, and the provision of specialist rape and sexual offence teams in all police forces in England and Wales. Our ambition is clear, but there is much more work to be done.

Jas Athwal: Harshita Barela was just 24 years old when she was murdered and her body was dumped in a car boot in Ilford. Nearly two years on, her husband and alleged killer has still not been arrested, and is believed to be hiding in India. A few weeks ago I was humbled to meet Harshita's parents, who had made the journey to trace her last steps. They deserve justice and closure. Does the Home Secretary share my horror at this vile murder, and will she meet me to discuss what further steps can be taken by those in this country, working with the Indian authorities, to bring her alleged killer to justice?

Shabana Mahmood: My deepest sympathies are with Harshita's family for their unimaginable loss. No one should have to go through what she and her loved ones have endured. As the investigation is live, I cannot comment further. I hope my hon. Friend will understand that doing so could prejudice the investigation and the path to justice for Harshita and her family.

Mary Kelly Foy: At my recent market stall at Durham Pride, local Labour members and I spoke to many people about the Government's VAWG strategy. The message we received was clear: it is strongly welcomed but long overdue. The clock is ticking, and there is still no published timetable. When will the Government action the plan and the necessary grassroots consultation? How will progress be publicly reported so that women and girls in Durham and beyond feel reassured that this Government take seriously the effort to stamp out violence against women and girls?

Shabana Mahmood: First and foremost, this Government's commitment is evidenced by our landmark commitment to halve the levels of violence against women and girls over a decade. We have a deliberate 10-year vision to do that, because it is a wider societal change that we are seeking to enact. We are delivering that transformational change to keep more victims safe. Work has begun, but there is much more to be done. As my hon. Friend will know, these matters are discussed regularly in the House, and I will keep Members updated.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Home Secretary for her responses. In the last two to three weeks in Northern Ireland, we have had two horrific murders of women and their unborn children; in both cases, heavy sentences have been handed out. Given her responses to the hon. Members for City of Durham (Mary Kelly Foy) and for Ilford South (Jas Athwal), it is important that we have similar rules in Northern Ireland for those who carry out vile, horrific killings of their partners and their unborn children. There must be a sentence that equals that.

Shabana Mahmood: Let me assure the hon. Gentleman that criminal law applies across the whole of the UK. Those are things that we track as a Government, and I will look at the substance to see if we need to change the law. We work very closely with our colleagues in Northern Ireland, and I will ensure that the ministerial team discuss these matters with their counterparts in Northern Ireland.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Stamford) (Con): May I put on the record my sympathy for the family and colleagues of Sir Alex Younger? He was a true patriot.

Two years ago, this Government pledged to halve violence against women and girls within a decade, but the Minister responsible for delivering that promise has now resigned. In her resignation letter, the hon. Member for Birmingham Yardley (Jess Phillips) laid a damning charge: that Government progress came from the fear of embarrassment from

“threats made by me in light of catastrophic mistakes”,

and that it was only when the Prime Minister’s shameful decision to appoint paedophile apologist Lord Mandelson “bubbled up” that No. 10 would “kick into gear” and finally do anything about women and girls.

Two years in, we still do not know how this Government are going to measure violence against women and girls and whether it has halved, so my ask is simple and is something that the Government can do today: extradite Andrew and Tristan Tate to the UK to answer Crown Prosecution Service charges that were laid in 2024. It is a political decision. A year since I asked for them to be extradited, the Government should do what is right. If they are in Dubai or Hong Kong, they can be extradited. Why will the Government not extradite them?

Shabana Mahmood: The shadow Minister will know that we never comment on matters relating to extradition, or on any specific cases. I would never want to say anything at the Dispatch Box that prejudices any future action—she knows that well enough. She has made her point in relation to those two men, and I am sure that point has been heard.

Mohamed al-Fayed: Alleged Abuse

12. **Dave Robertson** (Lichfield) (Lab): What steps her Department plans to take to help support the response to alleged abuse at workplaces connected to Mohamed al-Fayed. [900273]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Natalie Fleet): It was an honour to be by the side of the Prime Minister when he met Fayed victim-survivors last week. I was proud that one of my first acts in post was to help facilitate the first meeting of this kind with these brave women. No one is above the law, and those who perpetrate or facilitate abuse must be held to account. I will continue to engage with my hon. Friend’s all-party parliamentary group so that victim-survivors know that this Government are listening.

Dave Robertson: I welcome the new Minister to her place. I thank her for her work in facilitating the historic meeting last week, which was the first time a sitting Prime Minister has met a group of survivors in this space. It was a great meeting, but the survivors are

understandably sceptical, because they have been let down severely by so many institutions for so long. Can she outline the steps she will take in the short and medium term to ensure those survivors start seeing the justice they have been denied for far too long?

Natalie Fleet: I thank my hon. Friend for the work he is doing with the APPG. As the Prime Minister made clear, the Government are committed to engaging with the Fayed victim-survivors and ensuring that their concerns are addressed. I will shortly be in contact with them to follow up on the meeting last week, and we will set out the form that that engagement we take. We will absolutely ensure that this is the start of a process, not the end. These women absolutely need to be heard.

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): Alongside the hon. Member for Lichfield (Dave Robertson), I was present at the meeting with the Prime Minister last week. I welcome the Minister to her place and thank her for her time at the meeting. We have heard consistently from survivors that they were trafficked in many locations by many different people. Given that that partly fits the category of organised crime, what consideration has the Minister given to getting the National Crime Agency involved with this investigation, which would help build survivors’ confidence and trust in the ongoing investigation?

Natalie Fleet: I thank the hon. Member for her work on the APPG and the vital work she is carrying out in supporting these women. Where there is evidence of criminal activity, it is the police’s duty to investigate, and it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the specifics. My job and the role of the Government are to support the police to ensure that justice is delivered as swiftly as possible, and I am absolutely committed to that.

Illegal Migration

13. **Rachel Taylor** (North Warwickshire and Bedworth) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to help reduce levels of illegal migration. [900274]

The Minister for Border Security and Asylum (Alex Norris): This Government are taking decisive action to restore order and control at our borders. We have removed nearly 70,000 people who have no right to be here, we are overhauling our asylum system to reduce pull factors and we have funded more officers to disrupt organised immigration crime, with interventions at their highest rates and the number of linked arrests rising by over 55%.

Rachel Taylor: I thank the Minister for his answer and for visiting my constituency of North Warwickshire and Bedworth recently. My constituents will strongly welcome the most recent data showing that small boat arrivals are massively down this year, but can the Minister confirm that this important progress is just the beginning of restoring order and control at our borders?

Alex Norris: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her question. When I visited her community, I heard in no uncertain terms on the doorstep how important this issue is to people, as it is for my community and the rest of the country. That is why we are stepping up the international action we have taken, including the important new deal with France. Domestically, we will be legislating

through our immigration and asylum Bill to create the system that I know her constituents want, which is a fair but firm one.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Home Secretary.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): Nigerian illegal immigrant Gift Oladele was recently jailed for the brutal rape of a teenage girl. He dragged her into isolated woods, leaving her terrified, and she now has recurrent nightmares. Oladele had committed previous violent sexual offences, and the Home Office rightly tried to deport him, yet an immigration judge allowed him to stay because of Oladele's human rights, and he went on to violently rape the teenage girl. I believe the rights of women and girls to be protected are more important than the supposed human rights of foreign rapists to stay here. Is it not time to leave the European convention on human rights, so that all criminals such as Oladele can be deported?

Alex Norris: Let me start by saying that I agree that that is a truly awful case. It shows how important it is that we remove people who commit crimes, and we have removed nearly 8,000 foreign offenders since we came into office. But the right hon. Gentleman's prescription does not match up to a solution: leaving the ECHR would undermine our returns agreements with countries around the world. Instead, our contention is that we can improve it. We have said that we will look at legislating to narrow the domestic interpretation that has sprawled around article 8, and he will have seen the progress we have made internationally on article 3. That is the sensible approach, rather than chasing a sugar high that he knows—because he did not do it when he could have done so—will not work.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Max Wilkinson (Cheltenham) (LD): Brexit has seen off a number of Prime Ministers, but as we approach the 10th anniversary of the referendum this Prime Minister has apparently been given a period of indefinite leave to remain in No. 10. Ministers are clearly feeling unusually generous, but are they aware of a report by the Oxford Migration Observatory, which shows that Brexit is actually a pull factor for dangerous small boat crossings? It is now obvious that the Government's one in, one out scheme with France is never going to work at the scale required, so will Ministers today re-state for the official record that Brexit is a large contributor to the small boats crisis, and will they commit to pursuing a new comprehensive asylum deal with the entirety of the EU?

Alex Norris: If we are talking anniversaries, I would like to take this opportunity to wish my fellow class of 2017 intake a happy ninth anniversary today. Our ninth anniversary has been full of Liberal Democrat spokespeople trying to pin every single thing on Brexit. I say to the hon. Gentleman that those conversations, designed just to create division in the country, do not serve the common aim of ensuring we have a robust asylum system. We can do that through ordinary collaboration with our neighbours on the continent. I do that frequently and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary does that frequently. Look at the action that that has delivered with France alone. That is the better way forward.

Migration: Safe and Legal Routes

14. **Perran Moon** (Camborne and Redruth) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to introduce new safe and legal routes for migrants. [900275]

The Minister for Border Security and Asylum (Alex Norris): The Government committed to new safe and legal routes in the "Restoring Order and Control" statement, and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced that the student refugee route will open this autumn, with arrivals in autumn 2027. We are working with partners to design new routes to ensure they are safe and controlled, and we will provide an update to the House in due course.

Perran Moon: In recent years, families across Cornwall have been offering safe and welcoming homes to Syrian and Afghan refugees through the community sponsorship scheme. Without using the words "dreckly", "mañana" or "in due course", can the Minister specify when the community sponsorship scheme will be extended, as promised?

Alex Norris: And I thought the hon. Member was my hon. Friend, Mr Speaker! But what he says speaks to the innate goodness of the Cornish people—it is the same in my own community and across the country. Whether it has been the Syrian scheme, the Afghan scheme, Hong Kong British nationals overseas or Homes for Ukraine, the British people have leant in when schemes have been ordered and controlled. We are working with stakeholders on what that looks like, but getting this right is crucial to the programme's success, which is why it takes a little bit longer—it will take us time to get it right. I make no apologies for that, but I will say that further details will be set out "in due course".

Gideon Amos (Taunton and Wellington) (LD): Dr Alastair in my constituency is doing vital medical work. In normal circumstances, his wife would be allowed to visit him on the appropriate visa, but because she is in Gaza and would have to travel to Israel or to other cities to give biometric information, she cannot visit or join him here. Will the Government change the rules in the way they did for Chevening scholars, so that people in Gaza can give biometric details in other ways?

Alex Norris: I cannot speak to that individual case, but I recognise the challenges where no visa centres are open in areas of conflict. We have taken what I think is a quite pragmatic and flexible approach, not just with students but medical evacuations as well. If the hon. Gentleman is able to write me and the Minister for Migration and Citizenship, we will look at that case accordingly.

Topical Questions

T1. [900286] **Dr Danny Chambers** (Winchester) (LD): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Shabana Mahmood): I believe that we in this House have a duty to protect the children of this nation, but there can be little doubt that collectively we have failed to keep pace with the changing threats they face. Nowhere

is that more apparent than in the horror of online sexual exploitation and abuse, but we have begun to change the story.

Today, we laid down the gauntlet to tech firms. We have told them that they must block nudity on children's phones. We know the tech is there; we know there is a way. The question is: do they have the will? The tech firms now have three months. The clock is ticking. If they do not introduce these controls, we will legislate and force them to do so. This is a landmark moment in the protection of children in this country, so if I may, I will end by paying tribute to the woman who has pushed for this harder than anyone else, my hon. Friend and former colleague in the Home Office, the Member for Birmingham Yardley (Jess Phillips). The children of this country will be safer as a result of her work.

Dr Chambers: I too pay tribute to the hon. Member for Birmingham Yardley for her immense campaigning and work in this area. Can the Secretary of State be more specific on what actions will be taken to prevent women and girls becoming victims of AI-generated sexual content, because it really can ruin lives?

Shabana Mahmood: The hon. Gentleman is right that it can ruin lives. The Government have already held different platforms to account, and the hon. Gentleman will know about our row with Grok and the action we forced as a result. We are alive to the online environment and what that means for deepfake images and nudification apps—areas where we have already taken action. The action today on device-level controls to block nudity for children is a game-changing moment because it will prevent children from becoming sex offenders before they even know what sex is, and from being victims of sextortion. It is the right way forward.

T3. [900288] **Laura Kyrke-Smith** (Aylesbury) (Lab): My local Jewish community does not have a dedicated building to meet and worship in. That means that they are not eligible for the Government's expanded support for Jewish communities, which is primarily aimed at fixed places of worship. I welcome the Government's expanded commitment, and I am grateful for their engagement with me on this issue, but will the Minister give an update, including on whether support can be extended to security guards?

The Minister for Security (Dan Jarvis): My hon. Friend may be aware that I recently met the hon. Member for Mid Buckinghamshire (Greg Smith) and the rabbi for south Buckinghamshire. She will know that the Jewish community protective security grant scheme, administered by the Community Security Trust, funds security measures such as CCTV, alarms and fencing, which require fixed sites to install and maintain. However, I fully recognise the fear and concerns raised by mobile Jewish congregations, and we are working closely with CST to understand what more support we can give.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Home Secretary.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): The "Police Anti-Racism Commitment", a copy of which I have here, published in March 2025 by the National Police Chiefs' Council, asks police to reverse engineer the same arrest rates for different ethnic groups, even though offending rates are different. It expressly calls for different racial

groups to be treated differently, saying that people should not treat "everyone 'the same'" or be "colour blind". This is a formal policy requirement for two-tier policing. I have been raising this issue for over a year, and I have never had an answer, including from the Home Secretary last Tuesday. Let me try again: does she agree that this racist and dangerous policy document should be immediately withdrawn—yes or no?

Shabana Mahmood: The right hon. Gentleman knows full well that the NPCC, which is independent of Government, is rightly reviewing the wording of the "Police Anti-Racism Commitment" to ensure that there is no ambiguity or suggestion of differential treatment. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman speaks from a sedentary position, but I say to him that I have taken more action on preventing differential treatment in the criminal justice system than he or his party ever did.

Chris Philp: The Home Secretary still gives no clear answer. We have repeatedly raised serious concerns with the Government's Islamophobia definition. South Wales police has now instructed staff to record anything that goes beyond "legitimate discussion of Islam", even if there is no crime. That could then be disclosed on someone's Disclosure and Barring Service check. Police officers in south Wales will now have to decide what is or is not legitimate discussion of Islam. No other religion is treated that way in south Wales. That is completely wrong. Parliament has rightly repealed blasphemy laws, and criticising religion is part of free speech, so does the Home Secretary agree that the guidance is wrong and should be scrapped immediately? Let's try a simple yes or no.

Shabana Mahmood: Given that the right hon. Gentleman represents a party and former Government that did not take any action on dealing with hate crime, anti-Muslim hatred, or other forms of hatred, I am not going to take any lessons from him. Let me make clear from the Dispatch Box that the police, wherever they are—south Wales or anywhere else—must always police without fear or favour, and we all must always be equal before the law.

T4. [900289] **Liam Conlon** (Beckenham and Penge) (Lab): Organised car crime has affected residents in Beckenham and Penge for many years, with cars stolen to order and quickly shipped abroad. What powers and support have been given to the police to crack down on vehicle theft, and how is the Minister working with manufacturers to ensure that modern vehicles are harder to steal?

The Minister for Policing and Crime (Sarah Jones): Around half of vehicle crime involves manipulation of signals from remote devices. Through the Crime and Policing Act 2026, we have criminalised the possession, importation, making, adapting and supplying of the electronic devices used to commit vehicle theft, which will make a real difference in my hon. Friend's constituency.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Max Wilkinson (Cheltenham) (LD): Last week we discussed the murder of Henry Nowak, which continues to shock the country. As we said last week, his father,

Mark, asked politicians not to use the tragedy to stoke division and hatred. With that request in mind, and considering the need to maintain trust in policing, would the Home Secretary like to take this opportunity to urge Vice-President J. D. Vance and the US Department of Justice to butt out of our politics, leave British law enforcement to Britain and, just as importantly, show respect for British victims of crime?

Shabana Mahmood: I urge all commentators, would-be commentators and wannabes of every description to leave our criminal justice system to us. We have been going for a very long time, and we will carry on in that vein.

T8. [900294] **Sureena Brackenridge** (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): Following investment in police operations targeting predatory behaviour in Wolverhampton's night-time economy, including the deployment of specially trained undercover officers, alongside the welcome support given by the Late Night Safe Haven and Night Guardians, what further action will the Government take to strengthen prevention so that women and girls feel safe in night-time and other high-risk settings?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Natalie Fleet): Women and girls must feel and be safe everywhere, which is why we have provided funding for police to trial and evaluate Project Vigilant, where plain-clothed officers are deployed within the night-time economy to identify and de-escalate behaviours known to precede sexual offending. We are providing £13.9 million to improve the policing response to violence against women and girls nationally. New legislation means that someone causing intentional harassment, alarm or distress because of a person's sex can now face up to two years in prison.

T2. [900287] **Edward Morello** (West Dorset) (LD): Dorset police is among the 10 worst-funded forces in the country. It faces higher operating costs due to our rural geography and, during the summer, has to contend with a population that increases by 40%. It has already had to make cuts worth £2.8 million over the past three years. Will the Secretary of State reform the police funding formula to properly account for rurality, lower council tax growth and seasonality?

Sarah Jones: The hon. Gentleman is a bit behind the times; we have already announced that we are reforming that formula.

T9. [900295] **Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Academics, professionals and environmentalists have experienced dozens of arrests and yet no charges have been upheld. At a recent vigil for the trees, there were more police than protesters. Will the Minister meet me to discuss the over-policing of my constituents, who are literally standing up for nature, and ensure that we see off these draconian Tory policies, which over-egg the policing needed for environmentalists?

Sarah Jones: I thank my hon. Friend for her question—*[Interruption.]* The right to peaceful protest and public assembly is one that we must protect, but it must be balanced with the need to maintain public order and

keep the public safe. Perhaps she could write to me with further detail. If she wants to have a meeting to talk about it, I would be very happy to do that.

Mr Speaker: Order. I just want to help the hon. Member for York Outer (Mr Charters). The Minister was answering, and you walked straight across both of us—not that I should need to explain that.

T5. [900291] **John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): Immigration, especially non-EU migration, remains too high. Many of my constituents across the Scottish Borders want to see a cap on the number of people who can come into the United Kingdom. Will the Home Secretary introduce a binding cap, set by Parliament, to bring down immigration once and for all?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mike Tapp): Under the previous Government, we saw 2.5 million people arrive in just four years—that is one in 30 people in the country at this time. This Government have brought migration down by 82% since its peak and by 41% in the past year.

Catherine Fookes (Monmouthshire) (Lab): I welcome my hon. Friend the Minister to her place. Surviving Economic Abuse estimates that around 750,000 women are trapped in a joint mortgage with an abusive partner or ex-partner, with the only way out often being to let their home be repossessed, as abusers refuse to contribute their share of repayments or prevent the sale of the property. I welcome the fact that the Government want to explore solutions, including what could be done through the Financial Services and Markets Bill, but what steps will the Government take to stop joint mortgage abuse as part of their wider commitment to halving violence against women and girls?

Natalie Fleet: The VAWG strategy and the financial inclusion strategy set out ambitious commitments to tackle financial abuse. The Government are determined to embed the prevention of violence against women and girls across all Departments. Our VAWG strategy and the financial inclusion strategy are committed to exploring how we can make it harder for abusers to use joint financial products, including joint mortgages, as a tool of abuse, and how to better support victim survivors. Last week the Economic Secretary to the Treasury and I hosted a roundtable with 16 banks and financial service organisations to underscore Government priorities, share best practice in the financial services sector, and agree how we can work together to deliver commitments in the VAWG strategy and the financial inclusion strategy.

T6. [900292] **Helen Maguire** (Epsom and Ewell) (LD): There has been an exponential rise in the use of e-scooters, which are incredibly dangerous—some can reach speeds of up to 17 mph. The police have told me that at the moment they are having to adapt existing powers and that there is a lack of central guidance. Will the Minister outline whether more central guidance is forthcoming on the apprehension of individuals using e-scooters?

Sarah Jones: I am working closely with the Department for Transport on the challenges with e-scooters and the use of e-bikes, which I know many Members across the

House will have. Making sure that we have more neighbourhood police in our communities is the absolute core of the issue, and that is what the Government are delivering.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham Yardley) (Lab): I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute back to the Home Secretary, who has worked incredibly hard on the issues on which the Government made their announcement today. The BBC carries the headline that we will stop children sending and receiving images; can she say for the House that the change will also stop children ever taking naked images of themselves, and give us an assurance that her Department is working on robust legislation and a legislative vehicle to make sure that can happen?

Shabana Mahmood: I very much thank my hon. Friend for her question, and she is absolutely right. Let me clarify for the House that this involves the taking of those images. We will also follow through on the threat to legislate, and the Department is working at pace on the content of the legislation and the appropriate vehicle in the second Session.

T7. [900293] **Gareth Bacon** (Orpington) (Con): In the last three years, the number of Metropolitan police officers has fallen by 3,000, and it is now at a lower level than it was in May 2016, when Sadiq Khan became Mayor of London. Overall crime in London has increased by 26% and knife crime is up by 27%. It is true that policing in London is partially devolved, but over 70% of the funding to the Metropolitan police comes from the Home Office, and that makes the Home Secretary a key player. What is she doing to reverse the dismal decline that we have seen in Sadiq Khan's decade of failure?

Sarah Jones: The murder rate is at its lowest level ever recorded in London. The police have more money and more resources to tackle crime, and we are working closely with them as they do that. I gently remind the hon. Gentleman that when his party's Government recruited police officers, they put them behind desks. We are putting them on our streets, fighting crime.

Dame Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): With the news that the Stradey Park hotel has now gone into receivership, what assurances can the Minister give my constituents in Llanelli that his Department has no plans to use the premises for asylum seeker accommodation?

The Minister for Border Security and Asylum (Alex Norris): I assure my hon. Friend and colleagues across the House that we are closing hotels, not opening them.

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland and Fakenham) (Con): My constituents hate seeing organised shoplifting taking place with apparent impunity. Norfolk police recognises this and has identified suspects in more than a third of all cases, but what is the point when the Government's assumption is that any sentence shorter than 12 months will automatically be suspended? What are the Government going to do about it?

Sarah Jones: We are making some progress in this space. It may seem small, but there was a 1% fall in shop theft offences last year, and a 30% increase in the last year of the hon. Gentleman's Government, so we are

making progress. In particular, we are working hard on how we target prolific offenders more. We are using new technology and of course working with the private sector. Our Crime and Policing Act 2026 introduced new powers, so we are going to tackle shop theft in a way that the previous Government did not. We are also launching the centre for AI soon, which will give us new technology that we can use. We are bearing down on shop theft.

Sonia Kumar (Dudley) (Lab): Sadly, last week Dudley town centre fell victim to vandalism again. The new central seating area was damaged, impacting local businesses and footfall. I welcome the Government's efforts to restore neighbourhood policing and our new police station, but what further steps will the Minister take to tackle antisocial behaviour and to take criminals off our streets and allow businesses to operate safely?

Sarah Jones: We are working hard to introduce respect orders, which will be really important in this space. I am happy to visit my hon. Friend to see exactly what the problems are and what we can do, but we are introducing whatever powers we can to tackle "low-level" antisocial behaviour—that is what the previous Government called it—which actually blights our communities.

Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst (Solihull West and Shirley) (Con): I listened carefully to the Minister's response to my hon. Friend the Member for Broadland and Fakenham (Jerome Mayhew), but the reality is that every day shopkeepers are facing abuse and threats and being stolen from. A direct consequence of the presumption in the Sentencing Act 2026 that those with a sentence of 12 months or less will not face prison is that there is no deterrent. Can the Minister genuinely say that our streets are safer as a result?

Sarah Jones: First, we have introduced a new offence of assaulting a shop worker, which the previous Government failed to do. We are using every single tool in our armoury. Unfortunately, the previous Government did not provide the prison places they promised, so we have to deal with the situation as we find it.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): The role of faith liaison officer is extremely important in Lewisham, but the post has been deleted. The officer is important with regard to preventing extremism and building community cohesion: they meet with faith leaders and have been integral to the inter-faith peace walk. I ask the Minister to look again at the role and see what more can be done. This is important not just for Lewisham but across the Met area and, indeed, across the country.

Sarah Jones: As my hon. Friend knows, that is a decision for the Met in terms of how it allocates its resources, but I hear what she said. In the light of the tensions we have faced in recent months, I am sure there is a role for policing in building relationships with our faith communities.

Pete Wishart (Perth and Kinross-shire) (SNP): Every few weeks, assorted far-right activists descend on my peaceful city of Perth to holler abuse at asylum seekers placed in hotels by the Home Office. They come tanked up on misinformation and loathing, and the people of

Perth are getting thoroughly sick of it. Some who attend have even been served with bans in their own communities, yet they roll up in Perth. What will the Home Secretary do about these individuals? Will she consider something like buffer zones between the protesters and the hotels?

Alex Norris: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that important point. We know that those hotels across the country are providing a focal point for people to do things that they absolutely should not do, and we condemn that behaviour in the fullest terms. Our No. 1 goal is to shut the hotels—that is the priority—and I make that commitment to the community of Perth. Alongside that, we work with the local police to ensure that areas are supported and that all tools are used as effectively as possible. I can support the hon. Gentleman in that.

Tom Hayes (Bournemouth East) (Lab): We are a patient people and a compassionate community in Bournemouth, but there is a feeling in town that, with our three asylum hotels, we are being asked to do more than our fair share. Will the Minister please set out for my constituents that Bournemouth is uppermost in his mind as he closes hotels and that Bournemouth's asylum hotels are being prioritised for closure?

Alex Norris: My hon. Friend raises that issue with me very frequently indeed, and for good reason. I totally accept his characterisation. The people of Bournemouth have three such hotels, which is an extraordinary pressure not just on public services but on community tensions. I do not want those hotels open a minute longer than they have to be, so Bournemouth is absolutely uppermost in our minds.

Suella Braverman (Fareham and Waterlooville) (Reform): Earlier this year, the race and faith network at Greater Manchester fire and rescue service wrote to its firefighters targeting anyone who might be representing Reform UK at the local elections in what can only be described as an attempt at intimidation. Firefighters can legitimately stand in local elections. Does the Minister agree that such politicisation and institutional bullying is wholly unacceptable? What will the defending democracy taskforce do to investigate that and stop it happening again?

Dan Jarvis: I listened carefully to what the right hon. and learned Lady said and will give it due consideration as chair of the defending democracy taskforce.

Euan Stainbank (Falkirk) (Lab): The Government have cut the asylum backlog, reduced the number of people arriving illegally and shut more than half the hotels opened by Tory Ministers. Places in Scotland like Falkirk, Perth and Dundee must see further progress this year. When will we see the next phase of the hotel exit plan? How will Ministers ensure that it is equitable across the nations and regions of the United Kingdom?

Alex Norris: I am conscious of this issue, and think also of the Cladhan hotel in Falkirk and the impact on the local community, because my hon. Friend is rightly very dogged in raising this with me. I want to see that hotel closed. We are, of course, in the slightly better weather of the year, which puts pressure on services.

Nevertheless, we want the hotels closed. We have made a commitment to do that within this Parliament, but I say to colleagues that they will not be open a minute longer than they have to be.

Lisa Smart (Hazel Grove) (LD): Stephen Yaxley-Lennon has publicly thanked the donors who funded the recent Unite the Kingdom marches, which needed a significant police presence. We have heard mention several times this afternoon of equality before the law, so does the Home Secretary agree that the laws regarding the reporting of donations, both from the UK and from overseas, apply to members of all political parties equally?

Sarah Jones: Transparency underscores democracy, and we need to make sure we have that. Of course, we will talk to our colleagues at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government who run elections to make sure we are doing everything we should be doing.

Perran Moon (Camborne and Redruth) (Lab): The horticultural sector in Cornwall is worth about £100 million a year, but it is reliant on the seasonal worker scheme. The scheme numbers are announced annually at the end of the year, but the daffodil season in Cornwall begins in January. Will Ministers meet me to discuss an earlier announcement and a two-year rolling scheme?

Mike Tapp: It is important that we continue our strategy to bring net migration down while also maintaining agricultural industries. I have met a number of people across the sector and of course I am happy to meet my hon. Friend after questions.

Sir Roger Gale (Herne Bay and Sandwich) (Con): Further to the answer given to the hon. Member for Lichfield (Dave Robertson) earlier, Mohamed Fayed is beyond the reach of terrestrial justice, but many of the ladies he abused are still waiting for justice. The Metropolitan police has been conducting an inquiry into the activities of those who aided and abetted Fayed for many months. Will the Home Office ask the Met to expedite the inquiry so that those ladies can at last have justice?

Natalie Fleet: I can absolutely confirm how close this issue is to my heart. Within the boundaries of operational independence, the Home Office is regularly engaging, and rightly so, with the Metropolitan police. Those women absolutely deserve justice, and I will do everything within my power to make sure that they get it.

Dr Al Pinkerton (Surrey Heath) (LD): My constituent, Richard, has been unable to work for four months because of Disclosure and Barring Service delays. Things are getting desperate at home, and he faces the prospect of defaulting on his mortgage this month. There has been a 10-month delay from the point of application to now. Will one of the Front-Bench team look at his case in particular, to help him out, but also try to take a hand of the DBS more generally?

Sarah Jones: I am certainly happy to look at that particular case. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could write to me and I will look into it.

Greg Smith (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): As if the Government's announcement on watering down the provisions of the Equipment Theft (Prevention) Act 2023 were not disappointing enough, the secondary legislation to enact what is left of it still has not been tabled. Where is it?

Sarah Jones: It is a shame: the hon. Gentleman is much nicer when we meet personally than he is in the Chamber. He knows that we are working on that, and he knows that we will do it as soon as we can, but I am happy to have another conversation with him.

Edward Morello: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In my topical question earlier, I asked the Minister whether the Department would reform the police funding formula to account for seasonality and rurality. The Minister said that that announcement had already been made; actually, only a review of the funding formula has been announced. Can you give me guidance, Mr Speaker, on how I can get information on what will be included?

Mr Speaker: You have put that on the record, and those on the Front Bench have heard it. I think it was an

error rather than a complete misleading of the House, so I think we can leave it at that.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Stamford) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In March, I requested two briefings from the Home Office as a member of His Majesty's loyal Opposition: one on Islamist terrorism and one on the security threat in Northern Ireland. After months of chasing, at the end of last month I received a reply from a private secretary informing me that

"we will need to decline the request of a briefing for Alicia Kearns on the security and threat picture in Northern Ireland and the Islamist terrorist threat".

It is not unreasonable for the Opposition to request two briefings in six months. What advice and guidance can you kindly give, Mr Speaker, on how we can get the briefings we need so that we can hold the Government to account?

Mr Speaker: The Chair has no responsibility for that, but the Government have a responsibility to ensure that the Opposition are briefed. I am sure that point will have been noted.

Digital Safety: Children

3.44 pm

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology if she will make a statement on the Government's new policy announcements regarding children's online safety.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology (Kanishka Narayan): The Prime Minister has announced that this Government will take decisive action to strengthen children's online safety, including new expectations on technology companies to introduce crucial safety measures on children's phones. The Government are clear that children are facing unacceptable levels of sexual harm online, including grooming, sextortion and coercion into sharing intimate images. A single image can trap a child in a cycle of abuse—something I have personally heard about from young people, families and civil society. I hold them in my mind and heart as we take action to stop this harm at source.

To address this issue, we have set out expectations that technology companies introduce device-level protections for children. The protections will prevent children from taking, sharing or viewing nude imagery across all core device functionalities, including camera, messaging apps, search functions and file sharing. The protections are built directly into the operating system.

We recognise that companies have already developed and implemented nudity detection on devices, and we want to work collaboratively with industry to build solutions and call on companies to take action within three months. We have been clear that if industry does not meet our high expectations, we will not hesitate to legislate. Furthermore, the Government's "Growing up in the online world" consultation closed on 26 May. The Government are reviewing the responses and will provide an update in the coming weeks.

Munira Wilson: Thank you for granting this urgent question, Mr Speaker. I thank the Minister for his response. Today and over the weekend, we have seen a Prime Minister who has spent months completely disengaged from the digital threats facing our young people suddenly experiencing an eleventh-hour damascene conversion. This sudden rush seems to be driven entirely by a looming ballot in Makerfield and a full-scale rebellion on his Back Benches.

We Liberal Democrats will not criticise someone for reaching the correct position, even if it has taken them some time, but unfortunately this Government's approach remains profoundly weak. It is shameful that the Prime Minister has to beg big tech to stop the proliferation of child sexual abuse imagery. He could and should make these changes anyway, so I appeal to the Minister and, if he is watching, the Prime Minister: just bring forward the legislation. Why is the Prime Minister still asking big tech to co-operate with him when it has constantly shown a total disregard for our children and young people?

Broader proposals regarding a ban on harmful social media for teenagers were briefed to the newspapers over the weekend. The Liberal Democrats welcome these

reports, and again urge Ministers to move quickly and decisively. Only through a smart film-style age-rating system can we protect children from harmful online content and algorithms. I am delighted that, in pursuit of a legacy, the Prime Minister seems to be borrowing more Liberal Democrat ideas wholesale—tiered age-rated access, ending infinite scrolling and tackling online gaming, not just social media—despite ordering his MPs and peers to vote repeatedly against many of those proposals during the passage of Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026.

However, today is not about who voted which way. I ask the Minister and, through him, the Prime Minister to remember the children who have lost their lives because of the harms they have encountered online, and those whose mental and physical health and education have been harmed by what they have been exposed to online. It is for those children that we must work together to bring about change. The Prime Minister must stop begging tech companies to protect our children and start acting himself—now.

Kanishka Narayan: It is astonishing to hear the Liberal Democrats mention a lack of action. On Grok, this Government stood up to the richest man in the world, stood him down and as a result secured protections for people in this country. We have acted on cyber-flashing and strangulation in pornography, banning nudification tools and criminalising nudification, and putting personal criminal liability on tech bosses if they do not act. I understand that the Liberal Democrats are seeking relevance by doing a strategy review, but their complaint is still too much.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Bromborough) (Lab): I welcome this announcement, but is it not shocking that these companies have to be told what is unacceptable—that children should not be able to send and receive naked images? I ask the Minister: is this a tech problem or an issue of a lack of understanding and decency at the heart of these companies?

Kanishka Narayan: I thank my hon. Friend for a point well made. We have been consistently robust with tech companies on this question. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham Yardley (Jess Phillips) for her leadership on this question. It is, to me, not a technology problem; we have the technology to act on this, and we will now deliver that in the real world.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Peter Fortune (Bromley and Biggin Hill) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) on securing this important urgent question, and suggest that the Minister perhaps shows a touch more humility on this important issue.

His Majesty's loyal Opposition would welcome measures to prevent under-16s from accessing harmful social media. After all, it has been our policy for some time, and we are glad that the Government are finally starting to catch up. This Government's record of kicking the can down the road on children's online safety contrasts starkly with the action taken by the Conservatives. The last Government brought in the Online Safety Act 2023,

which is already cutting the number of children accessing porn. When it became obvious that more needed to be done, the Leader of the Opposition stood alongside parents and campaigners in calling for more. Only then did the Prime Minister leap swiftly into action—by announcing a four-month consultation on an issue so necessary and so blindingly obvious to the rest of us.

Let us not forget that just six months ago, the Prime Minister was personally opposed to a ban. Now, with nothing else to show for his time in office, he has performed yet another U-turn and discovered that protecting children was his priority all along. This is not leadership; it is legacy hunting, and thin gruel after so many missed opportunities: the safer phones Bill, the amendment to the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025, and my noble Friend Lord Nash's amendment, which was opposed not once, not twice, but three times before the Government finally conceded. Labour constantly voted down the very protections it now says are required.

So why now? Is it a genuine epiphany or is it the by-elections, or is it the rather inconvenient fact that a rival from the north has already staked out this ground, leaving the Prime Minister with little choice but to follow? Time and again, this Government have to be forced to do the right thing, and do it only after they have exhausted every other option.

However, I do want this to work, so I ask the Secretary of State, via the Minister, three questions. Will these protections extend to existing devices or only to new handsets? If it is the latter, I am concerned that because 90% of 12-year-olds have hand-me-down phones, it will leave the most vulnerable children the least protected—

Mr Speaker: Order. I welcome the shadow Minister to the Dispatch Box, but he is supposed to have two minutes. He has now spoken for nearly three minutes, so I am sure that the Minister will have grasped what he had to say.

Kanishka Narayan: I first point out that in government, the Conservatives took seven years to pass a Bill and then found that law to be inadequate. That is why they are proposing all the things they are trying to do. This Government are listening to the people of Britain. I have been around listening to thousands of young people and families, and they say that they have a Government who are listening with humility and getting the action right on this central question. They say, on age assurance for adult content, that this Government have listened and acted robustly. They said so on Grok when the Opposition were missing in action. On the shadow Minister's point about existing devices, I point out to him that a major provider has already applied age assurance at the device level for existing devices as well. We will learn the lessons and ensure that we are acting robustly in protecting young people.

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

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I welcome the announcement today. The Education Committee recently took evidence from social media and gaming companies, which left every member of the Committee profoundly concerned. They downplayed the issues, denied the scale of harm and overplayed the magnitude and effectiveness of their own responses, so

we have very little confidence that big tech knows what is required and has any motivation to do it. If, as seems likely, legislation is required after three months, can the Minister provide an assurance that the drafting of that legislation is already under way so that we do not lose any more time before our children are safe online?

Kanishka Narayan: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that time is of the essence, and I can confirm that we are working closely with the Home Secretary and the Home Office to make sure that we are ready to go if the companies do not act in the way they need to.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Dr Danny Chambers (Winchester) (LD): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) this urgent question. I am very disappointed that the Minister brought petty party politics into his response, because we have consistently proposed legislation that could have been implemented months ago. I speak on behalf of parents, teachers, carers and the children themselves in asking why the Prime Minister is pleading with tech companies about this. He is the Prime Minister; he should be leading the charge on blocking child sexual abuse material on smartphones. It is absolutely baffling that we have only reached this point now. We saw earlier this year the horrifying effects of Grok and other chatbots that are able to generate and share explicit content containing women and children at the request of online users. Children deserve far more than this dither and delay. The tech companies do not even deserve this three-month ultimatum. The Prime Minister should not be begging; he should be telling the big tech companies, "No to the proliferation of child sexual abuse imagery, and no to putting profit over the safety of children."

Kanishka Narayan: Perhaps the hon. Member did not listen to the questioning about politics from his own party, but let me say two things. First, when I go around the country and speak to parents and young people, they say to me that the fact that 116,000 people have engaged with our consultation shows that this is a question on which the British public have strong views, but also that they have a British Government who are now putting those strong views directly into public policy action. On the question of pace, I simply point out to the hon. Member that we are moving at pace on this issue, and in particular that the Prime Minister has secured changes. When I went to Australia two weeks ago, they said to me, "Why was the UK the first place to secure changes on nudity blurring on operating systems for a major provider?" That is the result of the robust engagement we have had. The House is rightly questioning the pace of legislation. I am interested in the pace of outcome, and that is what we are delivering.

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab): Social media companies have been conducting a social experiment on our children for too long and parents have been left trying to bear the burden. I thank the Minister very much for many meetings over many months. Can he tell us the criteria for deciding which platforms are going to be deemed safe or unsafe when determining what young people should have access to and at what age? In particular, can he reassure the House that this will not be left to parents, as YouTube, for example, is still pushing for?

Kanishka Narayan: I thank my hon. Friend, who has been a remarkable champion for young people and families on this question, and I have deeply valued her input and expertise. On her question about definition, I will not pre-empt the decisions that will result from the consultation, but her representations on harmful functionalities are very much top of mind for me. I assure her that it will not be parents who will bear the burden of enforcement; we will ensure that it is very much the platforms who are responsible for enforcement and for acting.

Mr Speaker: I call Father of the House.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): Rather than trading party political points, can we all agree that these huge companies are rotting our children's minds with addictive algorithms? While we know that banning things seldom works because people circumvent it and it leads to criminality, will the Minister and the Prime Minister go to these companies and say that they are in the last chance saloon—either they take decisive action, which we know they can do, or we will ban children from going on social media?

Kanishka Narayan: In characteristic fashion, the Father of the House has given wise counsel, and I will very much take it to heart in the way that the Government act.

Clive Efford (Eltham and Chislehurst) (Lab): It is clear that the sociopaths that run these platforms have no concern whatever for the welfare of anyone, but particularly our children, and that they will listen only if legislation is put before this House that makes them act and sends a clear message to them, so when are we going to do that?

Kanishka Narayan: I absolutely feel the weight of the point my hon. Friend makes about the inadequacy of what the tech companies have done so far. We are acting to make sure that young people in this country are secured from the harms they are experiencing. We have done that already by engaging robustly with the companies. As I said, we are already world-leading in that a major operating system has been reformed only in the United Kingdom to secure our children from harm. If that does not happen, we are working in parallel to make sure that the force of the law is felt as well.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): It is a pity that the Minister has chosen attack as the best form of defence when so many Members across the Chamber have repeatedly raised their concerns about the issue over many years. Nevertheless, I will set aside his bombast in the hope that the implementation of these welcome changes is more thoughtful.

Will part of the planned guidance for parents about screen usage, particularly by very young children, address parents' screen usage in the presence of their young children? There is growing evidence that what is now called technofence is having a strong impact on the attachments that parents form with their children in the early months and years of life, and that that is being felt, certainly in Andover and elsewhere in my constituency, in primary schools when those children arrive. It would

be helpful for parents to understand the impact that screen usage is having on them and on their attachment to their children.

Kanishka Narayan: The right hon. Member makes an incredibly thoughtful point about something that I have heard in anecdote when engaging with young families. I am conscious that we are running a large-scale media literacy campaign to support parents in their understanding of social media and its impact on them and their relationships with their kids. I will take his comments and ensure that they are fed into the guidance that is prepared.

Becky Gittins (Clwyd East) (Lab): The hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) mentioned delay on this issue; perhaps she did not enjoy the same level of consultation that I and many of my Labour colleagues enjoyed with our constituents, which would be a shame. When I was in Ysgol Maes Garmon recently consulting with groups of parents, young people and students, I was surprised by how much commonality there was in what they asked for from this consultation, and it was my privilege to present what they said to the Minister last week. Does he agree with me, and indeed them, that it is the Government's responsibility to call the tech companies to the table, so that there is an opportunity for parents, young people, Government and tech companies to all work together to protect our young people?

Kanishka Narayan: I thank my hon. Friend for her depth of engagement with young people and families in her constituency, which she has shown in her representations to me. I have heard consistently from young people, both here and abroad, that in the way that we have engaged on this question, we have made sure that we are doing politics differently: we are listening to the voices of young people and families and putting them at the heart of our decisions. She has done that in her community and we will do that across the country.

Caroline Voaden (South Devon) (LD): It is funny how the thought of the Prime Minister's legacy has suddenly spurred him on to take action to protect our children, when he has resisted for so long. That being said, it is welcome that the Government are listening to the Liberal Democrats' proposal for a harms-based approach and are considering restricting different social media sites at different ages, rather than imposing a blanket ban that will have unintended consequences and be unworkable. Will the Minister confirm that the Government will include addictiveness as a factor when determining age restrictions for different sites, platforms, games and features?

Kanishka Narayan: In the spirit that has been recommended by the House, I will ignore the political attack in the first part of the hon. Member's question. Her point about addiction being an important vector of harm is very much on our minds as we think about the appropriate action.

Rachel Taylor (North Warwickshire and Bedworth) (Lab): Parents and teachers across North Warwickshire and Bedworth are worried sick that tech companies are wilfully allowing young people to share and access explicit content on their platforms and devices, and they

are crying out for help. Does the Minister agree that it is high time the tech giants were held to account and forced into action to keep young people safe, and will the Government legislate without delay?

Kanishka Narayan: I wholeheartedly agree with my hon. Friend, who has been another remarkable champion: she has engaged with people in her community and represented those voices to me. We will ensure that those voices result in quick as well as deeply robust action.

Sir Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con): The Minister is aware of my concern about the interaction between whatever the Government choose to ban and the workings of the Online Safety Act 2023 that we already have. I know the Minister recognises that that is an important interaction. Will he reassure me that the Government are fully aware that whether they ban access to social media entirely for children, or ban specific functionalities, we will need to ensure we do not undermine the duty of care that the OSA requires of social media platforms and others?

Kanishka Narayan: The right hon. and learned Member, with all his expertise and experience on this theme, makes an incredibly thoughtful point. He has made that point to me before, and I assure him it is on my mind to ensure that whatever we do, there is no levelling down of the force of the child safety duties under the Online Safety Act on the platforms—if anything, there is a levelling up.

Melanie Ward (Cowdenbeath and Kirkcaldy) (Lab): To test Instagram's claim that its teen accounts provide age-appropriate content, I set up a teen account as a 17-year-old boy called David. Without searching for anything, it took just 11 minutes of scrolling for David to be shown antisemitic conspiracy theories. Does the Minister agree that that is a disgrace? That is just one example of why it is time to stop asking social media companies to make their products safe and instead start requiring them to do so through regulation.

Kanishka Narayan: My hon. Friend makes an incredibly important contribution. I brought together Jewish leaders to ensure that they got time with the companies to tell them about the depth of prejudice they experience online, and I was horrified when I heard a very similar set of anecdotes. I agree with her, and the Government will continue to ensure that we bring the full weight of regulation and policy to bear against the tech companies.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): While we all welcome the fact that the Government are finally acting, I will point out to the Minister that not a single parent of the very many parents in Edinburgh West who have been in contact with me has requested that the Government ask the tech companies to behave differently. Every single one of them is concerned about their child—a child who is not the problem, but the victim of the tech companies. Is it not time to recognise that we made this mistake with the press? We left them to self-regulate over decades, and we ended up with Leveson and all sorts of problems, so why are we doing the same thing with the tech companies? We want change, so we

should demand change and legislate for it, not let the people who created the problem decide when and how they will fix it.

Kanishka Narayan: I was visiting young people and families in Leith in Scotland just a few weeks ago. The thing I heard about more than anything else was the scale of harm that young people in those families were experiencing and a desire that we focus on doing the thing that stops that harm. That is why we will act robustly on the consultation we have done. In this instance, as I have mentioned before, we have already secured major changes; we will continue to do so and, in parallel, we will prepare legislation. I am interested in ensuring that young people in Edinburgh and across the country are protected from the horrific harms.

Matt Rodda (Reading Central) (Lab): I welcome today's decisive action. There have been the most appalling tragedies across the country, including in my constituency, where parents have lost children due to online harms. I know the Minister and the Prime Minister are working closely with parents, but may I urge the Minister to continue to do that, to carry out the type of engagement he has been carrying out, and to listen to the example from Australia? We look forward to hearing about more decisive action in the near future.

Kanishka Narayan: One of the big lessons of the Australian experience and beyond is that policy in this context is about not just short-term impact, but long-term norms. We will achieve that impact only if we bring parents and families with us. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, who has been a remarkable champion, particularly for bereaved families in his constituency who have experienced the utmost tragedy and, through it, have shown the most remarkable resilience.

Sir John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con): While I welcome the Government's belated intention to act in this area, does the Minister agree that there would be no need to wait for legislation if the social media companies actually started to enforce their existing age requirements for participating online? Many children under the age of 13 are able to create accounts and interact, despite the fact that that is completely against the terms of the platforms.

Kanishka Narayan: The right hon. Gentleman is totally right. Social media companies are already required to enforce the age assurance thresholds that they face under existing legislation. Where that is not happening, we continue to back Ofcom to ensure that it acts robustly and uses every single power it has. We will continue to review whether more is needed to ensure that that is robust action.

Ms Julie Minns (Carlisle) (Lab): It has been more than 20 years since I was one of half a dozen people who co-wrote the world's first code of practice to protect minors from age-inappropriate content. One of the biggest challenges we faced then was age verification. Will the Minister assure us that the technology and the devices are now there and in place so that under-18s can verify their age?

Kanishka Narayan: I have been very conscious of my hon. Friend's expertise in this domain, but I am glad to hear of her pioneering experience on the question of age verification, too. We have taken this action because,

[*Kanishka Narayan*]

through our engagement, we have made sure that the technology is now in a good place to robustly verify the age threshold of 18. That is why we want to see it extended, to make sure young people are secure online.

Suella Braverman (Fareham and Waterlooville) (Reform): I have met victims of online sexual exploitation—it is an absolutely devastating crime that needs to be stopped. However, I fear that the Government's plans are going to make things worse for everyone while taking little action to protect children online. The Australian model has not worked, and I fear that these Government plans will effectively open the door to state-mandated surveillance and digital ID for the entire population. We all want children to be safe online. Brilliant technology exists, such as parental control software and other excellent mechanisms; can we not use that technology more, rather than imposing an authoritarian ID database on the entire population?

Kanishka Narayan: That is a remarkable mischaracterisation of what the Government are looking to do, and I think the bulk of the House will feel the weight of what the right hon. and learned Member has just said. There is a straight choice here between backing parents and their families in a context where they are experiencing remarkable difficulties in keeping up with modern technology, and backing platforms. I am astonished that she has said that the Reform party is backing tech billionaires and platforms, not parents.

Naushabah Khan (Gillingham and Rainham) (Lab): Unfortunately, I do not believe that the tech giants will do as they say and act in the right way on this issue. What consideration is the Minister giving to legislation, particularly to ensure that all platforms can meet the same standards, but also so that we can future-proof against new platforms?

Kanishka Narayan: I share my hon. Friend's scepticism, so let me say two things. The first is that actions matter more than words, and we have already demonstrated that we can move in a pioneering way through the world-first action that we were able to take regarding a major operating system earlier this year—a move that has been praised by international partners. Turning to my hon. Friend's point about law, as I mentioned at the outset, the Home Secretary, the Home Office and I are working closely together to prepare law in parallel, to ensure no stone is left unturned when it comes to securing our young people's future.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Stamford) (Con): I welcome the Government's belated move on social media, but can the Minister clarify whether the technology prevents photos from being taken in the first place, or whether it scans people's devices to prevent them sending photos? There are understandable privacy concerns. The Minister's Department has also briefed the media that YouTube Kids will be excluded from any such action by the Government. Can he explain why?

Kanishka Narayan: On the hon. Member's first question, while we will continue to look at the most effective ways of making this happen, the existing technology largely uses classifiers that ensure that, even at the point of taking the images, camera rendering can prevent those

photos from being taken. On her second point, she will be aware that as a matter of course, I will not comment on briefings.

Laura Kyrke-Smith (Aylesbury) (Lab): I have spoken to many young people in Aylesbury and the villages about this issue. One boy told me about the content he had seen, from terrorist beheadings to sexual abuse. He said to me, "Please don't stop us communicating with our friends—we want to do that—but please stop us seeing this illegal and traumatising material, and please help us manage our addiction to these social media platforms." Does the Minister agree that the tech companies cannot be trusted with our children's safety or their futures, and that the Government have to step in now?

Kanishka Narayan: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend—she has also been a persistent campaigner on this question, and I have valued her input and the conversations I have had with her. Clearly, the experiment that we have allowed our young people to be a part of has not worked; we must bring it to an end, and we will do so robustly and imminently.

Vikki Slade (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): I welcome the proposals announced today, but I am concerned that they appear to be limited to nudity. Children who have been subjected to self-harm content or who have been encouraged to take their own lives, and those who have seen extreme violence, do not appear to be covered. My son George told me that without any attempt to find them, he was fed the images of Charlie Kirk's murder pretty much as soon as it had happened, and I do not see anything in this change to prevent something like that from happening again. Can the Minister confirm that it will include measures on extreme violence, as well as on those awful sites that are causing children to hurt themselves?

Kanishka Narayan: It is valuable that the hon. Member has raised those particular harms. I assure her that extreme violence and self-harm content of the sort she has described are already significant and priority offences under the Online Safety Act. Platforms have liability for making sure that that sort of content is proactively rooted out, and where that is not happening, the regulator has the powers it needs to act against it and will continue to do so. The particular change we are considering is about a very specific classifier of nudity—it is much harder to build classifiers for particular types of violence. However, I will of course continue to work with the hon. Member, and any other Members who are interested, on what more we can do.

Tom Collins (Worcester) (Lab): I welcome the Government's position on this issue. We know that the technology is capable and present. I have spoken to those in the UK developing it, but it is being realised against headwinds, because there is no pull. For every other product area or technology, consumers rightly expect safety, and that is built into our product safety laws, but that is not the case with digital. There is no pull for this technology from the big tech companies. Does the Minister agree that we should move in a direction that creates this pull for innovation, for safety as a value and for technology that delivers safety? Such innovation could be enriching our economy as much as the technology at the moment is threatening people's health.

Kanishka Narayan: Safety by design is an incredibly important principle. I valued its mention in the online safety legislation and in our engagement with companies. It is an attractive and tractable way of driving change, too. My hon. Friend has done extensive work on this issue, and I look forward to engaging with him in depth to make sure that his ideas feed into our decisions.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): As long as children are given access to social media I very much doubt that it will be possible to prevent them from seeing harmful content. Given the strong assurances from the Minister that he will certainly be taking action to prevent them from seeing extreme content, can he explain to the House what sanctions will be available effectively to punish those social media companies that defy the legislation?

Kanishka Narayan: The existing legislation provides for significant fines. More than 100 investigations have been conducted, and millions of pounds of fines have been levied on companies for inaction, too. Under any prospective new regime, I will make sure that the enforcement levers are as robust as they can be. The clear lesson from elsewhere is that compliance is critical to reshaping norms, and I want the companies and the bosses to feel the weight of that.

Jim Dickson (Dartford) (Lab): I thank the parents, teachers and young people in Dartford who came together with me at the end of last month to discuss how to take action against what social media companies are engaged in, which has been described as the great rewiring of our childhood. I was pleased to be able to provide a report to the Minister's Department after that engagement. There was near consensus that we want to see age restriction on social media access, a digital age of consent on data access and more guidance for parents and families from trusted sources. Does the Minister agree that it is vital that we take steps in all those areas, as well as the welcome announcement today on smartphones?

Kanishka Narayan: I thank my hon. Friend for the engagement he has done and for sharing the lessons from it across the three areas that he talks about: age restrictions, the ability to wield appropriate consent, and guidance for parents. The central theme is that parents and young people feel a loss of agency, and that is exactly the fundamental focus that this Government have: to restore the agency of people over platforms.

Seamus Logan (Aberdeenshire North and Moray East) (SNP): There remain serious concerns about the ability of children to use livestreaming on social media and the risks and harms that may arise. That issue has been raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) in the past. In addition, Members will be well aware of the risks posed to children by strangers, who are in some cases adults with malevolent and illegal intent. Will the Minister confirm that livestreaming and the protection of children from these predators will fall under the scope of the forthcoming Government response?

Kanishka Narayan: The hon. Member raises important points about livestreaming and what is called stranger pairing, which is the ability for strangers to engage with

young people online on a series of platforms. Livestreaming and stranger pairing together seem to me to be an important way in which international criminal networks have undertaken child sexual abuse. It is at the top of our minds as we think about regulating functionalities and features that are some of the most challenging aspects of what drives harm for young people.

Lola McEvoy (Darlington) (Lab): I thank the Minister for answering this urgent question today, and urgent it is. While the tech companies are spending millions of pounds congratulating themselves on how they are going above and beyond, children in Darlington tell me that the parental controls are really easy to work around. Can the Minister outline how these new settings on devices will be safeguarded to make sure that children cannot toggle them on and off to regain access to functionality?

Kanishka Narayan: My hon. Friend has been extremely thoughtful before in relation to these issues, and I agree with what she has said. In my experience with young people and families, parental controls have not been easy to engage with, and nor have they been completely effective in driving down the harm in question. As for the effectiveness of what we have announced today, there is clear evidence that age assurance at device level has already been effective in some instances. The technology also appears to be pretty effective in understanding nudity and therefore blocking it. We are looking at that precisely, because we think it is radically more effective than age assurance just at the level of the application. I will continue to bear my hon. Friend's lessons in mind.

Sir Gavin Williamson (Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge) (Con): In my constituency, this issue is of real concern to parents as well as children. Some of the big tech companies seem to resemble the big tobacco companies of the 1960s. We have had a great deal of briefing from the Government, and we have had an announcement that was not made in the House. Will the Minister commit himself to coming to the House when the guidance is ready, to set out exactly and clearly the steps that the Government will continue to take to give real reassurance to the parents in my constituency who are so concerned about this matter?

Kanishka Narayan: The Government are already committed to a conversation as well as a vote in the House on the substantive question of the consultation. I will ensure that there is even fuller scope for engagement in the Chamber on the full set of questions that the right hon. Member has raised.

Jess Brown-Fuller (Chichester) (LD): Many Members will have read "Careless People", a book by Sarah Wynn-Williams. It is a whistleblowing account of her time working inside Facebook, now Meta. She was silenced by Meta, using lawfare, when she sounded the alarm. These companies do not care about the people who use the platforms. They care only about keeping people on their platforms, especially our children. What does the Minister know that we do not? Does he believe that asking them nicely, rather than legislating against them, will achieve the intended results?

Kanishka Narayan: One of the things that I value most in this role is the ability to engage directly with whistleblowers from a range of companies, and to hear about their understanding of what is happening internally but, more than that, the strength of their prescription. I am not relying on any internal, privileged understanding; I am relying on action, not words. The fact that we have already been able to secure a world-leading change in respect of age assurance at device level, protecting millions of young people in this country, is the action on which I am relying, not false promises or privileged information.

Sarah Russell (Congleton) (Lab): The tech companies are big, they are rich, they are clever, and they are playing a very long game. I do not doubt that in the next three months we shall see some degree of compliance or movement towards what the Government are asking for from those tech companies, but I fear that there will then be constant backsliding—that we shall see them endlessly rowing back on, or not quite meeting, what they have agreed to. How can we prevent that from happening by means of any steps short of legislation? Could legislation please be enforced by means of class actions for children who are damaged by this content? I think that that is the only thing that the tech companies might pay attention to.

Kanishka Narayan: My hon. Friend is right to say that the issue of concern is not whether there are some incremental changes but whether our children are safe online, and that is at the forefront of my mind. We are looking at the quickest way of achieving such an outcome. We are preparing legislative options alongside the engagement that we are already carrying out, and if we are not able to secure substantive change to deliver that outcome, we will not hesitate to legislate.

Leigh Ingham (Stafford) (Lab): A little while ago I ran a consultation in my constituency with 60 young people and teachers, which the Minister kindly attended. While they would welcome the action taken today, they wanted to see significant regulation of tech companies, because a ban is easily avoided. What further steps are the Government considering to protect young people through regulation?

Kanishka Narayan: One of the firm lessons that I learned from my hon. Friend's engagement—and such depth of engagement—with young people in Staffordshire was the need to ensure that the changes we make online also reflect better opportunities offline. I know that she provides extensive opportunities for young people in her constituency. We will make sure that when we are acting on this issue, we are looking at the full range of their experiences.

Greg Smith (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): I am genuinely pleased that the Government have at least come to the table on preventing harms to children from social media and online content, but it strikes me that it is rather piecemeal. Listening to voices on the Conservative Benches, other parties in opposition and the Government's own Back Benchers, it seems everything is pointing in the same direction: we need an outright ban on social media for under-16s. This House has proven in the past

that when we want to act quickly, we can. Before any more children are harmed, will the Minister bring forward legislation?

Kanishka Narayan: With respect to the hon. Member, there are a range of questions, not least about how we make sure that we do not allow harms on gaming and messaging platforms. We need to look at the precise way in which age assurance can be robust enough, so that we do not get young people escaping any changes. There are a range of implementation questions. We want to get this right for our young people and families, not give in to political back and forth.

Sonia Kumar (Dudley) (Lab): Health misinformation and disinformation on social media is not harmless; it is a growing and serious threat to public health. We have already seen cases in which harmful online trends have led to severe injury and, tragically, even to the deaths of children. What steps are the Government taking to hold technology companies to account, and to prevent online influencers from being able to spread harmful and misleading health content on their platforms, given the clear risks that they pose to young people?

Kanishka Narayan: My hon. Friend makes a really important point. One of the things that we have been clear about is that regulated health advice should be provided only by regulated individuals in appropriate ways. The platforms need to ensure that they comply with that, and we will work with the regulator to ensure that any such responsibilities are carried out.

Adrian Ramsay (Waveney Valley) (Green): At a recent roundtable that I held at a high school in Waveney Valley, one young person said:

“Social media is dangerous for young people and the government needs to take more control over social media companies because of the harmful content”.

A senior teacher said:

“The majority of what we are dealing with as safeguarding leads is via social media.”

How will the Minister ensure that the out-of-control corporate tech giants are regulated effectively, so that only age-appropriate content can be accessed?

Kanishka Narayan: The central message that the hon. Member should take away is that this Government will make sure that we restore control to the hands of families, rather than tech bosses. That is the outcome that we will deliver imminently.

Jonathan Davies (Mid Derbyshire) (Lab): Parents, teachers and young people in Mid Derbyshire have spoken to me extensively about the harm that young people are receiving from social media and smartphones, but it is worth noting that many young people get their legitimate news content online. They also have a lot of access to educational material on places such as YouTube, and we have to be careful not to push young people towards more harmful places on the internet through legislation. What steps will the Minister take to ensure that young people can still get their legitimate news online? They are not engaging with traditional broadcasters or buying newspapers, and they need to access their educational content. We do not want there to be any unintended consequences.

Kanishka Narayan: My hon. Friend makes an incredibly important point. On all my travels across the country, I have tried to be active on social media, but the only content that young people report having seen is on “Newsround”. Public broadcasts of appropriate, high-quality news and educational experiences can be delivered in innovative ways in schools, as well as online. This Government will make sure that young people are kept informed and are in receipt of educational experiences.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): This country is in danger of losing a generation of young people to the bad and malign influences of big tech. Big tech can be a force for good, but are this Government not completely embedded with big tech, as the last Government were? Big tech is often more powerful and has bigger budgets than many Governments, and some of the big tech owners do not believe in democracy; they believe that democracy is bust and want to undo it. There is an inherent conflict of interests between the Government’s position and big tech’s influence and embeddedness in all Government Departments. It is incumbent on all of us to take action, because parents feel powerless. They look to us as their Members of Parliament to reflect their views, and today I am reflecting my constituents’ views. As we have heard from Members across the House, guidance is not good enough. It has to be about legislation, class actions and big bucks—that is what these companies listen to.

Kanishka Narayan: The right hon. Member makes an incredibly important point. First, of course we will act, including in law, to make sure that we are focused on outcomes for young people and families. Secondly, and critically, the conversations I have had across the country reflect a deep understanding that we need robust action in the short term, but in the long term Britain will shape technology, rather than being shaped by it, if we build British capability. That is what we are focused on. In fact, just this morning we announced a £1 billion hardware plan to make sure that the next generation of fundamental technologies—AI chips in particular—are built here. We are reindustrialising ourselves but, at the heart of it, making sure that we have the discretion to engage with international firms in the way that we want.

Johanna Baxter (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for his response to the urgent question. I am very grateful that the Government are taking action on this vital issue, but we all know that the pace of change in technology is terrifying. Will he set out how the discussions with technology companies and online safety experts have focused on ensuring that device-level controls are not only effective and easy for families to use, but adaptable to emerging online risks?

Kanishka Narayan: My hon. Friend makes the incredibly important point that the speed of technology needs to be reflected in the speed of democracy. That is why we have moved so fast in engaging the country, getting a set of actions ready and acting imminently. On device-level changes, although we were one of the first countries in the world to secure major changes to an operating system earlier this year, she is totally right that we must look not just at where the technology is now but at where the harms may go, and I will continue to bear that in mind.

Ann Davies (Caerfyrddin) (PC): I welcome the Minister’s announcement about blocking explicit images on children’s phones, but this should really have come much sooner. I totally agree with the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) that action needs to be taken now, not in three months’ time. What exactly will be measured at the end of that period, and what counts as failure? Are we really relying on the good will of tech companies, bearing in mind their inactivity so far?

Kanishka Narayan: I thank the hon. Member for her question. Let me give a very clear sense of that outcome and how we will measure it. Currently, 91% of the images used in child sexual abuse interactions are self-generated. To me, that is the central focus for what this Government are doing. We have already made a significant difference, as I have said, in ensuring that our robust engagement delivered a pioneering change to a major operating system. If this change is not delivered within weeks, we will ensure that the full force of the law delivers such an outcome.¹

Chris Webb (Blackpool South) (Lab): There is growing evidence of a link between smartphone overuse and symptoms of depression and anxiety and reduced student performance, and areas such as Blackpool are seeing double the national average of young people self-harming. What steps will my hon. Friend take to ensure that device-level controls are effective and easy to use for parents who may not be tech savvy?

Kanishka Narayan: A fundamental principle behind both the changes announced today and those we are considering as a result of the consultation is simplicity. Parents across the country tell me that they are working incredibly hard to try to keep up with the technology, but the technology continues to make it more difficult rather than easier for them to exercise control. That principle will motivate our actions, and we will ensure that this is easy and effective, and that the burden of liability falls on platforms, not parents.

Lincoln Jopp (Spelthorne) (Con): Why is the Minister answering an urgent question rather than bringing forward a Government statement?

Kanishka Narayan: I understand that Home Office Ministers made a statement at oral questions. I am happy to answer any further questions from Members of the House.

Josh Dean (Hertford and Stortford) (Lab): The vast majority of Members in this place had the benefit of growing up in a world without social media, and with social media, but today’s young people have not had that benefit. They have grown up with their lives intimately intertwined with the digital world, and in lockdown they were pushed even deeper online without being given a say. Whatever we do next, we must bring young people with us. Beyond the consultation, what will the Department do to meaningfully engage with young people in this area of policy, so that we can build a digital world that is safe for young people with young people?

Kanishka Narayan: My hon. Friend has been one of the most vocal Members on this question, particularly on engaging with young people. There are two things on my mind. First, there is the trust that I have felt in

1.[*Official Report*, 15 July 2026; Vol. 789, c. 14WC.] (Correction)

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engaging with young people in every nation and region of our country on these questions. Whether over basketball, cricket, football or netball—and, indeed, toasting marshmallows with the Cumbria scouts—my trust has only been affirmed. Secondly, he is right to raise an important point about finding a community online, particularly for young people from LGBTQ groups and rural groups. We must bear that in mind and ensure that they have appropriate resources to feel supported in forming such communities.

Monica Harding (Esher and Walton) (LD): At the G7 Digital Ministers meeting, it was reported that the US and the UK watered down stronger protections for children presented by France. My constituents, as evidenced by more than 2,000 emails I have received on online harms, want stronger protections. Will the Minister assure us that on online safety he and the Prime Minister have the interests of children in my constituency at heart, rather than the interests of the US and big tech? If so, why did the UK resist mandatory protection frameworks?

Kanishka Narayan: I will not be commenting on leaked briefings, but I will say two things. First, in my engagement, even in Australia, civil society has said that the United Kingdom has been the first country in the world to pioneer the changes to operating systems that are securing young people's future. On children's safety, the only thing that matters to this Government is ensuring that British children are kept safe. We will continue to make that the defining principle for all our actions.

Sureena Brackenridge (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): Tech giants have had the digital level controls capability to stop children taking, sharing or viewing naked images on their devices, but have failed to do so. I have very little confidence that they will suddenly have an epiphany and do the right thing without the necessary pressure, enforcement and consequences. How will the Minister ensure they comply, and if, or when, they fail, legislate with urgency?

Kanishka Narayan: I share my hon. Friend's starting position of scepticism. Robust action will be achieved by ensuring that the outcome is a significant reduction in child sexual abuse material propagated through the mechanisms described. In the absence of that happening within weeks, we are preparing law in parallel to ensure that such action is not deferred.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Regardless of what has provoked this change of heart, we can all welcome the Government now recognising the harms caused to children and families by social media. The evidence is very clear. I believe that most children will support the legislation. On Friday, I chaired a debate—a lively debate—at Roddensvale special school. All the points about disruption, distraction, bullying, peer pressure and so on were brought up. One thing I would ask of the Minister is that we need action now. He should not be put off by further promises from the big tech companies about self-regulation. If we are to have action, it should be enforceable and there should not be unintended consequences for free speech.

Kanishka Narayan: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point. When I visited young people in Glengormley in Northern Ireland, they told me that it was the first time they had been engaged on this question so systematically; and yes, they wanted robust action, but action that worked in the real world—they use different apps as well as virtual private networks. On the broader question of social media, the Government are not just listening but acting robustly and in a way that is distinctive. On the specific question of device-level interventions, the fundamental focus will be what delivers the most robust action the quickest. If that is the law, we will pursue the law. If it is engagement and the way that we have already delivered significant changes, we will do that. The future of young people is the critical driver here.

Dr Scott Arthur (Edinburgh South West) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his statement. It really does feel like change is coming and I know that parents in Edinburgh South West will welcome that. On the proposals to restrict social media access for young people, the Minister has rightly been listening to parents, but what work is he doing with campaigning charities such as the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, whose knowledge and expertise is extremely important in this domain? This also cannot be about a Government-led ban: we must engage our young people, schools, parents and charities in communicating the changes we plan. It would be good to hear more on that from the Minister. Lastly, if the industry does not proceed with a voluntary ban, how long does the Minister think it would take to implement a full ban on the ground?

Kanishka Narayan: I thank my hon. Friend for his incredibly important point. One reason we have ensured that we engage young people and families alongside civil society is that there is a depth of experience across the country. If we are to achieve change not just on devices but more broadly on social media norms, those who engage in places that matter with young people and families must be right at the heart of that. I will ensure that civil society charities across the country engage with us not just on the decision but on its communication.

Shockat Adam (Leicester South) (Ind): I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests as a practising optometrist. Myopia—shortsightedness—is nearing epidemic levels for UK children. It is a crisis that was sharply increased by covid, when screentime surged and outdoor activity collapsed. Research shows that nearly one in three of our UK children will now be short sighted, and the rate is still rising. Shortsightedness after a certain diopetre level can lead to retinal conditions and sight loss. When developing any digital policies, can consideration be given to the devastating impact of screentime on our children's eye health?

Kanishka Narayan: The hon. Member raises an important point, and I will ensure that it is fully considered in the evidence that we include when making decisions on that question.

Chris Vince (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Minister for his response to the urgent question; I have always been a big fan of his style. I echo the points made by the

Father of the House on the importance of holding social media companies to account. The Minister will not be surprised to hear that I have done extensive consultation with parents, teachers and young people in my constituency of Harlow about the issue. I also echo the comments made by the Chair of the Education Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes); I do not think that social media companies are taking their responsibilities seriously. Does the Minister agree that some sort of social media ban—which would be a good idea—will only be effective if we ensure that the technology does not allow people to circumvent the age-verification tools? That is very important.

Kanishka Narayan: Not even my mother has complimented me on my style, so I can confirm to my hon. Friend that a visit to Harlow is imminent. He is totally right, and one reason that we have taken time to ensure that we are engaging with families and young people is to understand exactly how age-verification technology works, as that is crucial to whether we look at a platform ban or features and functionalities limitations. We want to get it right and robust so that young people in this country are kept safe.

Lincoln Jopp: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. A few moments ago, I asked the Minister why he came to the Floor of the House to answer an urgent question rather than bringing forward a Government statement. I believe his answer was that he thought Home Office Ministers had made a statement earlier today. The Minister and I are both new to this House, but given that statements tend to follow oral questions—I sat through Home Office questions—and there has not been one, the Minister may have inadvertently misled the House. What opportunities are there for the record to be corrected?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. The Minister will know that in the first instance statements should be made to the House. Today we have had an urgent question to address the issue. If there has been any inadvertent misleading of the House from the Minister's use of language, I am sure that those on the Front Bench have heard that and will want to clarify the matter.

Kanishka Narayan: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I heard the Home Secretary deliver a statement at the start of topicals. It may not have been the fullest format, but it was a clear statement of the policy. I am of course happy to keep answering questions for as long as the House likes.

Water Companies

4.43 pm

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if she will make a statement on the performance of the water sector.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Emma Hardy): I welcome this opportunity to update the House on the progress the Government have made on this important issue. In these divisive times, there are few topics that unite all of us in this House—but water does. We all agree that the status quo cannot continue. Following 14 years of Conservative failure, this Labour Government are turning it around, but there is still lots more to do.

I have been grateful to meet with many passionate campaigners and Members of this House. Recently, that included an engaging meeting with my hon. Friends the Members for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) and for Shipley (Anna Dixon). Just last week I met with campaigners from Save Windermere and academics from the People's Commission on the Water Sector.

People are right to be angry about the problems facing the water industry. Customers have been let down by rising bills, under-investment in creaking infrastructure, supply interruptions and unacceptable levels of pollution in our rivers, lakes and seas.

That is why this Government took action on day one by updating the water companies' articles of association—the foundational legal documents that outline their internal rules and purpose—to put customers and the environment at their heart. We also established powerful consumer panels to give customers a voice. In week six of this Government, we introduced fundamental reforms through the Water (Special Measures) Act 2025, ringfencing customers' money, banning unfair bonuses, introducing criminal liability for polluting water bosses and creating automatic penalties for wrongdoing. Within a year in office, this Government had changed the guaranteed standards of service, doubling compensation for customers when things go wrong. Following that, we gave the Environment Agency more money and more power to monitor water companies, enabling it to deliver a record 10,000 inspections. After that, we strengthened protections for vulnerable households by changing the reforms around WaterSure to ensure that vulnerable people did not face excessive bills.

No one solution is going to fix the whole water industry. Since I have had the honour and privilege of being in this position, my focus has been on finding the quickest and most effective way to deal with each of those structural challenges. That is exactly why this Government are delivering the once-in-a-generation reform through our clean water Bill to reset the water sector and end the cycle of decline. And because the Government believe in experts, we have also supported the chief medical officer in bringing together a wider expert panel through the public health water taskforce, providing independent and technical advice on risks, alongside the fantastic work done by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' own scientific adviser, creating the science advisory council to look at what we can do around water.

[Emma Hardy]

We will deliver on our promise to clean up our rivers, lakes and seas not just today, but for generations to come. These changes are designed to address the structural challenges in the sector and to deliver a cleaner, more resilient and more accountable water system for the future.

Clive Lewis: I thank the Minister both for her response and for putting up with me—I am a bit of a broken record on this issue. We are all well aware that water is essential to life itself—to food, industry, nature, housing, energy, and now even the data centres powering the supposed AI revolution—and yet we have handed a monopoly where no competition is possible to companies, many owned overseas, whose overriding priority is profit. The result is systemic failure, with not one major reservoir built and the old ones sold off. That is why we were back in the Chamber last week over South East Water and the drought outages, just weeks into the summer.

Raw sewage has poured into our rivers and seas—3.5 million hours of it in 2024 alone—fouling beaches where children swim. It is why eight-year-old Heather Preen died after contracting *E. coli* from raw sewage, and why thousands of our constituents are made sick every year. When public anger saw the Government ban bonuses, water execs raised their salaries and rebranded the payouts “retention payments” and that comes on top of the £78 billion to shareholders and £60 billion borrowed, our bills up 40%, and 30p in every pound we pay servicing water companies’ debts instead of fixing pipes.

This was never a market failure. Instead, it is the market working as designed—profits out, sewage in, cost of living up and security of supply decimated. Surely the Minister understands that we can no more regulate privatised water companies than regulate the tide. How many more failures, inquiries and deaths before the Government accept that these problems are systemic and give the public the option of taking their water back?

Emma Hardy: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. He is right that he has been passionate about this matter for a long time. We have known each other a very long time, and—I have said this to him before—I genuinely admire and respect his passion. I know what it means to him. In fact, he was the person responsible for bringing Julie, Heather’s mum, to meet me when they came to Parliament for a premiere of “Dirty Business”, which I found really moving.

My hon. Friend knows I am going to agree with him on reservoirs. It is shameful that we have not had one built. Our climate is changing: we are facing drought in the summer and we have too much rain in the winter, and yet we cannot seem to hold it. That is a fundamental failure.

He knows my thoughts on South East Water, too, as well as my feelings about competition, which is why I think we should be introducing more new appointments and variations. As I said last week, where a water company might want to transition to a new ownership model such as not for profit, we are committed to developing a transparent process to look at whether that request should go ahead—a process that has never existed before.

Dr Neil Hudson (Epping Forest) (Con): Labour came into government promising major reform of England’s water sector, but progress so far has been slow. The Water (Special Measures) Act 2025 was largely a rebranding of many Conservative reforms. During its passage, we tabled many sensible amendments, including ones to ringfence funding from enforcement fines to a bespoke water restoration fund; to guarantee that companies fixed the environmental damage they caused locally; to require Ofwat to create rules on financial reporting in its remuneration and governance rules; to reduce consumer bills if companies were hit with enforcement fines; and to ensure that companies did not leverage too much debt. Sadly, the Government failed to support those amendments and missed the opportunity to increase accountability.

We on the Conservative Benches have been clear: no one wants to see water companies such as Thames Water collapse. Although water supply would continue, failure would expose taxpayers to billions of pounds of liabilities and drive customer water bills sharply upwards, without addressing the underlying issues. Yet we have seen the third party in this place lead legal action that could have pushed Thames Water to the brink, and both they and Reform appear relaxed about the consequences for consumers and the public purse. Government have to be prepared to step in if a company fails, but that should be a last resort, so can the Minister update the House on the current situation at Thames Water?

Last week, this House again debated further unacceptable water outages from South East Water. With further hot weather expected, what action are the Government taking to ensure that water supplies are not disrupted again and that people, businesses, schools, hospitals and livestock owners will have sufficient water? Turning to the wider systemic issues in the water sector, can the Minister update the House on progress towards delivering new reservoirs and other strategic water infrastructure? Finally, can the Minister explain how the Government are tracking investment commitments across the sector?

Emma Hardy: I think the shadow spokesperson managed to read his statement out without actually listening to the answer that I have given. But I am always keen to update everybody on the action we have already taken, so just in case he missed it, I am happy to say it again. We have passed the Water (Special Measures) Act 2025; ringfenced customers’ money so that it cannot be diverted away from investments; secured £104 billion of private investment to upgrade our infrastructure; given the EA more powers to monitor water companies; banned unfair bonuses; introduced criminal liability for water bosses; introduced automatic penalties; reduced the burden of proof for many offences so that regulators are on the front foot; introduced cost recovery to shift the cost of pollution on to those who pollute; banned the sale and supply of wet wipes; reformed our bathing water regulations; established the water delivery taskforce; more than doubled compensation for customers when things go wrong; and introduced strengthened protections for vulnerable households through reforms to the WaterSure scheme. In fact, I would say that we have done more in 20 months than the hon. Gentleman’s Government did in 14 years.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call the Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee.

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): My hon. Friend the Minister is absolutely right to say that we are united by our anger about the systemic failures in the water industry, in terms of both financial and environmental regulation, and the under-investment in infrastructure over a long period—although the fact that Welsh Water, a not-for-profit water company, is also a poor performer when it comes to the environment shows that it is simplistic to say that profit is the only issue here.

The Government have rightly addressed one of the issues—the amount of investment going in—but we need to see results from higher bills, and we also need to see regulatory reform as soon as possible. Will the water Bill tackle the environmental failures and also put in place a regime that prevents the kind of appalling indebtedness that we saw with Thames Water, and the industry more generally, and the prioritisation of those debts ahead of delivering for customers?

Emma Hardy: I thank my hon. Friend for his work as Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee. He is right to highlight the under-investment in infrastructure. In fact, some of the problems around resilience are, quite frankly, due to the under-investment in infrastructure, which is why we need to set resilience standards. He is also right that we need to see action resulting from higher bills, which is why we formed the water delivery taskforce to hold the water companies to account for the promises they have made on delivering infrastructure.

On the point about having an integrated regulator, at the moment Ofwat looks at things financially, the Environment Agency looks at the environment and the Drinking Water Inspectorate looks at drinking water. By abolishing that and bringing the regulator into one, we will have an integrated regulator that places the environment, customers and—what has been missing for the last 14 years—public health at its heart, which is incredibly important. Finally, I agree with him about debt levels; that was one of the things in the Sir Jon Cunliffe commission.

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

Charlie Maynard (Witney) (LD): Thames Water, which serves my constituency, embodies the systemic failures of the sector. The company is in breach of its licence conditions by not having held any investment grade credit ratings for nearly the last two years and by failing to inform Ofwat and the Government of the change of control at the company. The Government have stood by and let that happen. Now, their only plan is to hand the company over to the very same creditors who have pillaged, and continue to pillage, it. They must now change course, put Thames Water into special administration and bring it out as a business that is mutually owned and operated in the interests of its customers and the environment.

I find the shadow Minister's words extraordinary—he comes across as a corporate shill. I have provided him with information from Thames Water's own independent expert that demonstrates that the cost to the Government will be zero in the medium term, but he has not responded. Will the Government please now put the company into special administration?

Emma Hardy: I thank the hon. Member for his question, but I think it is a misrepresentation—I am sure it was an accident—to say that the Government are doing any kind of deals. The Government are working closely with Ofwat, which is evaluating the consortium's proposals. Of course, the Government will always have the best interests of customers and the environment at heart. As I have said many times in the House, we stand ready for all eventualities, including applying for special administration if necessary.

Helena Dollimore (Hastings and Rye) (Lab/Co-op): In Hastings, Rye and the villages we have had sewage dumped in our sea, two major water outages—lasting five and nine days—Hastings town centre flooded and, last year, as the Minister knows, 300 million plastic beads washed up on our beaches all thanks to Southern Water. Its failures are making people sick, damaging local businesses and tarnishing our livelihood as a seaside economy. That is why so many of the people I represent are fed up with Southern Water, while having to pay more in their bills. They welcome the action that the Labour Government are taking to ramp up regulation, ban bonuses and much more, but they want to know what more can be done. The water White Paper, which she has brought forward, talks about the importance of ownership and opens the door to the Government looking at not-for-profit structures. Could she say a bit more about that?

Emma Hardy: I thank my hon. Friend, who continues to be a formidable, incredibly impressive campaigner, as she was through her work on the Environment, Food and Rural Committee; honestly, she has been amazing. We have set out our White Paper, and a transparent process will look at whether a new model will go ahead. As the Secretary of State has also said, I have always been in favour of mutuals, and I do not have a problem with not-for-profits, but we need a clear look at the process to see whether that would be in the best interests of customers before any change goes ahead.

Sir Jeremy Hunt (Godalming and Ash) (Con): Is not the root problem a profound failure of regulation over the last 25 years, for which Labour, the Conservatives and the Lib Dems all bear responsibility? We have regulated for lower prices and more investment, but we have not stopped companies from loading up their balance sheets with debt, which means higher prices and less investment. I am not a believer in nationalisation, because I know from having been Chancellor that the state will never find the £104 billion now promised by the private sector, but if we are to stick with private companies, do we not need to regulate differently so that we have lower prices and more investment?

Emma Hardy: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his question—it still feels slightly odd to be on the opposite side of this, with him questioning me. I will gently say that, yes, I do accept the premise of his question—we need tougher and more effective regulation, because the regulation system has failed—but I would have thought that, as the second most powerful person in the previous Government, he might have had an opportunity to act himself.

Chris Hinchliff (North East Hertfordshire) (Lab): We come to the Chamber almost weekly to highlight the failures of the water sector in our constituencies, but I want to highlight a wider point today. For years, economic policy in this country has been based on trying to achieve growth by unlocking private capital, often from abroad. In this essential sector, we are now seeing the end result: water bankruptcy, environmental devastation, non-existent infrastructure and the public left picking up the tab. What conversations is the Minister having with colleagues across Government, especially in the Treasury, about learning from this monumental failure?

Emma Hardy: I thank my hon. Friend for his passionate work on this issue. I know how much he cares about the damage that over-abstraction is doing to our environment and to nature. On the water delivery taskforce, we have Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Ministers and Treasury representatives all looking at how we can make the fastest and most effective change to our water system. They look particularly at water infrastructure because, as has been highlighted already, one of the problems is that we have been unable to build the infrastructure we need, which is resulting in damage to the environment now.

Sir Roger Gale (Herne Bay and Sandwich) (Con): Since Mr Speaker allowed me to ask an urgent question on Wednesday last week, to which the Minister helpfully responded, it will not surprise her to know that I have received quite a number of public comments concerning the performance of South East Water, most of which are not repeatable before the watershed.

Two issues clearly have come to light and struck a chord. First, it really is time that the water companies were allowed to act as consultees in planning applications, because we are building house after house after house without saying where the water is going to come from, and of course the water companies have a statutory duty to provide it. The second point that has come through loud and clear underscores something that the Minister said to me, which is that it really is time that every new house built had a grey water system, because we are pouring water that we cannot afford to waste literally down the drain.

Emma Hardy: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for this question, and for his question last week as well. As I mentioned last week, the water delivery taskforce looks at planning. It is looking jointly with MHCLG and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs at where we are building homes, whether we have the right water and what water infrastructure is needed. There has been some retrofitting of properties in Cambridge to make them more water efficient, but the right hon. Gentleman makes a powerful point about the use of grey water. That is definitely on my agenda.

Yuan Yang (Earley and Woodley) (Lab): I thank the Minister for her statement. Tomorrow, I will be bringing Thames Water's management into Parliament to answer a simple question: what improvements will my constituents get in return for the increases in their bills? My constituents do not feel they are being treated fairly by Thames Water, and that makes it even more important that Ofwat should reject the current deal proposed by Thames Water's creditors to let it off the hook for polluting our

ivers. Does my hon. Friend agree that fairness in the water sector means that the polluters and their investors have to be the ones who pay, not customers?

Emma Hardy: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that it should be a matter of fundamental respect to Members on both sides of the House that water companies inform Members of what improvements they are making and where. Each and every one of us will have had emails from our constituents about water bills and concerns about rising prices. The least those companies can do is inform customers where the money is going. I admit that some are, but Thames Water has so far failed to supply my hon. Friend with the information she has requested. I do not think it is unreasonable for her to request it, and I repeat my point to Thames Water that if bills are going up, the least customers should know is what they are going up to pay for.

David Chadwick (Brecon, Radnor and Cwm Tawe) (LD): My constituents are disgusted by the sheer volume of sewage dumping that is happening across the River Tawe, the Usk and the Wye. Just two weeks ago, local children became ill after swimming in the Tawe, and the same happened last year in the Wye near Glasbury. Will the Minister listen to the Liberal Democrat calls to require water companies to publish the volume and concentration of sewage being discharged from emergency overflows?

Emma Hardy: This point came up repeatedly during the passage of the Water (Special Measures) Act 2025 and, fundamentally, my response remains the same, which is that the cost and time spent on installing monitors could be more effectively spent and used to prevent this from happening in the first place. That is why we want to focus on delivering the storm overflow reduction plan, which is looking to deliver £60 billion of investment across England by 2050 to reduce the number of overflows. Rather than trying to measure the problem, we are trying to tackle it.

Paula Barker (Liverpool Wavertree) (Lab): Several barriers to taking water back into public ownership have been floated—pardon the pun—but the myth around the cost has been debunked and the impact on pensions has been dealt with by leading academics. What will it take for the Government to take water back into public ownership?

Emma Hardy: I know how much my hon. Friend cares about this issue, and she is right to highlight the concerns of some unions about changes. On nationalisation, as I have already mentioned, the White Paper contains a process by which different forms of ownership can be looked at, but—I do not wish to mislead my hon. Friend—that would involve looking at not-for-profits and mutuals rather than nationalisation.

Mims Davies (East Grinstead and Uckfield) (Con): I know you have had your own issues with water, Madam Deputy Speaker. Given the dire ongoing issue with flies in Chailey, water outages due to heat, cold and storms, and a lack of confidence in infrastructure and drought planning, does the Minister think it is acceptable that Southern Water and South East Water

remain separate? Would proper joint working and firmer accountability through partnership be the answer for my constituents, who are struggling with higher bills?

Emma Hardy: I have huge sympathy for the hon. Lady's constituents; I remember our discussion of the previous situation, in December and January, and the impact on them all. She is right that the companies should be working more effectively together, and I am keen to support them in sorting out a proper legal agreement over the bulk supply of water from Southern Water to South East Water. Fundamentally, they have a duty under the Water Industry Act 1991 to ensure a supply of water; if they fail to comply with that duty, action will be taken.

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab): My constituents write to me constantly about the failings of Thames Water—bills going up, but pollution staying the same—and I am glad the Minister is taking a grip of the matter through the taskforce. It is World Oceans Day, and this morning I met several groups that are campaigning on and providing data about the impact of poor rivers on oceans. Can the Minister assure me that she is putting more effort into supporting the Environment Agency so that, as those organisations have suggested, it can better monitor the water and enforce the legislation we have passed?

Emma Hardy: Happy World Oceans Day, everybody—that is a good day to have. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, because for years she led the campaign to ban the supply and sale of plastic-containing wet wipes, which were a huge cause of pollution, and we passed that ban partly because of her work. She is right that river pollution leads to problems with the oceans, and as Minister for water, flooding and the oceans, I have an interest in making all that work.

Monica Harding (Esher and Walton) (LD): For more than a decade my constituent Holly, of Ferry Road in Thames Ditton, has watched Thames Water clean up raw sewage from her street, only to be told that the system is not fit for purpose, with nothing ever being fixed. In last week's heavy rain, human waste flooded two homes and spread to the local primary school. Thames Water's proposed solution is to wash it straight back into the river, which is unacceptable. This comes on the back of higher bills. Is it not time that the Government put Thames Water on a sustainable footing under special administration, so that it can at last invest in infrastructure, and Holly's nightmare can end?

Emma Hardy: The hon. Lady raises a shocking and awful case, and I am more than happy to meet her and look into it. There is no excuse for sewage ending up in primary schools or floating down the street. I am happy to take that up.

Jas Athwal (Ilford South) (Lab): Thames Water, which serves my constituency, has had a chequered history—it has gone from bad to worse—and there has been sewage on the streets of Ilford too frequently. When is enough enough? When will we take back control from Thames Water?

Emma Hardy: I thank my hon. Friend for his question, which provides yet another example of the current failure of the system. He is right to feel angry about it. As I have said, the Government are working closely

with Ofwat in respect of Thames Water. We stand ready for every eventuality, including applying for special administration if necessary.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I would like to record my appreciation of the consistent campaign waged by the hon. and gallant Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis), which included bringing the real-life activists on whom the "Dirty Business" docudrama series was based to the House of Commons where we could meet them. I noted what the Minister said in her reply to him about no new reservoirs being built. Does she think any new reservoirs could ever be built without direct Government intervention?

Emma Hardy: The right hon. Gentleman raises an incredibly important point. One of the things we have been doing through the water delivery taskforce is looking at all the potential barriers in the way of just getting stuff done. That is why it is so important that we have MHCLG on the taskforce alongside DEFRA, because it is about the question not just of financing but of planning. Everybody seems to want reservoirs, but lots of people do not seem to want them to be built—that part of it seems to be the difficulty.

The right hon. Gentleman is quite right. We have had to intervene more to look at where the blockages are, at the problems we come up against when we try to get something built, and at how we as the Government can remove some of them so that we can get on with it. We know the climate is changing—we know we are going to have wetter winters and drier summers—so this is becoming even more urgent.

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford) (Lab): The Minister knows that for decades shareholder returns have been prioritised over consumers, the environment and infrastructure investment, and when the companies ultimately fail, it is taxpayers who have to underwrite them. Given that all the empirical research shows that public ownership would lower financing costs and bills, improve accountability and pay for itself within seven years, why on earth are the Government still prepared to socialise the risks rather than bring water back into public ownership?

Emma Hardy: I thank my hon. Friend for the passion with which she speaks about this issue. I reiterate that my focus has always been on the quickest and most effective way I can deal with some of the problems in front of me. There are questions over how much nationalisation would cost—we have heard them before—and we know that the water companies have £82.7 billion of outstanding debt.

It is always difficult—again, this probably goes beyond my role and into that of the Treasury—to decide on priorities about what we spend money on, but that is not for one moment to give the impression that I am happy with the status quo or that I think the current situation is good, because I simply do not. It is about how we make the most effective change in the quickest way, which is why having set out in the White Paper a transparent process to look at not-for-profit mutuals and other different models is so important.

Adrian Ramsay (Waveney Valley) (Green): The suppressed report from DEFRA civil servants on critical systems beyond 2030 concludes with high confidence

[Adrian Ramsay]

that without “transformational change” Britain’s water and food systems face a realistic risk of “catastrophic failure”. The report highlights that significant parts of the UK already face water scarcity, while high levels of industry debt and woefully inadequate infrastructure investment have undermined system resilience. Can the Minister assure the House that the water Bill will require companies to build long-term climate resilience into reservoir supply networks and waste water systems, so that communities are protected from the climate and water security challenges expected in the coming years and decades?

Emma Hardy: The hon. Gentleman raises a really important point, and the short answer is yes. We need clear resilience standards and asset standards, because we do not have them, but, importantly, as he pointed out, those standards need to be fit for the future and not just for today. When we look at what the standards should be, we should think about what will happen to the climate in years to come in terms of overheating and flooding. The hon. Gentleman is quite right: work on that is going on, and he raised an important point.

Alex Sobel (Leeds Central and Headingley) (Lab/Co-op): Minister, we know that our water company, Yorkshire Water, is a dirty business, flushing sewage into rivers such as the Wharfe and the Aire, with children and others getting ill from swimming in them. But is it not also a broken business, with debt more than four times its revenue, while still paying over £50 million to shareholders last year? What financial studies has the Minister done to look at Yorkshire Water’s viability? Is it not time that the people of Yorkshire have the same say over their water company as the people of Wales?

Emma Hardy: My hon. Friend is right that we share the same water company. Sir Jon Cunliffe’s commission addressed whether it would be appropriate for the Government to set a level of debt that companies cannot go beyond, because the gearing over the last decade or so has been completely unsustainable. It is making companies act in a way that I do not think is right. That is why the need to look at the debt levels for these companies was included in the White Paper. We need to look at what is a sensible and realistic level for them to hold, to ensure it does not undermine their sustainability or their ability to put customers and the environment first, which should be at the core of everything they do.

Katie Lam (Weald of Kent) (Con): I know that the Minister is acutely aware of the terrible problems we have had with South East Water; we have discussed it recently. It cannot supply water in the winter because it is too cold. It cannot supply water in the summer because it is too hot. The chair and the chief executive have both stood down, but that is a necessary condition for the company to be transformed, not the transformation itself. Can the Minister give us any update she is aware of on how the recruitment process is going to appoint their successors and what role the regulator and the Department will play in that process?

Emma Hardy: The hon. Lady wrote to me about the specific difficulties her constituents have faced, and I have huge sympathy with them; that is not acceptable. The regulator will of course be taking a close interest because one issue that South East Water faces is that it is non-compliant with its licence because it was downgraded by Moody’s. Ofwat will be taking a very close interest in what happens with the company because it is not currently compliant. I, too, am very interested in what happens with this company. I have met the interim chair. She has been in post for only a few weeks and is trying to restore relations with Members of Parliament, so I am keen to know from them how that is going. Fundamentally, the hon. Lady is right and what she said was echoed in the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee: we need not just a change in leadership, but a change in culture and a fundamental change in leadership for that company.

Clive Efford (Eltham and Chislehurst) (Lab): Parents from my constituency who went to the south coast during the half-term week described how they would not let their children swim in the sea. These are not necessarily beaches that are deemed to be unsafe, but such is the loss of confidence in our water industry that they reacted in that way. There must come a time when we say that we cannot allow water companies to continue to perform in the way that they have consistently been performing, and there must be a way of separating off the debt from the responsibility for running the water companies so that we can take the responsibility of supplying water and leave those companies, who have done extremely well out of the industry, to pay off their own debts.

Emma Hardy: As summer comes, we all want to be enjoying our beaches, going for a swim, having a paddle and not having to think about checking an app to see whether they are polluted. My hon. Friend and his constituents are right to feel angry about the current situation. We have told companies that in delivering their storm overflow reduction plan, they must prioritise bathing waters and chalk streams to begin with so that we can make those as safe as possible. Our reforms to bathing waters will help clean them up more quickly, because we want everybody to go out and enjoy the great British seaside this summer.

Jess Brown-Fuller (Chichester) (LD): I refer members to my registered interest as chair of the all-party parliamentary group for infant feeding and inequalities. With water scarcity prevalent across the south-east and poor management of water companies leading to outages across the south, will the Minister consult with her colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care to find a route to put new mothers on to the priority services register automatically, because for formula-fed babies there is no option other than a clean water supply?

Emma Hardy: That is a hugely important issue. I have already begun to have some conversations, but those were about pregnant women, who obviously should be on the priority services register. There are concerns, as people can imagine, about data sharing and giving permission, but this is a really important point because pregnant women will fall in and out of being a priority,

as will formula-fed babies. This is quite tricky because of the problems around sharing information, but it is on my agenda.

Emma Lewell (South Shields) (Lab): For over a decade, I have worked with campaigners in South Shields to stop sewage dumping in our sea. We are still waiting for Northumbrian Water's compliance plan that was promised to us last year. The industry is broken. Introducing regulations and penalties and blocking bonuses is clearly not working. Will the Minister explain why, despite acting on rail, energy and other industries, the Government are not acting on the strong expert evidence and calls from the public and campaigners to nationalise the water industry?

Emma Hardy: My hon. Friend and her constituents have had a terrible time dealing with sewage pollution. I know from the meetings that we have had together with her constituents that it is not good enough that the promised plan was not delivered, and I will urgently follow up to find out what has happened with it. As I have mentioned, in the White Paper we have a transparent process to look at various not-for-profit models.

Joe Robertson (Isle of Wight East) (Con): Southern Water is preparing to dump sewage on a beach in Bembridge, on the Isle of Wight, in a new location. The Environment Agency says that that is okay because there is an old combined sewer overflow pipe there, notwithstanding the fact that it has not been used in decades. Does the Minister agree that that is unacceptable? If she does, what assistance can she and her Government provide to stop this from happening?

Emma Hardy: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. I would be happy to look into it and get back to him. If he wants to have a meeting with me to discuss it further, we can make that arrangement.

Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab): I thank my good friend, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis), for all his work on this issue to protect the environment and customers. My local supplier is United Utilities and I receive vast amounts of correspondence about its poor performance. To provide a couple of stats, 50.6 litres of water are lost per day per person in the United Utilities network through water leaks, which is the second highest after Thames Water, and in the past five years the average annual water bill for United Utilities customers has gone up approximately 51.6%, while private shareholders in the water industry tend to be doing quite well for themselves. May I urge the Minister to support public ownership of the water industry?

Emma Hardy: My hon. Friend cares about this issue and has raised it with me before. He is right to be angry about the issue of leakage, because water that people are paying for is ending up leaking and in the wrong places. We are tracking that leakage target through the water delivery taskforce. When we look at how we ensure that we have the water that we need for houses, growth, the environment and everything else, tackling leakage is one of the core things on which we can take action, and it is something I am committed to doing.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Diolch yn fawr iawn, Dirprwy Lefarydd. Local people are appalled that there were nearly 95,000 hours of sewage pollution in Dwyfor Meirionnydd last year, to the point where there are dedicated local groups in the constituency. I must mention Forum Llyn Padarn who stepped in to monitor water quality in the magnificent glacial lake in Llanberis, home of the rare Torgoch char. However, we cannot rely on citizen scientists to fix the system in its entirety. What update can the Minister give me on the UK Government's White Paper plans to devolve further water powers to Wales, so that we have the means to establish a separate independent economic regulator, and further prioritise sustainable water management over commercial interests?

Emma Hardy: The right hon. Lady raises an important point, and that lake sounds very beautiful. Conversations are ongoing with the new devolved Government. She knows that the UK Government support devolution wherever we can. The new Welsh Government have only recently been elected, but I assure her that conversations are happening right now about how we will set things up so that Wales will have a separate regulator from England.

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): My constituents have been profoundly failed by Thames Water for many years, with frequent leaks and bursts, inadequate investment in our infrastructure, clogged up roads and, to add insult to injury, skyrocketing bills. Thames Water is a failing organisation. Will the Minister confirm that the Government will not accept a proposal to exempt Thames Water from fines for four years? It should be held to the same standards of accountability as the rest of the industry and if it fails, the Government should step in to place it in special administration, with a view to bringing it back under public control.

Emma Hardy: Again, my hon. Friend is a formidable campaigner on this issue; she has raised it with me on many occasions both in public and in private, and she is absolutely right to do so. Yes, the rules apply to everybody. The previous Secretary of State stood at the Dispatch Box and made that commitment, and I will make it again. Rules apply to everybody, and that has never changed and will never change under this Government. We are prepared and ready for every eventuality if that is needed.

Ben Maguire (North Cornwall) (LD): South West Water has pleaded guilty to illegal sewage dumping across my constituency, including at Bodmin and Harlyn. It will likely get yet another fine and a slap on the wrist—a cost of doing business. The Water Minister kindly met me recently, but she has confirmed in writing that vital sewerage upgrades will not take place until 2030. If the Government will not push South West Water to speed up its investment plan, will the Minister support my efforts to hold it to account through a group action legal claim?

Emma Hardy: I understand why the hon. Gentleman feels frustrated about this issue. Each company will set out through the price review exactly what it will deliver and when, and make priorities. As I have already mentioned in the House, we are prioritising bathing waters, chalk

[Emma Hardy]

streams and various other areas at the moment, but he is well within his rights as a Member of Parliament to campaign for his area to be moved up and be given greater priority.

Sarah Russell (Congleton) (Lab): Since 2003, my constituent has suffered multiple incidents every year of raw sewage flooding into his garden. United Utilities is disputing with him how the guaranteed standards scheme works, and he is not receiving adequate compensation. His golden wedding anniversary was completely ruined when he had family over and the garden was literally full of excrement. This situation could not be any worse—it is an absolute disgrace. Although we have strengthened the regulations, our current system is not sufficiently economically damaging to UU to force it to take actions that would solve the problem for my constituent. Will the Minister please meet with me and my constituent to talk to him about this issue?

Emma Hardy: I would, of course, be happy to meet with my hon. Friend.

David Reed (Exmouth and Exeter East) (Con): The Minister will know from our conversations that sewage pollution is a regular problem in Exmouth and Exeter East. However, the Lib Dems on East Devon district council propose to build tens of thousands of new homes, and I do not have faith that South West Water will keep pace with all the new development. We have been bitten before: a new town was built in Cranbrook, and the corresponding sewage treatment network was never built. Will she work with me and the Housing Minister to ensure that we apply a magnifying glass to any plans and push back strongly if South West Water cannot keep pace with delivery?

Emma Hardy: The hon. Gentleman is quite right. Where we are building homes, we need to ensure that they have not only an adequate water supply, but an adequate waste water supply. We are looking at that in the water delivery taskforce, and I am happy to look at the exact example that he has given.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): Greedy privatised water companies have caused huge harm by treating our rivers and seas like an open sewer. They have been ripping off the public while doing that and, at the same time, they have handed nearly £90 billion over to shareholders since privatisation. Does the Minister agree that, as is being done with the railways, the water companies need to be taken into public ownership so that they can serve the public good and be run for the public good, not for private profit?

Emma Hardy: My hon. Friend is right to passionately defend customers and to be angry about the fact that money has been diverted and not used in the most effective way, which it should be. As I have mentioned, we are looking to set up a transparent process to look at various ownership models for water, such as a not-for-profit model.

Caroline Voaden (South Devon) (LD): Last week, South West Water was fined nearly £2 million after pleading guilty to supplying water unfit for human consumption in Brixham in my constituency in 2024. I do not believe that that fine does justice to the impact

of the event; people became ill—some were hospitalised—and the economic impact was massive. Repeated fines, some of which are never paid, are not delivering the results that customers want to see. The Minister—a Minister in a Labour Government—says that the customer is the most important priority. Does she agree that it is time to change the ownership model of the water industry so that the customer is prioritised over profit made for overseas shareholders?

Emma Hardy: The hon. Lady is right to point out the record fine that was handed out for not having drinking water at an adequate standard, and I pay tribute to the Drinking Water Inspectorate and the work it has done—it does an incredible job of making sure our drinking water quality is among the best in the world. On ownership, the hon. Lady will have heard me say that we are looking at setting out a transparent process in the White Paper for water companies that wish to transition to a different model.

Lee Barron (Corby and East Northamptonshire) (Lab): I commend the Minister for coming to the House today to outline the various measures that have been taken, but what this says to me is that the model is fundamentally broken. We need a new model, one that puts people before profits, because people should no longer accept that the public always pay the bills and the shareholder always takes the profit. The issue with water is that we have privatised the profit and nationalised the debt. Bearing that in mind, does the Minister agree that the change people want is a Government who take the right and radical approach and bring our water back into public ownership so that it serves the people, and to stop shareholders being paid a dividend for failure on what is a natural monopoly and a basic human right?

Emma Hardy: My hon. Friend is right to be angry at the service that many customers have faced for years, and at the broken model we have had for a very long time. We need a fundamental reset—we have already made a huge number of changes since coming into government, and we as the Labour party should be proud of all those changes. As I have mentioned, we are looking at a transparent process for whether requests to move to a new model should go ahead, but that is for models such as not-for-profit.

Greg Smith (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): I have many criticisms of the operating practices of Thames Water, but further to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Exmouth and Exeter East (David Reed), I am very concerned about the total dysfunctionality in how the planning system interacts with water companies. This is a problem now, even before Buckinghamshire is wrongly asked by this Government to build 95,000 homes. We have seen a lot of development in recent years—in the village of Ickford, for example, the wagon to pump sewage out and take it away by road has already become the norm. Does the Minister agree that if the Government are determined to build all these homes, water companies should get statutory consultee status for all planning applications? Otherwise, they are going to be chasing their tails rather than fixing the problems we already have.

Emma Hardy: This Government are determined to build the homes that people need. I am sure that every Member has met enough people who are living in overcrowded homes and are desperate to move somewhere else—I know I have. In fact, just on Friday, I was talking to a constituent who lived with his wife, their six-year-old daughter and their two-year-old son in a one-bedroom flat because no other alternatives were available. When we talk about objections to building homes, we never ask people living in overcrowded accommodation how they feel about the number of homes we want to build.

However, on the fundamental point of the planning system and the water companies, the hon. Member is right, and we are looking at that through the water delivery taskforce. As I have mentioned, it is important to make sure we have the water and waste water capacity to build the homes this country needs.

Cat Eccles (Stourbridge) (Lab): In 2025, there were over 300,000 sewage spills into our waterways up and down the country. In March this year, a section of the Stourbridge canal had to be closed due to raw sewage spilling into the water from a broken Severn Trent pipe, killing hundreds of fish. Does the Minister accept that the current model of privatised water companies is failing to protect our natural environment, and as sewage spillages continue, how will her Department measure success in that area? If there is no improvement, when do we say enough is enough?

Emma Hardy: My hon. Friend raises an important issue, and I remember hearing about that incident. That is why under this Government, the Environment Agency has carried out over 10,000 inspections of water companies; under the previous Government, the figure was only 4,000, so we have increased the number of inspections. We are also introducing MOT-style inspections so that when the Environment Agency goes into a water company, it can check all the infrastructure, see where the problems are and get the company to tackle them before another awful incident such as the one my hon. Friend has described occurs, where sewage ends up in the wrong place, causing damage to our environment.

James MacCleary (Lewes) (LD): Villagers in Rodmell in my constituency have been without water or had low water pressure for weeks—including during the recent heatwave—with little or no communication from South East Water. Just up the road in Ringmer, residents are really concerned about large-scale house building plans, with little account being taken of the need for additional water infrastructure despite pre-existing problems. Can the Minister tell me what action she is taking to press water companies to communicate properly with customers during outages. May I also press her again on water companies being statutory consultees in the planning system?

Emma Hardy: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that South East Water's communication with customers was frankly not good enough, and nor was its communication with Members of Parliament. One thing we are trying to do through DEFRA is to support the work with the local resilience forum to look at how we can improve that communication, so that everybody

knows what is happening and when. That way, we can work as a coherent unit, rather than having miscommunication between the different parties involved.

To repeat an answer I have already given, through the water delivery taskforce, we are looking at planning, water supply and waste water supply together when ensuring we build the homes our country needs. I say “our country”, but it is about building the homes that our people—families, adults and children—need. When we talk about house building, we forget about the number of people living in overcrowded accommodation. I am yet to have a conversation with somebody living in overcrowded accommodation who says no when I ask, “Would you like to live in a home rather than the overcrowded one-bedroom flat you are currently in?” Let us remain focused on the families who desperately need the homes we are building. As a responsible Government, we will build them in a way that does not put extra pressure on our water system.

Emily Darlington (Milton Keynes Central) (Lab): I will raise with the Minister something that I have already raised with her in a letter about the impact of Anglian Water, another failing water company. There was no water on the hottest day of the year for families in Woburn Sands and the Brickhills. That is a disgrace. Around the same time, there was a lack of water pressure, and the fire and rescue service in Milton Keynes had to bring in water to fight a fire. Does the Minister agree that each and every one of these companies has a story of failure, and it is time we held them to account? I urge her to resist calls to allow failing water companies to determine how many homes can be built in this country. Instead, we should make them do the job that they are there for, which is to give water to each and every one of us.

Emma Hardy: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I could not have put it better myself. She is right to be cross about problems with water pressure. Instead, we seem to be deflecting the problem by saying, “We should not build the homes we need”. We absolutely should build the homes we need, and we should ensure that the water companies deliver the water for them.

Richard Foord (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): In 2023, South West Water was fined little more than £2 million for seven pollution incidents dating back seven years at South West Water facilities, including at Kilminster. Now we learn that it has been fined less than £2 million for supplying drinking water in south Devon that left 140 people sick and four people hospitalised. This company had revenue of nearly three quarters of a billion pounds last year. How is the Minister upholding the polluter pays principle when the polluter only has to set aside loose change?

Emma Hardy: That was a record fine for not delivering safe and clean drinking water, but the hon. Gentleman is right that what happened there is a serious issue. Issuing fines is a matter for the independent regulators. On making the polluter pay, through our changes to the Water (Special Measures) Act 2025 we can recoup the cost of investigation from the company, and we can carry out more investigations, so under this Government the polluter really does pay.

Josh Dean (Hertford and Stortford) (Lab): The River Stort is one of our rare and precious local chalk streams, and my residents were rightly furious when they discovered that Thames Water has been pumping sewage into it for hundreds of hours. When I asked Thames Water what it intended to do to remedy the situation, it told me that it had an improvement plan in place and it would not be ready until 2028 at the earliest. That is not good enough. My residents will not stand for that, and neither will I. Can the Minister say a little more about what we can do to hold these water companies to account, to speed up the progress that they are making, and to ensure that we protect our rare chalk streams specifically?

Emma Hardy: My hon. Friend is right to point out how beautiful and rare our chalk streams are. In fact, they are often known as our rainforests, because England is one of the only places in the world where we find chalk streams. He is right to be angry about Thames Water polluting them. Under the rules that we have set under this Government, we have prioritised chalk streams and bathing waters as an issue of public safety and protecting the environment. If Thames Water is not doing that, I am keen for my hon. Friend to write to me with the specifics, and I will take it up with the company.

Clive Jones (Wokingham) (LD): In my constituency, sewage was spilt from the Arborfield treatment works 28 times last year, and in the last few days sewage has poured into the Emm brook. Given the numerous repeated sewage spillages in Wokingham and across the country, will the Minister back the Liberal Democrat proposals for a mutually owned public benefit model for water companies, focusing investment on the environment, customers and replacing and repairing infrastructure rather than on lining the pockets of water company shareholders and senior managers?

Emma Hardy: The Government are, of course, determined to tackle the sewage scandal head-on and clean up our rivers, lakes and seas for good. We want to address the root cause of pollution. We are shifting the focus to a dual approach, driving water company action and pre-pipe solutions, tackling sewer misuse and pushing for better rainwater management. These changes are more sustainable, enabling growth, delivering more benefits, reducing flood risk and protecting biodiversity. We will hold companies to account for the promises made in respect of their storm overflows discharge reduction funds.

Cuba: Humanitarian Situation

5.40 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs if she will make a statement on the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Cuba, following the US naval and financial blockade of the island.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Chris Elmore): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his urgent question.

The United Kingdom is concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Cuba, particularly shortages of food, fuel and essential medicines, which are having a real impact on ordinary citizens. The United States' long-standing embargo continues to place significant constraints on Cuba's economy and its access to international finance. The United Kingdom has consistently opposed the embargo, for instance at the United Nations, for nearly 30 years. At the same time, domestic economic challenges within Cuba also play a role, and sustainable improvement will require economic reform and greater resilience.

We welcome confirmation from the Governments of both Cuba and the United States that talks are under way to permit an urgent improvement in the current circumstances, and we urge all parties to move swiftly to an agreement that can alleviate the suffering of the Cuban people. We also welcome and encourage confidence-building measures that can help to reach that goal, including the release of political prisoners and easing of restrictive measures. Our priority is the safety and welfare of British nationals in Cuba, alongside the resilience of the Cayman Islands and Turks and Caicos Islands, our two overseas territories in the region. We remain deeply concerned for the Cuban people, and will continue to support constructive engagement, monitor humanitarian needs, and work with international partners to encourage solutions that ease hardship and promote long-term stability.

Jeremy Corbyn: I thank the Minister for his answer, and I thank him for confirmation of Britain's consistent opposition to the blockade of Cuba. My entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests will indicate my own interest in respect of my recent visit to Cuba with the hon. Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon). During that visit we were able to deliver some medical aid, for instance during a visit to a cancer hospital. Forever seared in my memory is the sadness in the eyes of the hospital director as he tried to deal with the catastrophic loss of power and loss of medicines while dealing with people whose conditions meant that they were potentially terminally ill.

Owing to the fuel blockade, any fuel bought on the open market in the streets of Havana would cost at least £10 per litre, which means that for most people it is impossible to obtain. As a result, traffic simply does not flow. Bus services do not run, very few taxis run, and refuse collection—and so much else—is impossible. Moreover, because a fair amount of the electricity is generated by means of oil, there are power cut-offs

lasting up to 20 hours a day. The health risks are enormous, the education risks are enormous, and Cuba is really up against it.

We had a fascinating meeting with the Government and others about converting the economy to a much greater extent through sustainable energy sources, and about the way in which they wish to take things forward. However, the US sanctions and blockade, the order from Donald Trump in January this year and the long-term effects of the Helms-Burton Act mean that the economy of the island is strangled. The loss of financial services, and of the use of international credit card facilities, means that the tourism industry has halted. There is no tourism industry at the moment, and there are no visitors to Cuba. At best, there are one or two flights a day at an airport that used to be quite busy.

None of this is necessary, and we should recognise and thank the Governments of Mexico, China, Canada, Japan and EU member states for the support they have given. Britain has recognised Cuba for 124 years. Can we please have some aid for Cuba, including oil?

Chris Elmore: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his question. As I said in my opening remarks, this is the 30th year in which the UK Government have objected to the embargo, and we will continue to do so. We work through the United Nations on humanitarian aid relief to ensure that direct support reaches the Cuban people.

Alan Gemmell (Central Ayrshire) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his response. The situation in Cuba is very worrying. Can he set out what the UK Government are doing to ensure that aid reaches those who need it?

Chris Elmore: My hon. Friend is right to raise the wider humanitarian concerns. I can reassure him that, through the World Food Programme and UNICEF, the UK Government continue to provide aid. We are a major contributor to the UN's central emergency response fund, which ensures that the Cuban people are supported through disaster response efforts, as well as efforts in relation to the latest challenges.

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

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) for securing the urgent question, and to the Minister for his response. The imposition of tariffs is a bilateral matter for the US and Cuba. We are appalled by Cuba's record of abusing its civilians' political, civil and human rights. The Cuban regime's record is shameful, and we should be wary of narratives that seek to explain Cuba's current difficulties solely through external factors. The reality is that the Cuban people have endured decades of economic stagnation, political repression and the denial of basic freedoms under a one-party communist system, and any assessment of the present situation must acknowledge the wider context.

I turn to the Minister's response. Can he tell the House what recent discussions Ministers have had with the US Administration regarding developments in Cuba and the actions of the United States? Can he set out what engagement the Government have had with the Cuban authorities? In those discussions, have Ministers

raised concerns about human rights, political prisoners and democratic freedoms, alongside the humanitarian issues?

Finally, are the Government considering a humanitarian response and, if so, how will they ensure that that assistance reaches the Cuban people directly and is not diverted for the benefit of a regime with such a poor record on human rights and civil liberties? The House would really benefit from a clearer statement of the Government's overall policy towards Cuba at what is clearly a significant moment for the country and its people.

Chris Elmore: I thank the right hon. Lady for the constructive way in which she always engages in these conversations on the Floor of the House. I reassure her that I would echo, and expand on, her concerns about the Cuban Administration's impact on human rights. To answer her question on engagement directly, I have met the Cuban ambassador since the beginning of this year, not only to discuss the challenges that the Cuban people are facing but to directly challenge the human rights conditions that they are facing. I can confirm that there is ongoing regular engagement between the British embassy in Washington and US State Department officials. More specifically, the Foreign Secretary, the Deputy Prime Minister and the former permanent under-secretary of state have had regular engagement with both Secretary Rubio and Deputy Secretary Landau to discuss the negotiations between the Cuban and US Administrations.

Paula Barker (Liverpool Wavertree) (Lab): The UK-Cuba political dialogue and co-operation agreement—PDCA—was signed in Havana in 2023 and ratified by the Cuban National Assembly in 2024. In the UK, it remains under cross-Whitehall consultation, with no current timetable for parliamentary scrutiny. Will the Minister consider agreeing to a provisional implementation of the PDCA, as the EU did with its own agreement in 2017, to signal constructive engagement and deepen bilateral co-operation?

Chris Elmore: I know how much my hon. Friend cares about this issue, and I was pleased to meet her and other colleagues recently to discuss the challenges that the Cuban people are facing. On better bilateral relations, we are looking to extend our work on climate and wider environmental protections, and also on science and technology, so we are looking more towards our bilateral relationship. She is right to say that the political dialogue and co-operation agreement remains under review.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Monica Harding (Esher and Walton) (LD): Trump's reckless blockade is exacerbating the humanitarian crisis facing Cubans. It is the latest iteration of his "might is right" approach to global diplomacy, with devastating impacts. Four months in, Cubans are facing a backlog of 96,000 pending surgeries. There are 1 million people without reliable drinking water, empty petrol stations and a deadly summer heatwave. UN experts are formally condemning the blockade as "energy starvation"—a coercive tool that is being used against civilians.

[Monica Harding]

With fresh sanctions imposed on Thursday, the situation will only get worse. Given that Raúl Castro is now indicted, the parallels with Venezuela, where Trump used an indictment as a precursor to forcible regime change, are impossible to ignore.

What conversations have the Government had with the US Administration about the blockade? Will the Minister provide an assessment of what will happen next, including of the possibility of military incursions? As Spain and Canada organise emergency aid shipments, will the Government review our aid contribution?

Chris Elmore: On engagement with the US Administration, as I set out in reply to the shadow Minister, the right hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton), there has been a continuous dialogue since the beginning of the year with me, the ambassador or the Foreign Secretary, including between the Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary Rubio as recently as April, so those conversations are ongoing. On aid, I can confirm that officials are working up options for how else the UK might support additional funding for the Cuban people, including through the United Nations.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): I recently went on a three-day humanitarian visit to Cuba where, among other things, we delivered aid to a cancer hospital. When we were in Cuba, not a single drop of fuel had got into the country for three months because of Trump's fuel restrictions, and I saw with my own eyes that Trump's fuel blockade was having a devastating humanitarian effect on millions of ordinary Cubans.

I am very disturbed and concerned to see the threats emerging from the Trump Administration, but I welcome the fact that, as is our country's long-standing position, the UK Government continue to vote against the blockade at the United Nations. Disputes between nations must be resolved through dialogue and with respect for international law, so will the Minister confirm that he will use his efforts and those of his office to ensure that diplomacy and dialogue are seen as the best way forward?

Chris Elmore: I will.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) on bringing forward this urgent question. I certainly agree with him that the humanitarian situation in Cuba is bad and getting a lot worse, but we may disagree about the best way to bring relief to the Cuban people. In my view—and this is not a western construct, but I believe an international construct—freedom, democracy and the international rule of law may be a better way of opening up Cuba to humanitarian relief and political relief. It is of course a one-party, communist state, and a failed state.

Will the Minister again emphasise the importance of the Cuban Government releasing political prisoners, giving their people more freedom, and allowing people to grow their own food and grow their own businesses? On the humanitarian point, does he agree with the American Administration that it is best for humanitarian aid to go through the Catholic church, charities or faith-based organisations, not through the regime?

Chris Elmore: On the diplomatic point, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon), I agree. We have had a bilateral relationship with the Cuban Government for more than 100 years, which means we have been able to have more of a frank dialogue. It is through dialogue in the multilateral and bilateral systems that we will bring more prosperity to the people of Cuba.

On the human rights issue, as I have mentioned in response to a number of Members across the House, I agree. We continue to have a dialogue about the release of political prisoners. More broadly, decisions on the future of Cuba should be for the Cuban people.

Torcuil Crichton (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his statement and the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) for bringing this urgent question to the House. Cuba is on its last breath after a brutal four-month siege that is as commercial as it is ideological in nature. We have seen Spanish hotel operators pull out of the country. We have seen Canadian companies such as Blue Diamond and Sherritt, the Canadian nickel company, thinking again because of the threat of secondary sanctions. It seems that the US President is attempting to sweep aside Canadian and Spanish interests to bring in US crony companies and reintroduce the spirit of colonialism that led to Castro's revolution in the first place. What discussions have UK Ministers had with their Spanish and Canadian counterparts to make it clear to the US Government that this is not acceptable?

Chris Elmore: We have an ongoing dialogue. I have met Canadian and Spanish counterparts in recent months, and Cuba has been discussed. As my hon. Friend will know, US decisions about what is happening in Cuba are for that Administration, but we continue to call for dialogue. As I mentioned in my opening statement, we welcome the fact that both the Cuban and US Governments have confirmed that those negotiations are ongoing. We continue to work in the multilateral space to bring about a resolution that works best for the Cuban people.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Stamford) (Con): I would hope that no one in this House had any sympathy for the Cuban regime. It is highly unlikely that President Trump will pursue military action in Cuba; it is far more likely that the US Government intend to use Venezuelan oil as leverage over Cuba to force changes in its behaviour. What is the Minister's assessment of the legal basis on which Venezuela's sovereign oil can be transferred and used as a bargaining chip by the US, and how would the UK sanctions regime respond to that?

Chris Elmore: The hon. Member will know, as a former Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, that we do not discuss sanctions on the Floor of the House, but I am more than happy to meet her to go through some of the wider challenges, particularly regarding the conditions in Venezuela and their impact on the wider region.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I will just say that it is not for the US to determine the future of the Cuban people—that is for the Cuban people themselves—or to use such methods to try to influence the regime. The UN Secretary-General has made clear

his view that Cuba is on the brink, and children are already dying as a result of what is happening in the hospitals. Some of the sanctions have affected the ability of the Cuban Administration and Cuban companies to access banking and, more recently, payment facilities. What discussions have the Government had about assisting the Cuban Administration to overcome these US Government activities, which are endangering the whole Cuban economy?

Chris Elmore: I agree with my right hon. Friend, and I hope he heard me say that decisions about the future of Cuba are for the Cuban people, not for any foreign country, including the United Kingdom. On additional assistance, as I have said in previous answers, conversations are ongoing about what more we can do in the multilateral system.

I can confirm to the House that we are doing a piece of work on the particular challenge of fuel shortages, which several Members have mentioned. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is now providing a fuel management specialist to the World Food Programme, which is unblocking some of the wider fuel challenges, and that will be critical for the effective delivery of aid. We are trying to work through this in a very practical sense, as I am sure my right hon. Friend would agree. On the wider point about banking, as I have said to him, we are working with multilateral partners to see what additional support we can provide and where we can work in a joined-up way to bring about a better future for the Cuban people.

Seamus Logan (Aberdeenshire North and Moray East) (SNP): I thank the Speaker's Office for granting this long-overdue urgent question, and I congratulate the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) on securing it.

This is indeed an urgent matter for the Cuban people as they continue to endure a deepening man-made humanitarian crisis, with shortages of food, electricity, fuel and even vital lifesaving medical supplies, as has been said. It has been caused by the Trump Administration, who have unjustifiably described Cuba as a threat to US national security. Can the Minister confirm that the Foreign Office will inform President Trump that the UK will vigorously oppose any and all attempts by the United States to use military force against Cuba, and can he reconfirm that he is seeking to persuade the US Administration to ease the measures currently contributing to this impending disaster for the Cuban people?

Chris Elmore: On diplomatic efforts, I have said repeatedly—I am happy to reiterate it—that that work is ongoing. I have listed a number of meetings that have happened at the most senior level. In terms of the hon. Gentleman's points on force, our dialogue is about peaceful resolutions through political dialogue, not through increasing any conditions. On the wider point around what is happening in Cuba, as I said in my opening response to the right hon. Member for Islington North, we have opposed the embargo for the past 30 years. I cannot predict the future, but that has been the position of Administrations from 1996 until today.

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford) (Lab): US secondary sanctions on Cuba arguably represent a clear breach of

international law. What representations have the UK Government made to the US about that, in the same way they did with regard to Greenland?

Chris Elmore: We continue to have the dialogue I have mentioned in previous answers, and we continue to be of the very strong view that diplomatic courses of action are the best way forward. We also continue to respect the UN charter and the wider multilateral system, including the international rule of law. We would expect, as a member of the UN Security Council and the General Assembly, all countries to follow that position.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I entirely agree with the Minister when he says that the future of Cuba should be decided by the Cuban people. What assessment have the Government made of the likelihood of the Cuban Government ever allowing the Cuban people to take those decisions?

Chris Elmore: The right hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. Work goes on constantly to try to work through how there can be a move towards the decisions of Cuba being for the Cuban people. I would point out that our bilateral relationship has been in existence for more than 100 years. I say that not just for the sake of it; we have been able to have those frank and difficult conversations because we have kept the relationship open. We will continue to have those difficult conversations, whether with the ambassador or with Ministers in the Cuban system, because we want to do the very best we can for the Cuban people.

Brian Leishman (Alloa and Grangemouth) (Lab): I thank the right hon. Member for Islington North for bringing forward this urgent question. I do not think that anyone can possibly dispute that energy shortages will prove fatal, as will the disease that will inevitably follow, and hyperinflation for essential items will price millions of Cubans out of buying goods. Do the UK Government recognise that the American blockades are a lethal method of economic terrorism? Why on earth do the UK Government not call out internationally our counterparts in the American Administration for that?

Chris Elmore: I do not know if my hon. Friend missed my previous answers, but we have very publicly spent the past 30 years voting against the very thing he is complaining about. We have not supported the embargo in the international space where these decisions are taken and that has been the position for successive Administrations.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): In trying to understand what America has been doing in its own backyard, what assessment has the Minister made of Cuba as one of the largest foreign contributors to Russia's illegal war in Ukraine? What are the Government doing to better understand the position of Cuba as a potential hub for hybrid warfare in the area, inspired by Russia and as Russia's entry point for its malign activities in the wider Hispanic region?

Chris Elmore: The right hon. Gentleman is right to raise those issues. The work in this space continues. We work with the US Administration, as our closest ally, on defence and national security. We will continue to

[Chris Elmore]

challenge in this space and work with Five Eyes and other security partners to ensure that that work does not move away from the fact that there are still those economic and wider social challenges for the Cuban people. National security remains an absolute priority for us, as it should for all Governments.

Steve Witherden (Montgomeryshire and Glyndŵr) (Lab): As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on Cuba, I refer the House to the APPG register. In September in Machynlleth, the Cuban ambassador and a Cuban doctor working in Birmingham addressed my constituents in Montgomeryshire on the medical situation in Cuba. Since September, the situation has become worse, with nurses manually hand pumping ventilators so sick babies can breathe, and plastic carrier bags being used instead of colostomy bags. We have the aid needed here. Will we defy Trump's monstrous blockade and get it into Cuba?

Chris Elmore: I thank my hon. Friend for his question and for the work he does as the chair of the APPG. I have been pleased to engage with him since he took on that role. Just to reassure him, as I did in our meeting, we are using the World Food Programme, UNICEF and the UN central emergency response fund to ensure that the funding is given to the correct agencies to support the Cuban people. That is the point: we are using agencies that are trusted in the region and then providing additional support through the WFP. We have fuel management specialists, so that aid can actually be delivered to the Cuban people. He is right to be deeply concerned, as we all should be, about the humanitarian conditions that the Cubans are living in. It is our job, as the UK Government, to find ways to ensure the aid goes directly in. That is what we are doing.

Richard Foord (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): US sanctions on Cuba have been stepped up since Marco Rubio became US Secretary of State. Will the Minister talk about what representations the UK Government have made in Washington about the so-called Donroe doctrine as it relates to Cuba?

Chris Elmore: As I have said in previous answers, engagement remains at the highest levels, including at the British embassy in Washington with the US State Department, Secretary Rubio and deputy Secretary Landau, and between, again, Secretary Rubio and the Foreign Secretary, the former permanent under-secretary at the FCDO and the Deputy Prime Minister. That work goes on constantly in terms of engagement in relation to Cuba and many, many other issues relating to US-UK bilateral relationships.

Steel Industry (Nationalisation) Bill

[1ST ALLOCATED DAY]

Considered in Committee

[CAROLINE NOKES *in the Chair*]

Clause 1

MEANING OF "STEEL UNDERTAKING"

6.7 pm

Dame Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): I beg to move amendment 21, page 1, line 6, leave out "of or including" and insert "predominantly of".

This amendment would narrow the definition of a steel undertaking so that it had to be a business consisting predominantly of the manufacture or processing of steel, or iron for the purposes or in connection with the manufacture of steel.

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Caroline Nokes): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Clause stand part.

Amendment 14, in clause 2, page 1, line 14, leave out "includes (but is not limited to)" and insert "means".

This amendment would limit the public interest test to the areas set out in subsections (a) to (c).

Amendment 23, page 1, line 20, at end insert—

"(d) preventing the closure of, or the loss of jobs at, a steel undertaking in Wales."

This amendment includes the public interest in preventing the loss of jobs in Wales and the prevention of the closure of a steel undertaking in Wales in the meaning of public interest for the purposes of the Act.

Amendment 1, page 2, line 20, at end insert—

"(2A) The Secretary of State may not exercise a principal transfer power unless they have laid a statement before both Houses of Parliament explaining their reasons for concluding that it is necessary to exercise the power in the public interest."

This amendment would require the Secretary of State to lay a statement before Parliament explaining their reasons for concluding that it is necessary to exercise a principal transfer power in the national interest, before exercising that power.

Amendment 15, page 2, line 20, at end insert—

"(2A) The Secretary of State may not exercise a principal transfer power unless he has commissioned an independent assessment of whether the exercise of the power is in the public interest, and that assessment has demonstrated that it is in the public interest.

(2B) The Secretary of State may appoint such independent person as he thinks fit to carry out an independent assessment under subsection (2A) above, and may pay remuneration and allowances to that person."

This amendment would require an independent assessment of whether the public interest test had been met before the Secretary of State could exercise the principal transfer powers.

Amendment 16, page 2, line 20, at end insert—

"(2A) The exercise of a principal transfer power may only be considered to be in the public interest under subsection (1) if the Secretary of State has is satisfied that the exercise of the power would provide value for money for the taxpayer."

This amendment would require the NAO to have concluded that the exercise of the principal transfer power was good value for money before the Secretary of State could consider it to be in the public interest.

Amendment 17, page 2, line 20, at end insert—

“(2A) The Secretary of State may not exercise a principal transfer power under subsection (1) unless they have laid a report before Parliament containing full details of the criteria used to assess whether the exercise of power would be in the public interest.”

This amendment would require the Secretary of State to publish full details of the criteria used to assess the public interest test before exercising the principal transfer power.

Clause 2 stand part.

Amendment 12, in clause 3, page 2, line 10, leave out subsections (3) to (5).

This amendment would prevent the Secretary of State extending the sunset of the principal transfer powers.

Clause 3 stand part.

Amendment 2, in clause 4, page 2, line 30, leave out “negative” and insert “affirmative”.

This amendment changes the procedure for share transfer regulations from the negative procedure to the affirmative procedure.

Clauses 4 to 14 stand part.

Amendment 3, in clause 15, page 8, line 21, leave out “negative” and insert “affirmative”.

This amendment changes the procedure for property transfer regulations from the negative procedure to the affirmative procedure.

Clauses 15 to 38 stand part.

Amendment 18, in clause 39, page 25, line 32, leave out “negative” and insert “affirmative”.

This amendment would require regulations relating to continuity obligations to be subject to the affirmative procedure.

Clauses 39 to 44 stand part.

Amendment 19, in clause 45, page 28, line 37, leave out “negative” and insert “affirmative”.

This amendment would require regulations related to enforcement to be subject to the affirmative procedure.

Clauses 45 to 51 stand part.

New clause 2—*Stakeholder Advisory Committee*—

“(1) The Secretary of State must establish a Stakeholder Advisory Committee to provide advice on the exercise of principal transfer powers under this Act (“the Committee”).

(2) The Secretary of State must ensure that the membership of the Committee includes representation from stakeholders, including but not limited to—

- (a) industries that rely on the supply of steel, including the defence sector and critical national infrastructure,
- (b) representatives of the workforce of the steel undertaking, and
- (c) local authorities for the areas in which the steel undertaking operates.

(3) The Secretary of State must consult, and have regard to the advice of, the Committee before making a determination that the exercise of a principal transfer power is necessary in the public interest under section 2.”

This new clause requires the Secretary of State to establish a stakeholder advisory committee. The Secretary of State would be required to seek the committee’s advice before making a determination that the exercise of a principal transfer power under the Act was in the public interest.

New clause 3—*Jobs and industrial transition strategy*—

“(1) Where the Secretary of State has exercised a principal transfer power in respect of a steel undertaking, the Secretary of State must prepare and publish a jobs and industrial transition strategy.

(2) A strategy under subsection (1) must explicitly set out how the Government’s investment and transition plans for the specified steel undertaking will—

- (a) protect skilled employment,
- (b) provide and support reskilling and redeployment opportunities for the workforce, and
- (c) deliver tangible economic renewal and support economic resilience in the local communities dependent on the steel undertaking.

(3) The strategy must be laid before Parliament within six months of the day on which the regulations exercising the principal transfer power take effect.”

This new clause requires that the Secretary of State publishes a report on jobs and industrial transition strategy where it exercises a principal transfer power.

New clause 5—*Duty to report: 10-year strategy for nationalised steel undertakings*—

“(1) Within three months of exercising a principal transfer power in relation to a steel undertaking under this Act, the Secretary of State must publish and lay before both Houses of Parliament a report containing a 10-year strategy for the steel undertaking.

(2) Any report published under subsection (1) must include—

- (a) a strategy for the operation of any blast furnaces which form part of the steel undertaking,
- (b) an investment plan for the steel undertaking,
- (c) a vision for the future of the site of the steel undertaking, and
- (d) consideration of the need for a steel procurement strategy which prioritises British steel to support the steel undertaking,

for the following 10 years.”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to publish a 10-year strategy for any steel undertaking nationalised under this Act.

New clause 8—*Contingent liabilities*—

“(1) The Secretary of State may not exercise a principal transfer power in relation to a steel undertaking unless they have made a statement to Parliament on the value of contingent liabilities associated with the use of the power.

(2) The statement made under subsection (1) must include—

- (a) the value of any contingent liabilities to be acquired; and,
- (b) the steps the Secretary of State will take to seek to minimise taxpayer exposure to any contingent liabilities so acquired.”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to make a statement to Parliament on contingent liabilities acquired before they exercise a principal transfer power under this Act.

Dame Harriett Baldwin: If I may, I would also like to speak to the other amendments in my name and those of my hon. Friends, and, before I do that, approach the Bill with the serious concern it deserves. Today’s amendments reflect some of the points the Opposition made on Second Reading: that the Bill is a chaotic, unplanned intervention that risks landing taxpayers with an open-ended and potentially unlimited bill. Without addressing those issues as we make this legislation, we need to really focus on the things that are currently making the domestic production of steel unprofitable,

[*Dame Harriett Baldwin*]

such as higher employment costs and policies in pursuit of net zero, such as carbon taxes and associated regulations and levies.

Before I turn to the amendments in detail, I put on record how much I respect the Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade, the hon. Member for Stockton North (Chris McDonald), and his real-life expertise in the steel business. He is truly a rare example on the Government Benches of someone who has deep private-sector experience and really knows his subject—I salute that. My own private-sector expertise is as an investor, so most of the amendments in my name and those of my hon. Friends are trying to protect the taxpayer from some of the financial risks the Bill lands them with.

The fact is that nobody wanted to nationalise British Steel. The Government told us last year, when they brought in emergency legislation—and brought Members back on a Saturday for the first time since the Falklands war—that they did not want to nationalise British Steel. They may now claim to their Back Benchers and union backers that this is something to celebrate as true socialism, but the reality is that it is an outcome that the Government wanted to avoid.

The Government failed to negotiate a good outcome with the Chinese owners of British Steel. The Prime Minister and the Business Secretary went all the way to China and failed to get a deal. Whenever this Government negotiate, the taxpayer loses out. The Conservatives do not think that the Government should nationalise British Steel, because we do not think politicians should be running businesses. Since the Government intervened last year, it has cost taxpayers over £1.3 million every day.

The Bill is deeply flawed, and it is in a spirit of goodwill that I offer the Government the chance to adopt the Opposition's amendments. I am sure that they will want to agree to them, as they are all sensible.

Richard Tice (Boston and Skegness) (Reform): To correct the record, I have been calling for British Steel to be nationalised for seven years. I urged the previous Conservative Government not to sell British Steel to the Chinese, and if they had followed my excellent advice, we would not be in the pickle we are now in.

Dame Harriett Baldwin: The hon. Gentleman has got his point on the record.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): It is interesting that the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Richard Tice) once again outflanks Labour on socialism, but there we are. As a fellow west midlands MP, I am sure my right hon. Friend will be as concerned about the Bill as I am. My constituent, Mr Peter Hughes of EverEdge, which is a west midlands steel manufacturing company, has suggested that:

“While these measures are positioned as protecting primary steel production (such as TATA Steel), they are inadvertently undermining the much larger UK steel-processing sector.”

Does my right hon. Friend share his concern, in particular, the fact that:

“While raw material costs are rising, there are no equivalent restrictions on imported finished products”?

That could be seen—inadvertently, I accept—as a tax on manufacturing. It will certainly damage UK, Shropshire, and west midlands steel manufacturing.

Dame Harriett Baldwin: As a west midlands MP, I absolutely recognise that. In fact, I was with a constituent in Worcester on Friday, Mr Michael Outwin of Industrial & Tractor Ltd, who is going to have to pay a 50% tariff. I tried to table some amendments on the tariff regime, but unfortunately, they were not orderly, so I will limit myself to agreeing with my right hon. Friend. There are many types of steel that will be affected by the tariffs that do not seem to be made in the UK. I would like the Minister to clarify how he expects people to continue manufacturing from the steel that they have been importing for some time, once the tariffs are in place.

On the Opposition amendments, I am sure that everyone in the Committee agrees that the Bill as it stands exposes the taxpayer to unlimited liability for an unlimited length of time. The Bill expropriates businesses, and that will deter inward investment into our country. You do not have to take my word for it, Dame Caroline, as it is also in the Government's impact assessment that one of the Bill's potential impacts is that it chills the investment environment in this sector. That is why we have tabled the amendments the Committee is considering today.

6.15 pm

Amendment 21 would ensure that the Bill applies only to businesses predominantly engaged in the manufacture or processing of steel or iron for the purposes of steel manufacturing, rather than to those whose operations merely include it. The way the Bill is written is extremely wide and, as highlighted in the explanatory statement, amendment 21 would narrow the scope to avoid dragging in businesses with only minor steel operations. The current drafting is far too broad and indiscriminate and could exacerbate the chilling effect on business in this country. I am sure the Minister will want to agree to the amendment, because by tightening the definition it responds to business concerns that the legislation could create collateral damage across supply chains and related sectors. It would prevent Government overreach and unintended consequences across the wider industrial base.

Amendment 14 would replace

“includes (but is not limited to)”

with “means”. It is a subtle difference, but one that would restrict the public interest test strictly to the listed criteria. As it stands, the public interest test is very widely defined. Amendment 14 would prevent Ministers from expanding the definition of public interest at will by ensuring that the trigger for nationalisation is clearly defined and bounded in law. A vague public interest test increases risk and makes the UK less attractive to investors, especially in capital-intensive sectors such as steel. The amendment would limit the Bill's chaotic, unplanned intervention with no set limits, which risks creating an open-ended chequebook for state control.

Amendment 15 would require the Secretary of State to commission an independent assessment to prove that nationalisation is in the public interest before the exercise of transfer powers. Industry figures have warned that nationalisation could cost billions of pounds and burden British taxpayers with large contingent liabilities, reinforcing the need for independent scrutiny before action. The

amendment would introduce an objective check before a potentially multibillion-pound intervention is allowed, thereby ensuring that decisions are based on evidence rather than political expediency. We cannot have an indefinite and infinite Bill without proper safeguards.

Agreeing amendment 16 would mean that nationalisation could be considered to be in the public interest only if the National Audit Office determined that it would deliver value for money for the British taxpayer. Our amendment would introduce an explicit taxpayer protection test to ensure that Ministers could not proceed unless the intervention was economically justified, not just politically convenient. British taxpayers should not be asked to sign off on a blank cheque. We cannot have nationalisation in search of rationale.

Amendment 17 would require the Secretary of State to publish the full details of the criteria used to judge whether nationalisation is in the public interest before exercising the powers. The amendment addresses the unchecked powers and lack of clarity in the Bill. It would ensure that Parliament and the public could effectively scrutinise the Government's reasoning.

Amendment 12 would remove provisions allowing the Government to extend the sunset clause for nationalisation powers, which can currently be extended time and again. The amendment would ensure that those extraordinary powers remain strictly time limited. I am sure the Minister will want to accept the amendment, because without it we risk open-ended intervention with no clear exit strategy.

Amendment 18 would require regulations relating to continuity obligations to be subject to the affirmative rather than the negative procedure. Given the enormous scale of intervention in the Bill, the amendment would address the insufficient democratic scrutiny and strengthen parliamentary oversight of potentially intrusive or costly measures. Similarly, amendment 19 would also require regulations related to enforcement to be subject to the affirmative procedure.

Finally, Dame Caroline, new clause 8 would require the Secretary of State, before nationalisation, to publish a statement to Parliament on contingent liabilities. Nationalisation could saddle the state with significant contingent liabilities and long-term financial risks, making up-front disclosure to Parliament essential. Of particular importance in new clause 8 are subsections 2(a) and (b). Paragraph (a) would ensure that the Government are required to be transparent on the value of hidden or future liabilities, including those that relate to environmental, pension or operational risks that could fall on taxpayers. Paragraph (b) would ensure that the Secretary of State takes steps

"to minimise taxpayer exposure to any contingent liabilities so acquired."

We do not think the British taxpayer should be exposed to unknown and escalating costs without clear disclosure.

In conclusion, taken together, our amendments and new clause will hold the Government to account. We oppose the Bill in its current form, its potential colossal cost to the British taxpayer, and the adverse impact on our steel manufacturing sector and related supply chains. By accepting our amendments and new clause, the Government will simply strengthen accountability and transparency. I commend them to the Committee.

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Caroline Nokes): Before I call the Minister, I will set the record straight: sadly, it is just plain old Ms Nokes in Committee of the whole House.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Chris McDonald): I thank the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Dame Harriett Baldwin), for her incredibly generous remarks at the start of the debate. I think we all try our best here with whatever expertise we have; of course, I recognise her expertise in finance, and will aim to address some of the serious issues she raised.

At the heart of the Bill and this debate is the future of our steel industry. The difference in opinion between the Government and the Opposition over the use of nationalisation as a tool of industrial strategy may be irreconcilable, but it is a useful tool—although not one to be used lightly. It is important that it is used in situations of market failure or some other private sector issue, which is certainly the case today. It was also the case when the previous Conservative Government briefly nationalised one of our steel companies, before that led to a failed private sector ownership.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): Yes, the Minister is right: Greg Clark nationalised it. As far as my constituents who work at Scunthorpe are concerned—and, I am sure, those of my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Immingham (Martin Vickers)—all we want is a viable Scunthorpe. We do not take an ideological line on nationalisation in this case. Given the problems we are now reading about in respect of electric arc technology in Port Talbot, can the Minister commit that the Government are fully committed to the blast furnaces in Scunthorpe?

Chris McDonald: Perhaps I can even give a slightly fuller answer than that. The particular issue with that previous nationalisation by the then Secretary of State was that it was effected merely to create a change of ownership, without actually improving the quality of the business or attracting additional investment into the business at the time. It is important to take this Bill in the full context of our steel trade measures and our steel strategy, which lays out a forward plan for the steel industry. Nationalisation is one of the tools that we can use.

The Government have been clear in our steel strategy that we see a transition to electric arc furnaces over time—there are good reasons for that, not least because they are the most productive and efficient technology available and are reliable and tried and tested—but our intervention in the Steel Industry (Special Measures) Act 2025 and our ongoing support of the British Steel business has been to ensure that we have blast furnace-produced primary steel available as part of that transition. The furnaces in Scunthorpe are the only two working blast furnaces in the UK, and they are currently our only source of primary steel.

The right hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) also raised reports in the press about delays to the project in south Wales. Delays on such a large project are not unusual, but the specific issue in that case was around the groundworks—I would certainly be happy to expand on that more if it becomes part of

[Chris McDonald]

the debate. I am, of course, in close contact with Tata Steel about that. In my experience of such projects, it is always difficult to understand what the duration of the project will be until it gets out of the ground, and ultimately there are issues with the groundworks there.

Let me move on to address amendment 21 and the issues raised by the shadow Minister. In terms of its structure, the Bill is very much modelled on the Banking Act 2009, which received incredibly broad support. The clauses in part 1 are vital to the operation of the Bill, and I urge the Committee to reject attempts to remove them.

While I understand the consideration that has gone into the preparation of the amendments, narrowing the scope of the definition of a steel undertaking would, in the Government's view, introduce ambiguity rather than clarity. In practice, there are unlikely to be many undertakings operating at scale in both steelmaking and an unrelated business practice; if there were, the Government would look to exercise powers in a way that focused on what was necessary to operate the steelmaking business. The drafting of the Bill follows on from the text of the Steel Industry (Special Measures) Act. The Government are therefore of the view that amendment 21 is not necessary.

Jacob Collier (Burton and Uttoxeter) (Lab): I fully support the need to buy British, but does the Minister recognise that JCB, based in my constituency, cannot source the grade and size of steel required for its machines entirely from the UK, and that a significant proportion of its steel comes from the EU? The proposed tariffs will apply to imported steel even when no UK alternative exists, so they are due to cost JCB millions. Will the Minister look into the matter urgently and meet me and JCB to discuss it?

Chris McDonald: My hon. Friend raises a specific point about JCB. I am reasonably familiar with its business, and I think its particular concern may be around the sourcing of plate steel. The steel trade measures—the tariffs and quotas that we announced—are designed to ensure that the UK is not subject to subsidised steel, which would damage our upstream industry, and will certainly help to support the upstream sector. Of course, we need a strong upstream sector in order to have a strong downstream sector. The issue with plate steel is that the Dalzell plate mill in Scotland, which is capable of making many of these steels, has not been operating for some time. I would be happy to meet my hon. Friend and JCB to discuss that in more detail.

Mark Pritchard *rose*—

Chris McDonald: I was just going to address the point the right hon. Gentleman made about the business in his constituency. I am not familiar with that business, but the general approach we have taken is to ensure that the groupings of steel under the trade measures are subject to the tariffs where those steels are or can be made in the UK, accepting that some of them are not but could be made in the UK, including at operations such as Dalzell. It is not always possible to separate all those steels out based on the groupings, so that is the purpose of the quota.

I am always interested to hear of specific examples. I had a meeting with a business last week for which this appeared to be a concern, but once we discussed the issue in detail we found that it was not an issue for the business, because of some of the arrangements that were in place. If the right hon. Gentleman would like to share further details about that case, I am keen to hear them.

Mark Pritchard: For clarity—perhaps I was not clear—a constituent of mine runs the company but the company itself is actually in another constituency, and it employs people throughout the west midlands. Could I write to the Minister about that particular case in order to seek more clarity?

Chris McDonald *indicated assent.*

Mark Pritchard: I am grateful for that. I want to make two brief points on tariffs, which the Minister mentioned. First, the Shropshire chamber of commerce has said:

“There is growing concern that tariffs may be applied to certain materials and products that are not currently available from UK manufacturers”.

I would be interested to hear the Minister's view on that. Secondly, concerns have been raised about fabricated steel products that appear to fall outside the tariff regime. In practice, that could create an unintended incentive for steel-processing fabrication work to move overseas to avoid tariff costs. Will the Minister comment on that?

Chris McDonald: I am aware of that issue as well, and if the right hon. Gentleman would like to include all those issues in the letter, I will be happy to provide him with a response.

Gideon Amos (Taunton and Wellington) (LD): I have been contacted by Coker Engineering in my constituency, which supplies Rolls-Royce, Leonardo and other defence companies. It can only use steels from certified electric arc mills of certain types and is worried about facing 50% tariffs after 1 July, once tariff-free goods have been used up. Will the Minister similarly look at its concerns and consider exemptions for steels that cannot be sourced in the UK?

6.30 pm

Chris McDonald: The hon. Member might wish to let the business know that we have committed to a 12-month review of these tariffs, which, as I said, apply to steels that are made or could be made in the UK. I am aware that Speciality Steel UK is currently not operational as it is going through an administration process. Although the sort of high-quality aerospace steels that he mentioned may not be made there, I think it is probably the most likely location where they will be made, subject to those certifications, which are held by that business. The official receiver is currently in exclusive discussions with the business and a potential owner, so it is possible that the company he refers to may see a UK supplier soon, but if he shares the details with me, I will certainly be able to give him a fuller response.

Alex Ballinger (Halesowen) (Lab): Interestingly, there is also a Coker facility in my constituency, and I have had several other businesses write to me on this subject. Only last week I visited the London Screw Company in

Halesowen, which is really concerned that the 50% tariffs will increase the price of its products and make it uncompetitive. Although I am pleased that there will be a 12-month review, I wonder if that will come soon enough for such businesses in my constituency. Can the Minister provide any relief in the interim for those that may be on the verge of something more serious?

Chris McDonald: I thank my hon. Friend for raising the issue of the London Screw Company, and also for the discussion he had with me about that very company last week. It looks to me to produce an extraordinarily high-quality range of products, and certainly better than I normally find for my DIY projects, so it is my intention to patronise that company in future—we should all have more high-quality ironmongery, I believe. In a similar vein, if my hon. Friend writes to me with further details, I will ensure that my officials look at that matter, but in the first instance we would look to see whether those steels are made or could be made in the UK.

Unless there are any further questions about downstream steel producing, I will move on to address more of the shadow Minister's comments. She talked about the public interest test in clause 2. Some of the amendments would limit the test exclusively to consideration of the three factors in clause 2, whereas amendment 23 seeks to expand them to include the prevention of closure or job losses in Wales. The inclusion of the three factors in the Bill offers some additional weight, and of course any assessment of an intervention will need to be considered against them. However, there may be a good rationale for an intervention that moved beyond that and did not sit squarely under those factors, so in our view it would be sensible not to bind the hands of the Government in that way.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): Steel provides vital materials for our national infrastructure, from defence to renewable energy, and creates thousands of jobs across the UK. The Liberal Democrats therefore welcome the action that the Government are taking to protect British Steel and ensure that the blast furnaces in Scunthorpe do not go cold, but we are clear that the nationalisation of British Steel must be a temporary step to rescue the business before it can be returned to the private sector. We believe in a thriving, privately run steel industry, supported and empowered by the Government through an effective steel strategy.

Although the Liberal Democrats support this step, the Government must provide more detail on the plan, including how they will find private co-investors who can help to modernise the sites and put the money in to help to create more jobs. They must also ensure that the key stakeholders, including industries that rely on steel such as defence, are properly engaged in and represented through the process. We cannot afford another collapse of British Steel in a few years' time, and we must move on from interim short-term measures to create a robust long-term plan for the future of the plant and sustainable domestic steel production, with an emphasis on national security.

I wish to speak first in favour of amendment 1, which stands in my name. Fundamentally, it is about parliamentary accountability. If the Secretary of State is to exercise a significant transfer power, Parliament should, at the very least, be told why that action is necessary and in the public interest. The amendment would not prevent the Government from acting; it would simply require Ministers to explain their reasoning before exercising the power, providing far greater accountability and transparency. Requiring a statement to both Houses would help to ensure that the use of the powers is proportionate, justified and open to democratic oversight. The Government already argue that the powers will be used only where necessary. If that is the case, there should be no objection to setting out those reasons clearly before Parliament. Amendment 1 proposes a modest and reasonable safeguard. It does not create a veto or impose an onerous process; it merely asks Ministers to account for their decisions.

I wish to speak in favour of amendments 2 and 3, which seek to ensure that regulations relating to property transfers and share transfers are made subject to the affirmative procedure rather than the negative procedure. The transfer of property or shares by ministerial regulation is not a minor or purely technical matter. These provisions are the heart of the Bill and give the Government significant powers with substantial financial, operational and public consequences. Given the importance of such decisions, does the Minister not agree that it is entirely appropriate that Parliament should approve such regulations, rather than having to rely on the limited scrutiny afforded by the negative procedure? The affirmative procedure would guarantee a debate and a vote in both Houses, ensuring proper democratic oversight before the powers were exercised. At their core, amendments 2 and 3 are about reinforcing accountability, transparency and parliamentary sovereignty in the exercise of delegated powers, and I urge Members to support them.

New clause 2, which also stands in my name, would establish a stakeholder advisory committee to ensure that decisions made under the powers in the Bill included input from the relevant groups and those most affected. The exercise of principal transfer powers could have major implications not only for the steel undertaking itself, but for workers, local communities, supply chains and strategically important industries across the country. The proposed committee would bring together voices from industry, the workforce and local authorities, ensuring that decisions were grounded in practical expertise and real-world consequences. The inclusion of sectors such as defence and critical national infrastructure is particularly important, given the strategic significance of the steel supply to national resilience and economic security. A structured advisory mechanism would improve transparency, strengthen confidence in decision making and help to ensure that interventions are sustainable and effective. New clause 2 is about ensuring that the public interest is determined not behind closed doors, but with the benefit of broad expertise and stakeholder input.

I wish to speak in favour of new clause 3, which recognises that intervention in a steel undertaking cannot simply be about ownership or transfer powers in isolation. It must be about people, jobs and the long-term future of industrial communities. If the Government exercise these significant powers, they should be required to set

[Sarah Olney]

out a clear strategy for protecting workers and supporting economic transition. Not only is the steel industry strategically important to the national economy; it is often central to the identity and prosperity of the local communities within which it is situated. Workers in these industries possess highly valuable and specialised skills. Any transition strategy should therefore prioritise the protection of skilled employment wherever possible. Where change is unavoidable, there must be a serious commitment to retraining, reskilling and redeployment opportunities so that workers are not left behind. New clause 3 would help to ensure that Government intervention was accompanied by a coherent industrial strategy, rather than being another short-term fix and crisis management.

Steelmaking is of vital strategic importance to the UK. It creates thousands of jobs across the country and is central to many communities, and we rely on it for essential parts of our national infrastructure, from defence and transport to clean energy generation and advanced manufacturing. Although the Liberal Democrats are supportive of the pace and urgency of the Government's action to protect British Steel, nationalisation must be a temporary step, and the Government must ensure adequate transparency and accountability throughout the process. I therefore urge the Minister to support these amendments, to ensure that the legislation can deliver the necessary support to the steel industry, while balancing the needs of local communities and workers and ensuring that the necessary steps are taken to ensure thorough parliamentary accountability.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): As you know, Madam Chair, I have been urging successive Governments for over a decade to back the British steel industry, so it is genuinely a pleasure to be here today as the Government do just that. I support this historic Bill.

Steel is essential for the UK's economy. It supports thousands of well-paid, skilled jobs and plays a crucial role in ensuring Britain's security, particularly in an ever more volatile and uncertain world. Yet for years the industry has been allowed to wither. Production has fallen and plants have been lost—and with them jobs, capability and capacity. We simply cannot afford to allow this precipitous decline to go on any longer.

Rotherham is a steel town. It has seen the consequences of past Governments' neglect up close. Speciality Steel, which is based in Rotherham—and Stocksbridge—should be a crown jewel in our economy, but it has been allowed to lurch from crisis to crisis, choked of investment and left at the mercy of unscrupulous ownership, unfair competition and a lack of vision. The plants currently stand still, shuttered amid the fallout of Liberty's collapse. The workers are furloughed and uncertain about what their futures hold. I would be grateful if the Minister could update the Committee on the current state of the sale, which is now in its final stages.

My concern is not limited to Speciality Steel. Steel in Rotherham is at the centre of our local economy, and the crisis has had a substantial impact up and down the supply chain. The Minister's ambition for steel's renaissance could also be a rebirth for local businesses and local communities, but that requires investment, foresight and commitment. The Government's steel strategy sets

out a strategic vision for the industry and, crucially, delivers real and profound change for the sector as a whole. With £2.5 billion of investment in the sector and an ambitious but achievable target of 50% of the steel used in Britain to be produced here, the strategy is a blueprint for a revitalised domestic steel industry; it is one that has been roundly welcomed by the sector.

Perhaps most importantly, the strategy sets out a new approach to steel imports. Time and again, I and other steel MPs in particular have warned that a failure to tackle cheap, often state-subsidised and heavily polluting imports would destroy any attempt to increase domestic production. Without a level playing field, British steel cannot hope to compete. It is therefore welcome that the Government have acted to protect UK steel producers from unfair competition through a range of new trade measures, quotas and tariffs. While that is good news for steel producers, we do need to get the details right. I thank hon. Members on both sides of the Committee for raising specific examples of that.

Alongside steel producers, Rotherham hosts a large number of steel stockholders and downstream businesses. I have raised with the Government a number of instances in which trade measures have been introduced on products not currently produced in the UK, or where UK production and capacity is far below demand. I urge Ministers to act to ensure that those businesses are not impacted unfairly and that trade measures conform to the realities of the UK market; to do otherwise risks inadvertently harming the very industries and communities that the Government seek to defend.

While the Bill will not have a direct impact on steel production in Rotherham, it does send an important signal. I am proud that the Government are taking resolute action to ensure that they have the necessary tools at their disposal to safeguard the future of British Steel in Scunthorpe. I hope that this will set a precedent as the situation with Speciality Steel develops and that they will take similarly decisive action there, should it prove necessary.

With the right support, British steel can—and should—play an ever greater role in our economy, in infrastructure projects and, crucially, in our national security. I know that steelworkers in Rotherham will be relieved to have a Government who are so clearly on their side—on the side of good jobs and a dynamic economy—and, most importantly, a Government who back British steel.

Sir Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con): I will focus my remarks on clauses 1 to 3 of the Bill and the breadth of the powers that they give to the Secretary of State. I start with the meaning of a “steel undertaking” in clause 1, which is one

“that carries on a business consisting of or including...the manufacture or processing of steel, or...iron”.

As the Minister will know, I raised in an intervention on the Secretary of State on Second Reading—indeed my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Dame Harriett Baldwin), who speaks from the Front Bench, also mentioned this earlier—that that wording could appear to include undertakings that have as little as 1% of their business in iron or steel.

6.45 pm

I take the Minister's point that such undertakings may be vanishingly unlikely, and that the majority of enterprises we are concerned with are predominantly

engaged in the manufacture of steel, but we have to ensure that the legislation we pass is fit for purpose not just in the usual case, but in all anticipated cases. I therefore hope that he will seriously consider amendment 21, tabled by my hon. Friend. It seems sensible to me to ensure that, in pursuit of what may be a perfectly rational Government policy to protect domestic steel manufacture, we are not encompassing in the Bill the possibility of any undertaking being liable for nationalisation when that undertaking produces little of its output in the iron and steel industry. Amendment 21 would mean that steel was a predominant feature of a business in scope of the Bill, not an incidental one.

Clause 2 gives the Secretary of State authority to

“exercise a principal transfer power...if the Secretary of State considers it necessary to do so in the public interest.”

Of course, it is the Secretary of State’s judgment about the public interest that counts here, so we need to be confident that his power to do so is appropriately constrained. As has been discussed, subsection (2) sets out some examples of when the public interest test may be met, but there is plenty of breadth even in those scenarios. Under paragraph (c), for example, the Secretary of State may decide to nationalise a steel undertaking when he considers doing so would support

“the economy of the United Kingdom or any part of the United Kingdom.”

The Minister will recognise that I raised that point, too, on Second Reading.

The question must surely be: how small a part of the UK will do to satisfy that criterion? The closure of one steel-related facility will have an obvious economic impact on the town or immediate area in which it is located. Is that sufficient to meet the paragraph (c) criterion and justify the Secretary of State deciding to nationalise the whole undertaking? The wording would appear to allow that, and would mean that any decision to close a steel plant or any other facility relating to the manufacture of steel could render the company that owns that facility liable to nationalisation. We need to ask: is that what the Government intend and, if so, what are the likely consequences for industrial investment in this country? If that is not what the Government intend—it may well not be—surely the language should be tightened.

The definition of “public interest” in the Bill is wider still, because the three examples given in subsection (2)(a) to (c) are just that—examples. The Bill allows the Secretary of State to nationalise on the basis of any other definition of the public interest that he may choose, undefined in the Bill. I therefore support amendment 14, tabled by my hon. Friend, which would limit the definition of the public interest to the three examples listed in the clause. However, the Government would be wise to think again and tighten the language even within that.

In clause 3, the Secretary of State purports to limit his powers by use of a sunset clause. The problem is, he also proposes to allow himself to reset the sunset, and to do so indefinitely, under subsection (3). I am afraid that makes a mockery of the concept of a sunset clause.

Richard Tice: The very reason that the Government need the ability to extend the sunset clause is that if they listened to the amendments from the Conservative party, the delays from various items would be so great that they could go beyond the two years. Of course the Government need the ability to extend the sunset clause.

Sir Jeremy Wright: I recognise that the hon. Gentleman does not normally engage in the detail of legislation, but if he did, he would know that this is the Committee stage, where we look at the detail.

What the Government could perfectly properly do is pass the legislation, as amended by my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire, and if they felt at the end of the sunset clause period that they needed further powers, they could come back to this House with further primary legislation and seek our consent to do that. The difficulty with what we have before us is that the Secretary of State has the power to extend the sunset clause indefinitely, by regulations, over and over again. That is what the wording of the Bill says, and that seems to me to be something we should not accept here. What we should do is reinstate the natural, ordinary meaning of a sunset clause, which is set out in clause (3)(1), by removing the rest of that clause. If, as the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Richard Tice) suggests, the Secretary of State wants to extend those powers, he should seek the authority to do so in primary, not secondary, legislation.

These deficiencies in the Bill are cumulative: the power to indefinitely extend the Secretary of State’s proposed powers is more pernicious because the powers are so broad, and the huge latitude that he would have to define the public interest matters more because the Bill may apply to many more companies than might have been thought when hearing the Government’s original intentions for the Bill. Plus, of course, the Secretary of State’s consequent powers, which are set out in the rest of the Bill—having decided to nationalise and make that initial transfer decision—are mostly constrained only by the scrutiny of secondary legislation, so the initial transfer decision is all the more important. It is my view that the Secretary of State’s powers, as defined in clauses 1, 2 and 3, are simply too wide and need to be constrained.

The Government make two substantive arguments in response to that view, and I want to address those arguments. The first, which the Minister put forward earlier, is that the Government are doing only what a previous Government did in the Banking Act 2009, and that the powers they seek to take here are no wider than those taken in that Act. I do not agree, for three reasons.

The first reason is that the powers in the Banking Act were premised on the existence of a special resolution regime, where the bank in question was already in financial trouble. As far as I can tell, this Bill does not require the relevant steel undertaking to be in any trouble at all for nationalisation to be an option. The second reason is that the Act provides for a temporary transfer to public ownership. This Bill does not use the word “temporary”, and again, I can find nothing in the Bill that prevents a nationalisation being permanent. The third reason is that the Banking Act requires the Treasury to consult before using its powers under that Act. There is no requirement in this Bill for the Secretary of State to consult anyone, so I am afraid it is just not like the Banking Act.

The Government’s second argument, which I discovered lurking in the memorandum from the Department for Business and Trade to the Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee—I am sure we have all read it—is that broad powers such as the right to define the public interest are

[Sir Jeremy Wright]

“buttressed by administrative law, including the need for interferences with property rights to be proportionate”.

Of course, that is so: the courts may intervene if the Secretary of State tries to use his powers irrationally or unreasonably, but Parliament should not be subcontracting our work to the courts.

If the legislative powers as drafted are too broad, it is up to the legislature—us—first and foremost to constrain them. The Secretary of State has consistently maintained, as has the Minister, that he wants only the powers needed to act where Government action is unavoidable, and only for the period needed, but the powers that he has in the Bill go well beyond that, and they could and should be restricted.

Lee Barron (Corby and East Northamptonshire) (Lab): I want to start off by saying that I find it absolutely incredible when people turn around and say that our Government should not be intervening and running services, when they are happy to allow other countries’ Governments to run our services and utilities. To be honest, I get a bit tired of it, because it is essential that we do this if we are going to save industries, save sectors and save jobs. That is why we are right in doing this.

I want to speak on amendment 21, new clause 8 and new clause 5. It was a privilege to be recalled here on a Saturday last year to pass the emergency Steel Industry (Special Measures) Act 2025 to save the Scunthorpe works, and I am just as happy to be here today to see this Bill go through its first day of Committee. Since last year, it has become clear that public ownership is in the national interest. Corby is a town built on steel—steel that built this country. At one time, the Corby steelworks was the largest combined steelworks in Europe. I recognise that the Bill does not nationalise the steelworks in Corby, but it will make sure that the sector does well, and where that happens, that will ensure that the other aspects of steel do well.

In 1967, it was the Labour party that nationalised the steelworks and put British Steel in charge. It did so because it knew that home-made steel was essential for our national security, for our economy and for thousands of jobs. In 1980, a Government who failed to see those opportunities closed the steelworks, and with that, tens of thousands of jobs went and almost a third of people in my constituency became unemployed. That is why it is so important that British Steel should be allowed to continue.

This Bill marks a reversal in direction. It shows what can happen when we have a vision for our economy and the dedication to see that vision through. How could the last Government shape our economy and create jobs when they failed to even create an industrial strategy? This Government have a strategy. Their decade-long industrial strategy, and the steel strategy announced in March, show that.

The steel strategy provides £2.5 billion through the National Wealth Fund to help rebuild our steel sector so that we can move towards 50% of all British demand for steel being made in this country, ensuring our security in an unstable world with the capacity for our own virgin steel supply. That is what this Bill leads to, and that is what is going to happen as a result of it.

British steelworking powered the first industrial revolution, and it can do so again, building the renewables and technology for the future. We still have a steelworks in Corby, and we want to make sure that Corby and the towns like it across our country have a new and secure future. I believe that the passing of this Bill will ensure that that happens.

Richard Tice: It is a pleasure to stand up and support the Government and this Bill, because we all know that the ability to make primary steel is absolutely in the public interest, and it therefore automatically meets the public interest test. We cannot be the only G7 nation without the ability to make primary steel using a blast furnace, but that will be the consequence if this legislation does not go ahead.

The Conservatives’ line of thinking is to just rely on the private sector. Well, they tried that for some 14 years, but the reality is that the state of the blast furnaces means that they need investment for relining, renewing and rebuilding. The private sector has said that it is not there yet, but it could be, so we need a period of time when the industry has the commitment of the public sector to ensure that a thriving primary steelmaking capability can exist.

7 pm

We face real danger. Only over the weekend we heard that the plans for a new electric arc furnace down at Port Talbot have been delayed by at least nine months, and possibly much longer, because of a failure to secure a grid connection. I fear that that is just the beginning: there could be concerns about the reliability of a connection or about the price of electricity. We hear from Tata UK that it is completely committed to opening an electric arc furnace, but I fear that the issues considered by Tata India’s board will be very different. If an electric arc furnace does not open at Port Talbot, it will still sell us steel, but steel that is made in India. That might suit Tata, but it does not suit the workers in Wales and beyond. We have just heard from the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) that the electric arc furnaces at Rotherham are not operational. We therefore face the real risk of having almost no steel manufacturing capability, whether from the electric arc furnace or from the blast furnace. It would be deeply humiliating for us, as a G7 nation, to end up with almost no steel-making capability.

Before I come on to the new clause that we tabled, let me refer to a couple of technicalities. Clause 44, on pension rights, refers to the ability to amend rights and liabilities. Members of British Steel pension funds will want confirmation that there is no intention to amend the existing rights of the workers, be they current or past serving members. I hope that the Minister can address that.

We need to get on with the Bill. As others have mentioned, we are almost in a sort of pause, whereas we need investment. That is why the proposals from the Conservative party are the exact opposite of what is required. What is required is a vision, a strategy and a commitment to the blast furnaces. Alongside that, there is a need for a new plate mill to ensure that we can have greater manufacturing capability. Other hon. Members have highlighted the concerns that we do not currently have enough of that capability. We can, we should, we must.

Sir Jeremy Wright: I understand the logic of the hon. Gentleman's argument. He has referred several times to the series of proposals being made in Committee by the Conservative party, as outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Dame Harriett Baldwin). They come to this: that no Government should be able to create for themselves a very wide definition of what a steel undertaking should be, that they should not be able to define for themselves without restriction what the public interest may be, and that they should not be able to extend indefinitely, without parliamentary authority, the effect of the Bill. Will the hon. Gentleman tell us what he objects to in those proposals?

Richard Tice: I will indeed. My objection is that the consequence of the Conservative party's amendments would be to delay the investment that is required to get on with this. People have expressed concern about the current losses. The last thing we should do is create bureaucratic delays that prevent the investment that would turn the cash flow around from negative to positive.

Martin Vickers (Brigg and Immingham) (Con): I have already made clear to my constituents that I do not oppose the Bill, but I support the Opposition Front Benchers in trying to constrain its cost. Will the hon. Gentleman give a specific figure, or is the Reform policy just to spend, spend, spend?

Richard Tice: Actually, the consequence of the Conservative party's amendments would be to delay the vision and investment that is required, and therefore to increase the losses. That is why they should be ignored. If you are going to do a job, then for heaven's sake, do it properly and get on with it. That is the difference here.

We need the blast furnaces to be refurbished and relined, and we need a plate mill. We need proper, committed investment. We need the Minister to have a pro-British steel procurement strategy at all levels of the public sector, from warships and the railways to even the planning conditions for a new Chinese embassy—let's make it with British steel from Lincolnshire, not cheap Chinese steel from far away.

Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): I am trying to understand how constraining Government powers in the three areas of concern would in any way lead to a delay. I do not think that any constraints imposed would stand in the way of this undertaking. In what way would there be a delay? I may not have sufficiently understood the linkage between such constraints on Government powers in other undertakings and how on earth those would impact this particular one.

Richard Tice: It is my judgment that the Conservative party's amendment would prevent the Government from getting on and setting out the vision, placing the investment that is required, and giving the confidence to everybody that there will be a steel-making capability for primary steel. Once we get that investment in the core asset in Scunthorpe—with a refurbished, renewed blast furnace that is ready for the next 50 years—then, with brilliant management from the private sector, we will start to attract private sector capital, which we all want to bring in. This is a moment that requires the proper seed

investment, the commitment and the courage from this Government to get on with it, which was so lacking in the previous Administration.

Sir Edward Leigh: I agree with a lot of what the hon. Gentleman says. We can surely agree on this point: what is really killing Scunthorpe are the insane green energy policies and the fact that we have the highest energy costs in Europe. If we had a sane energy policy, we could start to make a profit at Scunthorpe.

Richard Tice: The Father of the House is absolutely spot on. The net-stupid-zero policies have been catastrophic across the piece, and I fear that those very policies are the reason why people are concerned about the possibility of opening an electric arc furnace. That puts even greater pressure on the need to have a renewed, brilliant, wonderful blast furnace capability for the next 50 years. If we achieve those things, we can bring in private sector capability with a pro-British procurement strategy. That will give confidence to all.

It has been mentioned that the Bill would somehow prevent other investment from the private sector. The discussions that I have had with overseas pension funds and overseas sovereign wealth funds suggest exactly the opposite. They suggest that, with this sense of commitment—what I like to call a joint venture with the core asset, under public ownership—we will attract more international investment, because people will know that there is a long-term commitment as opposed to the wibbly-wobbly, flip-flop approach of previous regimes. That is the reason that we need to get on with this. We need to ignore any delaying amendments.

Let us have the vision. New clause 5 would require the Government within three months to set out that 10-year vision and 10-year commitment to the blast furnaces and others in the steel undertaking, to ensure that we have a vibrant and, ultimately, viable primary steel-making capability in the United Kingdom.

Alan Strickland (Newton Aycliffe and Spennymoor) (Lab): I am pleased to speak in support of the Bill and comment on a number of the amendments. I do so as a Member of this House who represents a proud manufacturing constituency, which includes a number of industries that rely on steel in a variety of ways, from the rail industry and advanced manufacturing to the cluster of innovative defence and space-related companies at NETPark—North East Technology Park—in Sedgefield. Steel is not only used by some of those companies, but extensively used in their supply chain. It underpins manufacturing not just in my seat, but across the north-east and many other constituencies in the country, as we have heard. I have also campaigned successfully to protect sovereign supply of key materials in my constituency and the wider economy. Given the importance of steel to our national security and national critical infrastructure, it is crucial that we get our approach to steel right.

So what does this mean? First, as hon. Members across the House have said, we need to ensure that the Government can act quickly and with agility. That is why I have concerns about several amendments, which, as other colleagues have raised, could slow down the Government's ability to act decisively. That appears in a number of amendments but, for example, amendments 2, 3, 18 and 19 and new clause 2 seek to impose additional requirements

[Alan Strickland]

on Ministers before they can act using the provisions of the Bill. Others have gone into some of the specifics, but my concern is that when considered in the round, these proposed changes would have the cumulative effect of hampering the Government's ability to act and to act swiftly. It is critical that Ministers can act because that is the key purpose of the Bill; that is why we are here debating it today.

Why is it important that Ministers can act quickly, and why might some of the amendments be a challenge? Because, as we are discussing, when a steel plant faces significant challenges and the Government are minded to intervene, Ministers need to achieve three things. First, they need to be able to provide certainty about the future of the business, which helps sustain the workforce and gives certainty to its supply chain and reassurance to its contractors. We have heard Members talk from their private sector experience—I myself worked in regeneration and housing previously—that when there is doubt about the future of an industry or a particular business, or there is a particular commercial concern, we know that when business confidence starts to fall, if action is not taken quickly, the lack of confidence in the supply chain and the contractor chain can do serious damage.

The second priority for Ministers must be to minimise risk. We know not just in this process, but in other similar processes undertaken by the public and commercial sectors that the longer the process, the higher the commercial and legal risk and the more likely it is that we will not get the outcome we desire. It was that desire to act swiftly and show significant national leadership that, as hon. Members mentioned, is why we were all recalled last year on a Saturday, to intervene quickly in the steel sector.

Thirdly, and crucially, the reason that speed is important is if this is agreed, it is important that Ministers have the powers they need to enact the will of Parliament quickly. Quicker intervention in circumstances like this, given the factors we have discussed, is likely to be more successful, particularly in complex cases as we see at British Steel in Scunthorpe.

Graham Stuart: The hon. Gentleman makes the point about the need for speed in these circumstances, but perhaps he could explain to the House why the endless resetting of a sunset clause, contradicting the whole purpose of a sunset clause, plays into the need for urgent action right now? Or does he agree that it is something that should be looked at again and does not need to delay any of the effective action for which he is calling?

Alan Strickland: Ministers will speak for themselves, but I think they are seeking the flexibility to act in the national interest and to do so appropriately. My concern is more with some of the clauses that add lots of prerequisites to what needs to happen before Ministers can act. My view is that in the limited, and hopefully rare, circumstances where Ministers do feel the need to exercise these significant powers, they need to be able to act quickly, and that is what we are discussing today.

Several of the amendments relate to concerns around value for money, which of course is an incredibly important consideration. It is important for all of us to remember

that one of the key reasons we are here today is precisely because Ministers have said that they want to do more to ensure value for money for taxpayers delivered in the Government's potential intervention in British Steel Scunthorpe. That is why my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry was clear in May that the Government intended to bring this legislation forward precisely because Ministers were unable to agree suitable terms with the current owner of British Steel that represented a "responsible use of public money,"

so value for money has been a key driver of ministerial action on this matter and the reason we are debating it in the Chamber today.

I turn to new clause 5, which the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Richard Tice) was just describing. I am sort of slightly astonished that Reform, a party with no plan for steel, has put an amendment demanding a plan for steel. I am pleased to tell Reform Members who are here that we already have one. The Labour Government, as the Minister mentioned, published the UK steel strategy in March. It clearly addresses a number of the important points that the hon. Member rightly mentioned earlier, including specifically the need for the public sector to buy more steel. A year ago in June 2025, the Cabinet Office published guidance—procurement policy note 22—that required public bodies nationally and locally, and their executive agencies, to ensure that UK-produced steel is routinely considered in public procurement and that this is done at an early stage in the process, so the mention of public procurement around steel in that amendment is redundant. Ministers have already issued clear guidance on that some time ago.

7.15 pm

The second problem with Reform's new clause 5 is that it misses the point of the Bill. This Bill is not about a national strategy on steel—one was published, as I have just mentioned. The proposed law before us deals with specific questions of ownership and with Government intervention in specific steel undertakings. My concern is that subsection (2) risks fundamentally undermining any steel company that might be acquired by the Government. Why? Because by requesting the publication of internal strategies, investment plans and the various things mentioned in the new clause, it risks asking the Government to release into the public domain highly sensitive commercial information about that new public corporation—information that I know, having spoken to people in the sector, other commercial steel operators would be unlikely to publish.

I have a broader point about not only the new clause but some of the wider discussion of the Bill. At the heart of new clause 5 sits a slight misunderstanding of what nationalisation means. To give a local example, I was proud to work with the Defence Secretary to secure the nationalisation—or the "strategic acquisition", as the civil service preferred to call it—of a semiconductor plant in Newton Aycliffe in my constituency. The process was designed to protect the sovereign supply of the semiconductor chips that are vital to the UK-Italy-Japan global combat air programme. There was a risk of that sovereign supply being lost from NATO soil.

Octric, as the company is now called, has its own board and its own chief executive, recruited from industry, along with industry experts supporting it. It is of course

supported by the Ministry of Defence, but it operates as a commercial concern—as a company in which the sole shareholder is the British Government. That is what we are talking about. Let us be clear: we are not talking about the Government acquiring a steel company then getting involved in the day-to-day running and making all sorts of detailed day-to-day demands. We are discussing the provision of powers to allow the strategic acquisition of a key element of the steel industry, if that is required and in the public interest.

I am concerned that, given the importance of steel to defence and to our critical national infrastructure, forcing the publication of the details set out in new clause 5 could compromise our national security, given that we are talking about using steel for such vital purposes. I say respectfully to the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness that, of course, Reform's slightly muddled position on steel strikes me as nothing new. In 2023, Reform appeared to oppose intervention in Scunthorpe; now it proudly supports it. Last year, Reform talked of reopening blast furnaces in Port Talbot; I noticed that that pledge had disappeared from its manifesto for the recent Senedd elections.

The Bill deals with serious and crucial issues—not just for our national economy but, as Members have said, for many of the constituencies represented by right hon. and hon. Members present, and it deserves to be taken seriously.

Before I finish, I have three issues that I would like the Minister to address, if he could, when he responds to the debate. First, we need to bring clarity to what nationalisation would mean in this context. My understanding is that were British Steel to be nationalised, it would effectively remain a private company, but its primary shareholder would be the Government, and commercial leaders with relevant sector experience would be brought in to run it. Can the Minister confirm that the best commercial minds from the steel manufacturing industry and other relevant industries would be recruited to run the company and that that is how it would function?

I think of comparisons from local government. When I was a cabinet member in charge of planning, housing and regeneration, we had a number of subsidiary companies as the council, but they had operational independence. We recruited the best people from the relevant sectors and did not interfere in the day-to-day operational running of those organisations. If the Minister could give clarity on whether that is a suitable comparison to what he envisages, that would be helpful.

Secondly, a number of the amendments seek clarity on transparency or accountability, on which Members rightly want reassurance. I have expressed concerns that the commercial reality of the company operating would mean that some steps just would not be appropriate, reasonable or helpful, and could slow things down. But can the Minister give some clarity on the entirely reasonable and legitimate desire of Members to understand, if British Steel is acquired, how things are going, how public money is being spent, what is being delivered, and how transparency might be brought to the House in an appropriate way?

Finally, the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney) tabled new clause 3, on jobs and the industrial strategy transition. I will not get into the specifics of the new clause, but it flags up an important point about

how Ministers will ensure that any acquisition of a plant will deliver social value, including jobs, apprenticeships, traineeships and other opportunities.

I have been very pleased recently to meet the new apprentices at the semiconductor plant in my constituency that, as I mentioned, was acquired by the Ministry of Defence, and have seen for myself how that Government intervention is delivering wider value to the community. A new apprenticeship programme has been established and 35 additional people have started working there, with more being recruited and work going on to expand the business and make it work better commercially, which is exactly what we want to see. Will the Minister say more about the important issues raised by the hon. Member for Richmond Park around how jobs, skills and apprenticeships might be looked at and considered in any potential acquisition?

To conclude, I support the Government's approach to the Bill and have been happy to set out some of my thoughts on the amendments from across the Committee. Given the importance of steel, it is entirely right that the Bill seeks to move us to a more proactive position and to give Ministers more options to act in the national interest. That is important not only to provide a more secure future for the sovereign supply of steel, but to avoid the permanent loss of our country's steel-producing capacity.

A modern, dynamic, future-facing steel industry is critical to the Government's ambitions for industry and modern industry. As we have heard from Members across the Chamber, it is also crucial and central to the ambitions of many of the communities represented in this debate. I commend the Minister, with his significant expertise on steel, for pushing this important matter forward.

Ann Davies (Caerfyrddin) (PC): I rise to speak to amendment 23, tabled in my name, which seeks to strengthen the public interest test that decides when Governments may nationalise steel sites under the Bill. Specifically, it would ensure that nationalisation can and should be used to prevent the loss of jobs in Wales and to prevent the closure of 16 sites in Wales.

Why is this change needed? Currently, the public interest test notes three specific factors for when nationalisation powers may be used, two of which are

“the construction, maintenance and operation of critical infrastructure in the United Kingdom”

and to support

“the economy of the United Kingdom or any part of the United Kingdom.”

While those provisions could allow the Government to intervene to protect Welsh steel sites, they offer no guarantee that they will.

Welsh steel communities know all too well what happens when Governments choose not to act. We have experienced this before. Port Talbot stands as the most painful example, where the blast furnaces were allowed to close in 2024, resulting in thousands of job losses and devastating a community that had a proud history of making steel for over 100 years. Before the closures Wales had the largest steel workforce in the UK, with 9,300 people employed in the sector. The Labour party had several years in opposition prior to entering government; the Government could have developed a

[Ann Davies]

plan to nationalise Port Talbot to safeguard jobs, as they have done for British Steel in Scunthorpe. They could have acted, but chose not to. Port Talbot deserved equal treatment. Wales deserves equal treatment. The Welsh economy cannot afford a repeat of the calamity of Port Talbot.

The need for certainty is not theoretical. Only recently, last Thursday night, a major fire at Port Talbot caused significant disruption. We are so grateful to the emergency services for acting so quickly, evacuating the area so there were no casualties, but significant damage was caused to the steelworks. We have also learned that the installation of a new electric arc furnace at Port Talbot may be delayed for months because of an electrical connection issue. I believe that is a planning issue with the local authority. These events have not helped the precarious situation at Port Talbot. To safeguard the site and jobs, the Government should make it clear that they will step in to prevent closure or job losses, as a measure of last resort—a position Plaid Cymru has consistently called for.

Steel jobs in Wales are not just jobs: they are strategic assets. They are essential for the future of our economy, for major infrastructure projects and for the development of offshore wind in the Celtic sea. They are also the backbone of our communities from one end of Wales to the other. Alongside Port Talbot, Wales is home to the Trostre works in Carmarthenshire, 7 Steel in Cardiff, Tata in Llanwern and the steelworks at Shotton in the north-east of Wales. Each of these sites deserves the same level of protection that is being offered to sites in England. All deserve equality.

Graham Stuart: Does the hon. Lady share my concern that the funds put in place by Government—£2.5 billion for the steel plan—are completely inadequate to match the enthusiasm of Members across the House for nationalisations? The National Audit Office suggests there would be £1.5 billion in losses from running the Scunthorpe plant alone, without any investment and without any compensation for Jingye, so the £2.5 billion would be rapidly gone. The truth is that this House and this Government are unable to put in place the sums of money that would allow Scunthorpe sensibly to be supported and invested in, let alone the long string of 16 sites in Wales that the hon. Lady so bravely speaks up for today.

Ann Davies: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention. Some £500 million has been ringfenced for Port Talbot; that money is rapidly gone, with no benefit to the local community, but that is another issue that I will not talk about now.

We want an end to the double standard. Welsh steel must be given the same guarantees as English or Scottish steel. What we want is equality for all the sites across the UK; we want the same security and the same commitment to preventing closures and safeguarding jobs.

Luke Myer (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): I am delighted to welcome the Bill, and will speak to a couple of the new clauses and amendments. I declare my role as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on steel and metals-related industries, through which it is a pleasure to work cross-party in the interests of the industry.

Just outside Middlesbrough, wedged between the gas pipes and the railway, is an old path. Someone walking there 200 years ago would have found sailors trudging through salt marsh hamlets, and 100 years ago they would have found steelworkers—hundreds of them—walking home on the tired commute. The cinders underfoot gave the path its name: “the black path.”

If someone walks that path today, they will see the remnants of a bygone age for Teesside iron and steel. They will see a former railway station, now disused, which was used for industry. They will see a lost ironworkers’ village and the red wild flowers that thrive on former slag pile soil. And, of course, they will arrive at one of the largest brownfield sites in Europe: the former Redcar steelworks, which once stood as a great shadow on our skyline, the heart of the region, pumping out steel across the world.

The phrase on Teesside goes, “We built the world.” Everything from the Sydney harbour bridge to the Churchill War Rooms were made with Teesside steel. It can never be forgotten that, in 2015, the then Conservative Government’s laissez-faire approach to Chinese steel dumping denied us the intervention that we needed on Teesside. The closure of Redcar steelworks tore a hole through our region and cost thousands of jobs. I pay tribute to my constituency neighbour, my right hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Anna Turley), who at that point was a newly elected MP and fought tirelessly for the workers of Teesside, but we can never allow a situation like that to happen again.

We cannot change the past, but steel is not our past, as the workers at British Steel Special Profiles at Skinningrove in my constituency will tell us, or the workers at Teesside beam mill at Lackenby, along with the many supply chain SMEs on Teesside. Having run a Teesside steel company for many years, the Minister for Industry knows that landscape well. I commend the decisions that the Government have taken, particularly on British Steel, that have protected and safeguarded jobs in my constituency and my region.

7.30 pm

Independent analysis earlier this year found that British Steel alone supports more than £1 billion in GDP and over 20,000 jobs across the UK. We have seen a range of different interventions this year, including the steel strategy and the measures on trade, which have been welcomed by industry as some of the most significant interventions in over a decade to support sovereign domestic production, and now we have this Bill, which allows the option of full public ownership. As the Minister said, that is another useful tool in the arsenal to protect sovereign capability.

The public interest test, as set out in clause 2, strikes a good balance between the flexibility required to act in the national interest and recognising the need for limitations on excessive power. It should not be restricted any further or we would risk leaving critical assets out of scope of the interventionist powers.

I also want to speak to clause 3 and Opposition amendment 12. I am a little cautious about clause 3. The powers enabled by the Bill must not be overly restricted by the sunset clause, as future Governments may not be as interventionist when it comes to our critical sovereign industry and may not be guaranteed

to renew them. If these powers are too quickly withdrawn, it will leave the industry with greater uncertainty. For that reason, I oppose amendment 12. I understand the instinct behind it—Parliament should always be careful about broad powers, and it is our right to ask how they will be used, how long they will last and what accountability will sit around them—but I do not support the amendment as, in my view, it would risk building unnecessary uncertainty into the Bill.

The steel strategy, published in March, was right to recognise that rebuilding resilience in the sector will take time. It will not be “job done” within two years; the challenges facing steelmaking, from energy costs and international overcapacity to supply chain fragility and strategic ownership, are long-term challenges. As the Minister says, the strategy is inseparable from the Bill, so I welcome the decisions on trade, but it would be useful to hear from him some clarity on carbon border adjustment mechanism alignment with Europe, which is a bit of a limbo issue at the moment.

I was disappointed not to see new measures in the strategy on industrial energy prices, which remain one of the greatest barriers to competitiveness for steel. We have seen the British industry supercharger and the British industrial competitive scheme that help ease the pain, but we need to think much more strategically about the long-term energy future of industry.

The Government are racing ahead with small modular reactors. In my view, there should be an alignment here by ensuring that SMRs are based in industrial clusters and supporting industry there, but also vice versa, so that as we move ahead with the SMR programme, we ensure that British steel is used throughout the supply chain. It was a courageous decision by the Government to choose Rolls-Royce SMR for that programme when other international bidders were available. We need to make the most of that by ensuring that the procurement for those contracting for that work uses UK steel.

I worry that if we pass Opposition amendment 12, we will bake in instability and loss of control, and we will not allow some of the long-term issues to be addressed when Government intervention is needed to ensure long-term resilience in the national interest.

Graham Stuart: The hon. Gentleman is giving a powerful speech and showing great expertise. Is he confident, as so many critics of the steel plan were not, that the £2.5 billion that has been found by the Treasury is sufficient to allow the interventions that he so enthusiastically supports? If it is not, is there not a danger that we will not invest in things, but just bleed out public cash on facilities that continue to be uncompetitive and do not get renewed? If we do not put the right resource in, as France and other countries have arguably done, we will be losing out and not winning.

Luke Myer: As a Back Bencher, I will always fight for more funding to modernise our steel industry. What I do know is that the current owners of British Steel are not responsible owners. We saw last year the crisis that was created when they failed to provide sufficient supply to keep the blast furnaces running. We cannot allow the current situation to continue if we are to protect our domestic industry. This Bill is about having the powers

to nationalise and ensure that the national interest is served. Whether there is sufficient funding is a question on which I will continue to push the Government.

We are not focusing today on clause 58, but the freedom to make the necessary fiscal decisions to support operational stability and competitiveness is fundamental to the sunset clause we are discussing, as well as the potential for ongoing considerations on other critical assets that the Bill might be used for. It would be helpful to hear more about the Government's intentions on issues like energy and procurement, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newton Aycliffe and Spennymoor (Alan Strickland) said. We had a positive intervention from the Cabinet Office last year and the ambition to increase domestic steel market share back towards 50% is right, but the test will be in the delivery.

For too long, we have had industrial strategies while approving publicly backed projects that import vast quantities of overseas steel. Taxpayers rightly expect public investment to strengthen British industry and British jobs. Mechanisms like contracts for difference and other subsidy schemes must align much more closely with procurement objectives, so that public money genuinely supports UK supply chains. The forthcoming defence investment plan is a major opportunity to ensure that we are using UK steel across the country in industrial communities to support national security. At the end of the day, economic security is national security. Britain cannot become dangerously dependent on overseas steel for critical infrastructure or defence capability.

While I support the shift to electric arc furnaces and the increased focus on how we use domestic scrap, which is welcome, Britain should seek to retain some primary iron capability. Other countries are investing heavily in technologies like direct reduced iron. We need only look at Luleå in northern Sweden, for example, where an operational hydrogen-powered DRI facility is already producing steel. That has not held the region back in any way. Economically, it has had the opposite effect of attracting inward investment in new industries, from data centres to clean power. I would like to hear a little from the Minister about DRI and whether we will be looking seriously at that, but I do not wish to stray too far out of the scope of the Bill.

The legislation was brought forward in the context of British Steel, but we should not pretend that British Steel is the only critical asset that may ever require Government action. There may be other sites, capabilities and parts of the supply chain where future intervention is needed to protect jobs, sovereign capability and the national interest, so my concern with amendment 12 is that it would make these powers too easy to lose. A future Government may not share the same commitment to active industrial strategy and may not be as willing to renew the tools needed to protect the sector, so we should not remove the extension mechanism now because we may leave workers and industry more exposed later on.

Opposition Members made the point that politicians should not run businesses, although of course the Minister for Industry did run a steel business for many years and did so very effectively. They may mean that politicians from this country should not run businesses. The Bill is before us because of the approach that Jingye has taken. The Chinese steel industry has long benefited from huge state subsidies, and cheap state-directed finance,

[Luke Myer]

energy support and overcapacity policies. Beijing did not leave it to the market; it used state power aggressively to expand industrial capacity, which is worth bearing in mind.

I will finish on this point. While the Government cannot say which assets they wish to use these powers for, it is evident that British Steel cannot remain in Chinese hands. I do not know what the long-term ownership structure will look like—perhaps it will be modernised and sold to a new buyer, or perhaps it will be taken into public hands and remain there, with steelworkers having some stake in the company that they built—but I do know this. When a Labour Government intervened to create the nationalised British Steel Corporation in 1967, Teesside enjoyed such high employment and high wages that it was classified as one of the best places to live anywhere in the UK. It brought stability to tens of thousands of families and built the second largest blast furnace in Europe.

In 1979, a very different Government took office with a very different theory of Britain—a small state and a blind faith in the global free market. In just five years, our region had the highest registered unemployment rate anywhere in Great Britain. By the end of Thatcher's premiership, almost 250,000 jobs in our region had gone. They took a British industrial economy and turned it into a globalised service sector economy.

Today the Thatcherites are back, with a new logo and a new face. They will talk a big game on steel, but we have been here before. It is my belief that only a social democratic Government can truly protect our steel communities and equip them to face the future, because a social democratic Government recognise something that a foreign private owner cannot: the value of protecting sovereign industry, even when the going gets tough.

This issue is about our jobs, but it is also about our security. Will we be left exposed in a volatile world, or will we build for the future again? I hope that this Labour Government have the courage and ambition to do so.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Minister McDonald, I believe you wish to contribute again.

Chris McDonald: There is so much to say, and so little time until the rise of the House. Members who are standing may wish to take a seat, because we might be here for a little while.

The Chairman: In case you are confused, Minister, we have until 10 o'clock.

Chris McDonald: Indeed, Madam Chair—I was banking on 10 o'clock.

I thank all Members, including the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Dame Harriett Baldwin); the Liberal Democrat Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney); and the former leader of Reform, the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Richard Tice), for the extremely constructive and civil way in which this debate has been

conducted. I know that that comes from a real enthusiasm among all Members in the Committee for having a successful steel industry.

In fact, there were many points of agreement in the debate. In debating the amendments to the first part of the Bill, the importance of the steel industry came through extremely strongly, as did the importance and reliability of the use of public money. We all share that view across this Committee, and we also want there to be extreme care in the use of the powers in the Bill. I know that Members who moved amendments in that regard are concerned about that, and the Government are too. I will address some of those points, and I will endeavour to address some of the points raised by Members during the debate. I will start by addressing a recurring theme in the debate: what nationalisation is.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I am thrilled that the Minister has until 10 o'clock to speak—if you are agreeable, Madam Chair, we will have lots of interventions. The issue is not whether people agree with the nationalisation of the steel sector, so we can set that aside; the issue is whether we will have a steel manufacturing sector that can produce steel for all the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. We in Northern Ireland need the steel from here, and we need it for our defence sector, which is really important. Just before Christmas, my pastor in my church told me, "There are 69 wars in the world." We have to be prepared for the world wars we are going to have to fight. We need a steel sector to do that, and what the Minister has put forward is a justification for it.

Chris McDonald: The hon. Gentleman is quite right. The steel sector is vital for our national security and our infrastructure and construction industries throughout the whole of the United Kingdom, including in Northern Ireland. He speaks very well about that.

Nationalisation or national ownership is not an objective in and of itself; it is simply a pragmatic tool of industrial strategy that can be deployed with care in order to achieve legitimate aims of Government. If we think about some of the nationalisations of the past, it may be that some of those were driven by the pragmatic use of industrial strategy, and it may be that some were driven by ideology. In general, the way that the nationalisation of a business works is that the Government intervene when a business is in distress or is no longer viable but is important. Those businesses are returned to the private sector only once they are successful.

Contrary to the narrative that is often peddled about public ownership, the purpose of public ownership is to pick up businesses when there is a market failure or where a private sector operator is unable to continue. We have seen that in other instances, such as in the railway industry. I see nationalisation simply as a useful and pragmatic tool of industrial strategy.

7.45 pm

Sarah Champion: Does the Minister share my concern and confusion about the comments made by the right hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart)? I was not sure if he was supporting the nationalisation of British Steel but thought that there was not enough money or that there was too much money. However, he seemed to support the fact that in

Europe, the Government subsidise electricity, and I felt that he wanted that to happen here. For all the reasons that Members have said, I just want a really strong and secure steel industry in this country.

Chris McDonald: I think the right hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart) also wants a strong steel industry, but he has been quite clear that he does not see nationalisation as a tool for delivering that—I think that is fair. He is also concerned about the use of public money, which I think is fair as well. I shall address both of those points as I continue.

I am very pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) raised those issues. This is an opportune time to mention that in her earlier comments, she asked for an update on the current status of the Speciality Steel UK business, which I know affects her constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Dr Tidball). That business shows the power of a productive Government intervention, working carefully with industry, because the Government have underwritten the costs of the official receiver to allow a proper sale of the business. The official receiver is in exclusive discussions with a potential buyer, and there was a high level of interest in the business from the market.

As we look forward to the potential sale of the business, we can see the vital role that the Government have played in recognising that steel undertakings are complex, that it can be difficult and can take time to assess them, and that they require high levels of working capital. That contrasts significantly with Governments in the past, who allowed steel companies to close simply by not allowing that process to continue.

Sarah Champion: Will the Minister give way?

Graham Stuart: Will the Minister give way?

Chris McDonald: I will take an intervention from the right hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness. Given that he was referenced, it would be helpful to give him the right to reply.

Graham Stuart: To help the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion), I do not think I said anything about subsidising. What I am looking for, and what I think all of us across this Committee would like to see, is the continuation of steel, especially in a dangerous world. I was questioning whether we have a coherent strategy and sufficient funding to take the steel industry—the specific site in Scunthorpe and others—on the journey that the Minister set out, which requires intervention to take it back to being a thriving industry. I worry that there is not such a pathway or sufficient resource, so we could be in the worst of all possible worlds, where we just bleed public money without it leading to the restitution of a healthy steel industry in this country. That is what I am looking for an answer to.

Chris McDonald: Let me address that point. It is helpful for us to think about the potential options. There is agreement across the Committee that we want a successful and thriving steel industry, and the Government have made some serious financial commitments. We have committed £500 million to support the transformation

of the plant in Port Talbot, which has attracted another £500 million of private sector investment. We have committed £2.5 billion through our steel strategy and an additional £400 million to support the Forgemasters operation, which is successfully under public ownership.

We have to think about the potential options. Given that the Government have put that money on the table and are seeking private sector partners to work with for all our steel plants, the alternative would be the closure and the loss of those facilities. This comes down to a judgment as to whether we think the UK is capable of having a successful, profitable and investable private sector industry.

It is the Government's view that it is possible for the UK to have that, not least when we compare ourselves with similar advanced economies in Europe—we are not necessarily comparing ourselves with low-cost economies around the world—but it is a matter of ensuring that we have the right business environment to enable that to happen, and it is clearly incumbent on Government to arrange policy in that way. I think our steel strategy, in particular, and our trade measures provide that response, which is what gives us confidence that we have the resources to do that.

Sir Ashley Fox (Bridgwater) (Con): Will the Minister give way?

Chris McDonald: If the hon. Gentleman does not mind, I will take the second intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham, and then I will give way to him.

Sarah Champion: The Minister is being very generous with his time. I want to take him back to the issue of Speciality Steel, because this is not just about the business itself—it is also about the supply chain. For example, the steel that is made in my constituency goes into Formula 1 cars and almost every plane in the sky. I think many hon. Members need to understand the consequential impact of saving not only British Steel, but all of our steel industry, on our whole economy and on global industries.

Chris McDonald: The supply chain is incredibly important. My hon. Friend is right about the jobs and the economic value in the supply chain; my hon. Friend the Member for Newton Aycliffe and Spennymoor (Alan Strickland) also referenced the supply chain, and particularly how its needs relate to the measures in the Bill.

A number of the proposed amendments to the Bill would ultimately slow down the ability of the Secretary of State to make decisions—that point was also made by the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness. If the Secretary of State cannot act swiftly, there is a risk of greater uncertainty among employees and commercial partners in the supply chain, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newton Aycliffe and Spennymoor rightly said. That can have real-world consequences for businesses that rely on trade finance or other forms of working capital support, as a lack of confidence can rapidly turn into business closures. While some of those amendments are well-meaning—I am speaking particularly about amendments 2, 3, 18 and 19—they would fundamentally

[Chris McDonald]

interfere with the speed and operational ability of the Secretary of State under the legislation and reduce legal certainty.

Sir Ashley Fox: Does the Minister believe that the Government's current energy strategy is consistent with a successful British steel industry, or does he envisage that energy strategy having to change in order to lower industrial electricity prices?

Chris McDonald: I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman has raised that question, because it was mentioned by a number of Members during the debate. To go back to the point about having a business environment that creates a profitable and investable steel industry, energy is clearly part of that. Some of the changes that the Government have already made—increasing the rebate on the supercharger from 60% to 90%, or the British industrial competitiveness scheme, which will support some of the downstream industry—will be particularly helpful in supporting not only the steel industry but other parts of heavy industry between now and 2030, which is when the Government's clean power mission will come fully online. We anticipate that at that point, we will have not only clean energy, but secure and lower-cost energy.

If we consider the timescale of some of the investments in steel companies that we are talking about—not only multiple-year investments in order to commission, but multiple-decade investments beyond that—we can see that we have a pathway on energy that will enable us to get from now to 2030 and beyond. The Father of the House, the right hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh), who is not currently in his place, was concerned about this issue as well. He was also concerned that the UK has the highest energy prices in Europe, but we do not currently, and it is certainly our plan to ensure that our energy prices for industry are competitive with Europe in future.

Returning to the amendments that have been tabled, there was quite a lot of discussion about the sunset clause in the Bill. There were a number of objections to it, but the case for its continuation was made extremely well by my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Luke Myer). As it stands today, the Government have no intention of extending the sunset period, but we recognise that we are living through particularly volatile times. There is geopolitical and economic uncertainty, which is likely to have a bearing on the steel sector in ways that it is difficult for us to see at the moment. As such, our view is that it is simply pragmatic to include this level of flexibility in the Bill, and of course, regulations made under that clause would be subject to the affirmative procedure.

It is important that I address some of the concerns of the hon. Member for Caerfyrddin (Ann Davies), who spoke with great passion and commitment about the importance of the steel industry throughout the whole of Wales. There is often considerable discussion of Port Talbot in this House, but as she rightly set out, there are also steelworks in Llanwern, Cardiff, Newport, Trostre and Shotton—I hope I have remembered all of them—that deserve recognition and investment.

I could not disagree more, however, that this Government have treated the Welsh steel industry unfairly, or not in an equitable way, compared with the steel industry elsewhere in the UK. The steel industry in Wales is the only part of the industry that has a ringfenced fund—£500 million for Port Talbot. The hon. Lady said that that has been spent with no benefit to the local community, but I frankly cannot agree with that. That £500 million has enabled Port Talbot to invest an additional £500 million in a transformation of that steelworks that will secure steel production at that site and the future of the south Wales steel industry for decades to come. It is a significant investment in the local community.

I know that the hon. Lady, like me, would have preferred for that transition in south Wales to have happened without the hard stop between the closure of the blast furnaces and the restart of the electric arc furnace, and I support Tata Steel's view on the installation of its electric arc furnace. However, the decision to close was taken before the general election, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds)—the former Secretary of State, who is now Chief Whip—was able to intervene at that point and get a much better deal for the workers at Port Talbot and the community there than the previous Government did. I share the hon. Lady's frustration and concern, but we need to be clear about where the indifference to the blast furnace closures in Port Talbot was. It was not with this Government; it was with the then Conservative Government.

Richard Tice: As we are talking about the new electric arc furnace in Port Talbot, can the Minister guarantee with certainty his confidence that, when built, it will open?

Chris McDonald: I am really glad that the hon. Gentleman has asked me that question—I know he has great experience in the property industry, and certainly with construction projects. As I mentioned earlier in the debate and as he will know very well, in any construction project you only really have certainty on the timeline when you have got out of the ground, and this project is still very much in the ground.

The hon. Gentleman's question gives me the opportunity to clear up some issues. I know that the delay as reported by Tata Steel—this is Tata Steel's project, not the Government's—related to an electrical connection, and specifically the soil condition as it relates to building a substation. At the outset, quite rightly, assumptions were made about the soil condition based on engineering assessments. Right hon. and hon. Members must be aware, though, that there have been steelmaking activities on that site in Port Talbot for well over 100 years. Not all of those operations had been fully documented, and the ground conditions were considerably worse than had been anticipated. That is now being dealt with, and as soon as the project gets out of the ground, we will have great certainty about when the electric arc furnace can turn on. Until that happens, as a project manager, I would hesitate to give a cast-iron guarantee, because you need to get out of the ground first.

What I am looking forward to, though, is the delivery of the electric arc furnace in Port Talbot, because that is the point when the project will feel real—when the workforce will be able to see the furnace itself. I have

been around the shop and seen the space that has been created for the installation of the furnace, but once it arrives on the dock of Port Talbot, we will all feel a greater degree of certainty about that. That will be a big boost to the workforce when it does happen. I am absolutely confident that it will happen, but to say when—to pin it down to an individual week or month—is more difficult.

There was one more point I wanted to make about the contribution of the hon. Member for Caerfyrddin. She essentially called for public ownership of Port Talbot, and I am really sorry, but that is another point on which we disagree.

The Government's view is that where a steel undertaking is running adequately under private ownership, that ultimately should be allowed to continue, because the Government believe in private involvement in the steel sector. It goes back to the point about investment that I think the shadow Minister made earlier. She described her concern about a potential chilling effect on investment.

8 pm

As I mentioned on Second Reading, since we have published the steel strategy, and in the background to this Bill, Sev.en has announced an additional £100 million of investment in the steel industry. That £100 million would not be there without our steel strategy. I have already mentioned the intense interest in the ownership of Speciality Steels UK. We can see that there is great interest in investing in the steel industry in the UK, and that is no wonder, given the opportunity that our market presents, so long as we can get the business environment right to ensure that people can invest and make money in the industry, too.

Mr Alex Barros-Curtis (Cardiff West) (Lab): I am grateful to the Minister for putting on the record this Labour Government's record on Welsh steel, because it contrasts with the 14 years of ruin under the Tory Government. Their failure to have an industrial strategy caused decisions to be taken in Port Talbot before this Government came into power. The Tories do not like to be reminded of that, but we will remind them about it every time. It is something that Plaid Cymru—I have great respect for the hon. Member for Caerfyrddin (Ann Davies)—and Reform would do well to remember when they turn up for their photo op outside Port Talbot.

I want to touch on something that my constituents are grateful for, which is this Government's steel strategy. As the Minister rightly says, that resulted in a £100 million investment by Sev.en in 7 Steel in Cardiff. Does he agree that that is not only a sign of the importance of the steel strategy, but will mean that at least half of future UK steelmaking will be Welsh steel? All Members in the House should welcome that.

Chris McDonald: I thank my hon. Friend for making that point. He is right that we should welcome that 50% of UK steel will be made in Wales. We talk about Port Talbot specifically, but 7 Steel's plant has operated incredibly well for so long, making the rebar steels that are essential for our construction industry in the United Kingdom, as well as in Ireland, which 7 Steel supplies, too. Long may that continue. I am sure that the investment will help with that.

The right hon. and learned Member for Kenilworth and Southam (Sir Jeremy Wright) raised a number of concerns, such as the operation of the Bill, its powers, public money and so on. He made a comparison with the Banking Act 2009, and he is right that I have made great play about the similarity between this Bill and that Act. I reassure Members that, having passed the Banking Act to great acclaim, this Bill is following its path, and we made a positive decision to do that.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman mentioned the requirement in the Banking Act for the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I believe, to consult with the Prudential Regulatory Authority, the Financial Conduct Authority and the Bank of England, and how a consultation requirement is not in the Bill. He is right to point that out, but these are different industries. The banking industry is highly regulated, and there are statutory bodies that require consultation. There is no opportunity to replicate that in the steel sector, because there are no such statutory bodies. He rightly made the point that it is important that we engage on the detail in Committee, and I thank him for raising that point and giving me the opportunity to respond.

Jim Shannon: The Minister quickly and helpfully responded to my earlier intervention, and he will be well aware of the economic position of Northern Ireland due to the Windsor framework. Should the Bill go forward, the Government must provide a cast-iron guarantee that the nationalisation and supply chain structures outlined in this Bill will operate seamlessly. Can he give us a guarantee that that will happen and that Northern Ireland will not be disadvantaged by any new tariffs or tariffs that are already in place?

Chris McDonald: From the Government's perspective, there is certainly no intention to disadvantage Northern Ireland. The unique position that Northern Ireland holds is enabling it to attract additional investment above and beyond. In fact, the economic growth rate in Northern Ireland is incredibly impressive, and I look forward to seeing that when I visit in two or three weeks' time.

Having addressed the amendments, I will move on to some of the new clauses. First, I acknowledge the incredibly constructive dialogue I have had with the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney) in preparing for the Bill and the tabling of her amendments. New clause 2 would place a requirement on the Secretary of State to consult an advisory committee as part of his decision-making process. The Government agree with the sentiment—we have had wide consultation with stakeholders—but there is a practical reality and in particular a commercial consideration for the exercise of the Bill's powers. It is therefore not possible for us to accept that new clause.

New clause 3 relates to the detail of a jobs and industrial transition strategy, which my hon. Friend the Member for Newton Aycliffe and Spennymoor asked a specific question about. I reassure Parliament that from a skills perspective, the Government will assess any impacts of a transfer on jobs, skills and local communities. In fact, that is an incredibly important part of why we would seek to intervene at all. Following an acquisition, the company's objectives will be published as part of the shareholder framework document.

[Chris McDonald]

Finally, I will move on to new clause 5. Again, this issue was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Newton Aycliffe and Spennymoor, and it also comes back to where I started the discussion about the nature of a nationalisation. While the Government in this situation would own a steel undertaking, and as the main shareholder in the business would have the opportunity to set the direction and appropriate strategic objectives, it is not the Government's aim that the steel companies would then become an extension of the civil service, as amazing as my civil servants are. Instead, steel undertakings should be run by those who are knowledgeable and skilled in the industry, as we have seen at Sheffield Forgemasters and, as we heard, at the semiconductor factory at Otronic.

Having covered the amendments and the new clauses, and perhaps tried the patience of the Committee to a great extent, it would be wise to conclude. I point out to hon. and right hon. Members that there is an additional day of debate on the Floor of the House on this Bill tomorrow. Rather than me standing here and talking to myself for six hours, they would be most welcome to come back then. If I have addressed their points sufficiently, perhaps some of those who have tabled amendments may see fit not to press them to Divisions, but otherwise, I feel I have addressed the points sufficiently for now.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call the shadow Minister.

Dame Harriett Baldwin: It is wonderful to see so many people interested in following this debate until 10 pm, which when our scrutiny of the Bill ends today. I will make just a few remarks, if I may. Despite the fact that we still have another day tomorrow, there were a few things in today's debate that I have not heard sufficiently answered.

First, I pay tribute to the wise remarks from my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Kenilworth and Southam (Sir Jeremy Wright). I encourage the Minister to take on board his points about the wide scope of the powers the Minister is taking in this legislation. My right hon. and learned Friend is a former Attorney General, so his remarks should be heeded with a great deal of seriousness. I reiterate the questions from my right hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) and my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Immingham (Martin Vickers), who sought assurances that the blast furnaces will continue. I am not sure we heard that on the record. When the Minister next gets to the Dispatch Box in these days of debate, will he clarify his intentions as far as that is concerned?

Will the Minister provide clarity on the public interest test? Sensible remarks were made about the Regulatory Reform Committee and how the public interest test is too broadly defined. How can it ever be reversed once it has been invoked? I did not hear anything about limiting the contingent liabilities or the sunset clause, or the possible impact—mentioned in the impact report itself—on investor confidence in this country.

The Minister mentioned that he was willing to meet Members who have concerns about the steel tariffs, which are a separate issue. May I urge him, over the

next 24 hours, to try to find some time in his diary so that they can raise specific examples with him?

Charlie Maynard (Witney) (LD): On 21 May, the Business and Trade Committee met representatives of more than 20 steel fabrication companies who were deeply worried about the potential loss of hundreds, or thousands, of jobs. I second that, in respect of the urgency, because 1 July is around the corner, and this represents a major risk to the sector.

Dame Harriett Baldwin: Indeed; and, as we have heard, one of the suppliers is still in administration. I think that the Minister needs to rethink that deadline, and I hope he will find time in his diary, perhaps as early as tomorrow, to meet Members on both sides of the House to discuss the issue.

With no more ado, Ms Ghani, I will now attempt to press as many of the amendments as you will allow, and we will test the view of the Committee. However, I beg to ask leave to withdraw amendment 21.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clauses 1 and 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3

SUNSET FOR EXERCISE OF PRINCIPAL TRANSFER POWERS

Amendment proposed: 12, in clause 3, page 2, line 10, leave out subsections (3) to (5).—(Dame Harriett Baldwin.)

This amendment would prevent the Secretary of State extending the sunset of the principal transfer powers.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Committee divided: Ayes 81, Noes 266.

Division No. 12]

[8.11 pm

AYES

Andrew, rh Stuart	Griffiths, Alison
Argar, rh Edward	Harris, Rebecca
Bacon, Gareth	Hinds, rh Damian
Baldwin, Dame Harriett	Holden, rh Mr Richard
Barclay, rh Steve	Holmes, Paul
Bedford, Mr Peter	Hudson, Dr Neil
Bhatti, Saqib	Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Bradley, rh Dame Karen	Johnson, Dr Caroline
Brandreth, Aphra	Jopp, Lincoln
Burghart, Alex	Lamont, John
Cartlidge, James	Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Cleverly, rh Sir James	Lewis, rh Sir Julian
Cocking, Lewis	Lopez, Julia
Cooper, John	Mak, Alan
Costa, Alberto	Malthouse, rh Kit
Davies, Gareth	Mayhew, Jerome
Davies, Mims	Moore, Robbie
Davis, rh David (<i>Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey</i>)	Morrissey, Joy
Dinenage, Dame Caroline	Morton, rh Wendy
Dowden, rh Sir Oliver	Mullan, Dr Kieran
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain	Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Evans, Dr Luke	Norman, rh Jesse
Fortune, Peter	Obese-Jecty, Ben
Fox, Sir Ashley	Paul, Rebecca
Francois, rh Mr Mark	Philp, rh Chris
French, Mr Louie	Pritchard, rh Mark
Fuller, Richard	Raja, Shivani (<i>Proxy vote cast by Mike Wood</i>)
Gale, rh Sir Roger	Rankin, Jack
Glen, rh John	Reed, David

Robertson, Joe
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, rh Sir Julian
 Snowden, Mr Andrew
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, Patrick (*Proxy vote cast by Mike Wood*)
 Stafford, Gregory
 Stephenson, Blake
 Stride, rh Sir Mel
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Swann, Robin
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond

Thomas, Bradley
 Timothy, Nick
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Martin
 Whately, Helen
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wild, James
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy

Tellers for the Ayes:
David Simmonds and
Alicia Kearns

NOES

Abbott, Jack
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Adam, Shockat
 Akehurst, Luke
 Alaba, Mr Bayo
 Aldridge, Dan
 Alexander, rh Heidi
 Ali, Rushanara
 Allister, Jim
 Anderson, Callum
 Anderson, Fleur
 Asato, Jess
 Asser, James
 Athwal, Jas
 Atkinson, Catherine
 Atkinson, Lewis
 Bailey, Olivia
 Baker, Richard
 Ballinger, Alex
 Bance, Antonia
 Barker, Paula
 Barron, Lee
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
 Baxter, Johanna
 Beavers, Lorraine
 Begum, Apsana
 Bell, Torsten
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berry, Siân
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Blake, Olivia (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Mark Tami*)
 Bloore, Chris
 Blundell, Mrs Elsie
 Botterill, Jade
 Brackenridge, Sureena
 Brash, Mr Jonathan
 Brickell, Phil
 Bryant, Chris
 Burgon, Richard
 Burke, Maureen
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Caliskan, Nesil
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Campbell, Juliet
 Campbell-Savours, Markus
 Carden, Dan
 Carns, Al
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Charters, Mr Luke
 Chowns, Dr Ellie

Clark, Feryal
 Collier, Jacob
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Conlon, Liam
 Coombes, Sarah
 Cooper, Andrew
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cox, Pam
 Coyle, Neil
 Craft, Jen
 Crichton, Torcuil
 Curtis, Chris
 Daby, Janet
 Dalton, Ashley
 Davies, Ann
 Davies, Jonathan
 Davies, Paul
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Dean, Josh
 Dearden, Kate
 Denyer, Carla (*Proxy vote cast by Siân Berry*)
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dickson, Jim
 Dixon, Samantha
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Eagle, rh Maria
 Eccles, Cat
 Edwards, Lauren
 Efford, Clive
 Elmore, Chris
 Entwistle, Kirith
 Fahnbulleh, Miatta
 Ferguson, Patricia
 Foody, Emma
 Fookes, Catherine
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Francis, Daniel
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardner, Dr Allison
 Gelderd, Anna
 Gemmell, Alan
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Gittins, Becky
 Glindon, Mary
 Goldsborough, Ben
 Gosling, Jodie
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Hack, Amanda
 Hamilton, Paulette

Hatton, Lloyd
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, Tom
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hinchliff, Chris
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Ingham, Leigh
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Jones, Lillian
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Josan, Gurinder Singh
 Joseph, Sojan
 Khan, Naushabah
 Kirkham, Jayne
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kumar, Sonia
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lake, Ben
 Lamb, Peter
 Leishman, Brian
 Lewell, Emma
 Lewin, Andrew
 Lightwood, Simon
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 MacAlister, Josh
 Macdonald, Alice (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Mark Tami*)
 MacNae, Andy
 Madders, Justin
 Martin, Amanda
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mather, Keir
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McCluskey, Martin
 McDonald, Chris
 McDonnell, rh John
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McGovern, Alison
 McIntyre, Alex
 McKenna, Kevin
 McMahon, Jim
 McNally, Frank
 Medi, Llinos (*Proxy vote cast by Ben Lake*)
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mishra, Navendu
 Moon, Perran
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murphy, Luke
 Myer, Luke
 Nash, Pamela
 Niblett, Samantha
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Norris, Dan (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Mark Tami*)
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osborne, Kate
 Osborne, Tristan
 Paffey, Darren
 Pakes, Andrew

Patrick, Matthew
 Payne, Michael
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Jon
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Phillips, Jess
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Joe
 Poynton, Gregor
 Ramsay, Adrian
 Rand, Mr Connor
 Ranger, Andrew
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, rh Steve
 Reeves, rh Ellie
 Reeves, rh Rachel
 Rhodes, Martin
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie (*Proxy vote cast by Rachael Maskell*)
 Robertson, Dave
 Robinson, rh Gavin
 Roca, Tim
 Rodda, Matt
 Rushworth, Sam
 Russell, Sarah
 Rutland, Tom
 Ryan, Oliver
 Sandher-Jones, Louise
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Scrogham, Michelle
 Seward, Mark
 Shanker, Baggy
 Shanks, Michael
 Shannon, Jim
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Spencer, Hannah
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stevens, rh Jo
 Stevenson, Kenneth
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Strickland, Alan
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Sultana, Zarah
 Swallow, Peter
 Tami, rh Sir Mark
 Taylor, David
 Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Adam
 Tice, Richard
 Tidball, Dr Marie
 Turmaine, Matt
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Vince, Chris
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Imogen

Ward, Chris
Ward, Melanie
Waugh, Paul
Webb, Chris
Welsh, Michelle
West, Catherine
Western, Andrew
White, Jo
White, Katie
Whittome, Nadia

Williams, David
Witherden, Steve
Woodcock, Sean
Yang, Yuan
Yasin, Mohammad
Yemm, Steve
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Taiwo Owatemi and
Claire Hughes

Robinson, rh Gavin
Roome, Ian
Sabine, Anna
Savage, Dr Roz
Shannon, Jim
Slade, Vikki
Smart, Lisa
Sollom, Ian
Stone, Jamie
Swann, Robin

Taylor, Luke
Thomas, Cameron
Voaden, Caroline
Wilkinson, Max
Wilson, Munira
Wrigley, Martin
Young, Claire

Tellers for the Ayes:
Tessa Munt and
Charlotte Cane

Question accordingly negated.

Clauses 3 to 51 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

New Clause 2

STAKEHOLDER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

“(1) The Secretary of State must establish a Stakeholder Advisory Committee to provide advice on the exercise of principal transfer powers under this Act (“the Committee”).

(2) The Secretary of State must ensure that the membership of the Committee includes representation from stakeholders, including but not limited to—

- (a) industries that rely on the supply of steel, including the defence sector and critical national infrastructure,
- (b) representatives of the workforce of the steel undertaking, and
- (c) local authorities for the areas in which the steel undertaking operates.

(3) The Secretary of State must consult, and have regard to the advice of, the Committee before making a determination that the exercise of a principal transfer power is necessary in the public interest under section 2.”—(*Sarah Olney.*)

This new clause requires the Secretary of State to establish a stakeholder advisory committee. The Secretary of State would be required to seek the committee’s advice before making a determination that the exercise of a principal transfer power under the Act was in the public interest.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 65, Noes 257.¹

Division No. 13]

[8.26 pm

AYES

Adam, Shockat
Allister, Jim
Amos, Gideon
Aquarone, Steff
Babarinde, Josh
Bennett, Alison
Brewer, Alex
Brown-Fuller, Jess
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Chadwick, David
Chambers, Dr Danny
Coghlan, Chris
Cooper, Daisy
Dance, Adam
Darling, Steve
Davey, rh Ed
Farron, Tim
Foord, Richard
Forster, Mr Will
Franklin, Zöe
George, Andrew
Gibson, Sarah
Glover, Olly
Goldman, Marie

Gordon, Tom
Green, Sarah
Harding, Monica
Jardine, Christine
Jones, Clive
Kohler, Mr Paul
MacCleary, James
MacDonald, Mr Angus
Maguire, Ben
Maguire, Helen
Martin, Mike
Mathew, Brian
Maynard, Charlie
Miller, Calum
Milne, John
Moran, Layla
Morello, Edward
Morgan, Helen
Morrison, Mr Tom
Murray, Susan
Olney, Sarah
Perteghella, Manuela
Pinkerton, Dr Al
Reynolds, Mr Joshua

Abbott, Jack
Abrahams, Debbie
Akehurst, Luke
Alaba, Mr Bayo
Aldridge, Dan
Alexander, rh Heidi
Ali, Rushanara
Anderson, Callum
Anderson, Fleur
Asato, Jess
Asser, James
Athwal, Jas
Atkinson, Catherine
Atkinson, Lewis
Bailey, Olivia
Baker, Richard
Ballinger, Alex
Bance, Antonia
Barker, Paula
Barron, Lee
Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
Baxter, Johanna
Beavers, Lorraine
Begum, Apsana
Bell, Torsten
Benn, rh Hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Blake, Olivia (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Mark Tami*)
Bloore, Chris
Blundell, Mrs Elsie
Botterill, Jade
Brackenridge, Sureena
Brash, Mr Jonathan
Brickell, Phil
Bryant, Chris
Burgon, Richard
Burke, Maureen
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Caliskan, Nesil
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Campbell, Juliet
Campbell-Savours, Markus
Carden, Dan
Carns, Al
Champion, Sarah
Charalambous, Bambos
Charters, Mr Luke
Clark, Feryal
Collier, Jacob
Collinge, Lizzi
Collins, Tom
Conlon, Liam
Coombes, Sarah
Cooper, Andrew
Cooper, rh Yvette
Cox, Pam

NOES

Coyle, Neil
Craft, Jen
Crichton, Torcuil
Curtis, Chris
Daby, Janet
Dakin, Sir Nicholas
Dalton, Ashley
Davies, Jonathan
Davies, Paul
Davies-Jones, Alex
Dean, Josh
Dearden, Kate
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Dickson, Jim
Dixon, Samantha
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Eagle, rh Maria
Eccles, Cat
Edwards, Lauren
Efford, Clive
Elmore, Chris
Entwistle, Kirith
Fahnbulleh, Miatta
Ferguson, Patricia
Foody, Emma
Fookes, Catherine
Foxcroft, Vicky
Foy, Mary Kelly
Francis, Daniel
Furniss, Gill
Gardner, Dr Allison
Gelderder, Anna
Gemmell, Alan
Gill, Preet Kaur
Gittins, Becky
Glindon, Mary
Goldsborough, Ben
Gosling, Jodie
Greenwood, Lilian
Griffith, Dame Nia
Hack, Amanda
Hamilton, Paulette
Hatton, Lloyd
Hayes, Helen
Hayes, Tom
Hazelgrove, Claire
Hillier, Dame Meg
Hinchliff, Chris
Hopkins, Rachel
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Ingham, Leigh
Johnson, rh Dame Diana
Jones, Lillian
Jones, Ruth
Jones, Sarah
Josan, Gurinder Singh
Joseph, Sojan

1.[*Official Report*, 9 June 2026; Vol. 787, c. 225.] (Correction)

Khan, Naushabah
 Kirkham, Jayne
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kumar, Sonia
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lamb, Peter
 Leishman, Brian
 Lewell, Emma
 Lewin, Andrew
 Lightwood, Simon
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 MacAlister, Josh
 Macdonald, Alice (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Mark Tami*)
 MacNae, Andy
 Madders, Justin
 Martin, Amanda
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mather, Keir
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McCluskey, Martin
 McDonald, Chris
 McDonnell, rh John
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McGovern, Alison
 McIntyre, Alex
 McKenna, Kevin
 McMahon, Jim
 McNally, Frank
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mishra, Navendu
 Moon, Perran
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murphy, Luke
 Myer, Luke
 Nash, Pamela
 Niblett, Samantha
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Norris, Dan (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Mark Tami*)
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osborne, Kate
 Osborne, Tristan
 Paffey, Darren
 Pakes, Andrew
 Patrick, Matthew
 Payne, Michael
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Jon
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Phillips, Jess
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Joe
 Poynton, Gregor
 Rand, Mr Connor
 Ranger, Andrew
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, rh Steve
 Reeves, rh Ellie
 Reeves, rh Rachel

Rhodes, Martin
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie (*Proxy vote cast by Rachael Maskell*)
 Robertson, Dave
 Roca, Tim
 Rodda, Matt
 Rushworth, Sam
 Russell, Sarah
 Rutland, Tom
 Sandher-Jones, Louise
 Scrogg, Michelle
 Sowards, Mark
 Shanker, Baggy
 Shanks, Michael
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stevens, rh Jo
 Stevenson, Kenneth
 Stewart, Elaine
 Strathern, Alistair
 Stone, Will
 Strickland, Alan
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Swallow, Peter
 Tami, rh Sir Mark
 Taylor, David
 Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Adam
 Tice, Richard
 Tidball, Dr Marie
 Turley, rh Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Vince, Chris
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Imogen
 Ward, Chris
 Ward, Melanie
 Waugh, Paul
 Webb, Chris
 Welsh, Michelle
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew
 White, Jo
 White, Katie
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Yang, Yuan
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
 Taiwo Owatemi and
 Claire Hughes

Question accordingly negated.

New Clause 8

CONTINGENT LIABILITIES

“(1) The Secretary of State may not exercise a principal transfer power in relation to a steel undertaking unless they have made a statement to Parliament on the value of contingent liabilities associated with the use of the power.

(2) The statement made under subsection (1) must include—

(a) the value of any contingent liabilities to be acquired; and,

(b) the steps the Secretary of State will take to seek to minimise taxpayer exposure to any contingent liabilities so acquired.”—(*Dame Harriett Baldwin.*)

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to make a statement to Parliament on contingent liabilities acquired before they exercise a principal transfer power under this Act.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 145, Noes 251.

Division No. 14]

[8.40 pm

AYES

Amos, Gideon
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Aquarone, Steff
 Argar, rh Edward
 Babarinde, Josh
 Bacon, Gareth
 Baldwin, Dame Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Bedford, Mr Peter
 Bennett, Alison
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Bradley, rh Dame Karen
 Brandreth, Aphra
 Brewer, Alex
 Brown-Fuller, Jess
 Burghart, Alex
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Cane, Charlotte
 Cartlidge, James
 Chadwick, David
 Chambers, Dr Danny
 Cleverly, rh Sir James
 Cocking, Lewis
 Coghlan, Chris
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, John
 Costa, Alberto
 Dance, Adam
 Darling, Steve
 Davey, rh Ed
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh David (*Proxy vote cast by Joy Morrissey*)
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dowden, rh Sir Oliver
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Farron, Tim
 Foord, Richard
 Forster, Mr Will
 Fortune, Peter
 Fox, Sir Ashley
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Franklin, Zöe
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 George, Andrew
 Gibson, Sarah
 Glen, rh John
 Glover, Olly
 Goldman, Marie
 Gordon, Tom
 Green, Sarah
 Griffiths, Alison
 Harding, Monica
 Harris, Rebecca
 Heylings, Pippa
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Holden, rh Mr Richard
 Holmes, Paul
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Jardine, Christine
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Jones, Clive
 Jopp, Lincoln
 Kohler, Mr Paul
 Lamont, John
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Lopez, Julia
 MacCleary, James
 MacDonald, Mr Angus
 Maguire, Ben
 Maguire, Helen
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Martin, Mike
 Mathew, Brian
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Charlie
 Miller, Calum
 Milne, John
 Moore, Robbie
 Moran, Layla
 Morello, Edward
 Morgan, Helen
 Morrison, Mr Tom
 Morrissey, Joy
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Munt, Tessa

Murray, Susan
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Norman, rh Jesse
 Obese-Jecty, Ben
 Olney, Sarah
 Paul, Rebecca
 Perteghella, Manuela
 Philp, rh Chris
 Pinkerton, Dr Al
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Raja, Shivani (*Proxy vote cast by Mike Wood*)
 Rankin, Jack
 Reed, David
 Reynolds, Mr Joshua
 Robertson, Joe
 Robinson, rh Gavin
 Roome, Ian
 Sabine, Anna
 Savage, Dr Roz
 Shannon, Jim
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
 Slade, Vikki
 Smart, Lisa
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, rh Sir Julian
 Snowden, Mr Andrew
 Sollom, Ian
 Spencer, Dr Ben

Spencer, Patrick (*Proxy vote cast by Mike Wood*)
 Stafford, Gregory
 Stephenson, Blake
 Stone, Jamie
 Stride, rh Sir Mel
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Swann, Robin
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Taylor, Luke
 Thomas, Bradley
 Thomas, Cameron
 Timothy, Nick
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Martin
 Voaden, Caroline
 Whately, Helen
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wild, James
 Wilkinson, Max
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wilson, Munira
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Wrigley, Martin
 Young, Claire

Tellers for the Ayes:
David Simmonds and
Alicia Kearns

NOES

Abbott, Jack
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Akehurst, Luke
 Alaba, Mr Bayo
 Aldridge, Dan
 Alexander, rh Heidi
 Ali, Rushanara
 Anderson, Callum
 Anderson, Fleur
 Asato, Jess
 Asser, James
 Athwal, Jas
 Atkinson, Catherine
 Atkinson, Lewis
 Bailey, Olivia
 Baker, Richard
 Ballinger, Alex
 Bance, Antonia
 Barker, Paula
 Barron, Lee
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
 Baxter, Johanna
 Beavers, Lorraine
 Begum, Apsana
 Bell, Torsten
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Blake, Olivia (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Mark Tami*)
 Bloore, Chris
 Blundell, Mrs Elsie
 Botterill, Jade
 Brackenridge, Sureena
 Brash, Mr Jonathan
 Brickell, Phil
 Bryant, Chris
 Burgon, Richard
 Burke, Maureen
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, rh Liam

Cadbury, Ruth
 Caliskan, Nesil
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Juliet
 Campbell-Savours, Markus
 Carden, Dan
 Carns, Al
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Charters, Mr Luke
 Clark, Feryal
 Collier, Jacob
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Conlon, Liam
 Coombes, Sarah
 Cooper, Andrew
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cox, Pam
 Coyle, Neil
 Craft, Jen
 Crichton, Torcuil
 Curtis, Chris
 Daby, Janet
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas
 Dalton, Ashley
 Davies, Jonathan
 Davies, Paul
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Dean, Josh
 Dearden, Kate
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dickson, Jim
 Dixon, Samantha
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Eagle, rh Maria
 Eccles, Cat
 Edwards, Lauren

Efford, Clive
 Elmore, Chris
 Entwistle, Kirith
 Fahnbulleh, Miatta
 Ferguson, Patricia
 Foody, Emma
 Fookes, Catherine
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Francis, Daniel
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardner, Dr Allison
 Gelderd, Anna
 Gemmell, Alan
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Gittins, Becky
 Glindon, Mary
 Goldsborough, Ben
 Gosling, Jodie
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Hack, Amanda
 Hamilton, Paulette
 Hatton, Lloyd
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, Tom
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hinchliff, Chris
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Ingham, Leigh
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Jones, Lillian
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Josan, Gurinder Singh
 Joseph, Sojan
 Khan, Naushabah
 Kirkham, Jayne
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kumar, Sonia
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lamb, Peter
 Leishman, Brian
 Lewell, Emma
 Lewin, Andrew
 Lightwood, Simon
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 MacAlister, Josh
 Macdonald, Alice (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Mark Tami*)
 MacNae, Andy
 Madders, Justin
 Martin, Amanda
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mather, Keir
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McCluskey, Martin
 McDonald, Chris
 McDonnell, rh John
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McGovern, Alison
 McIntyre, Alex
 McKenna, Kevin
 McMahan, Jim
 McNally, Frank
 Minns, Ms Julie

Mishra, Navendu
 Moon, Perran
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murphy, Luke
 Myer, Luke
 Nash, Pamela
 Niblett, Samantha
 Nicholls, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Norris, Dan (*Proxy vote cast by Sir Mark Tami*)
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osborne, Kate
 Osborne, Tristan
 Paffey, Darren
 Pakes, Andrew
 Patrick, Matthew
 Payne, Michael
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Jon
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Phillips, Jess
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Joe
 Poynton, Gregor
 Rand, Mr Connor
 Ranger, Andrew
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, rh Steve
 Reeves, rh Ellie
 Reeves, rh Rachel
 Rhodes, Martin
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie (*Proxy vote cast by Rachael Maskell*)
 Robertson, Dave
 Roca, Tim
 Rodda, Matt
 Rushworth, Sam
 Russell, Sarah
 Rutland, Tom
 Sandher-Jones, Louise
 Scrogg, Michelle
 Searns, Mark
 Shanker, Baggy
 Shanks, Michael
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stevens, rh Jo
 Stevenson, Kenneth
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Strickland, Alan
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Swallow, Peter
 Tami, rh Sir Mark
 Taylor, David

Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Adam
 Tice, Richard
 Tidball, Dr Marie
 Turley, rh Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Vince, Chris
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Imogen
 Ward, Chris
 Ward, Melanie
 Waugh, Paul

Webb, Chris
 Welsh, Michelle
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew
 White, Jo
 White, Katie
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, David
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Yang, Yuan
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Taiwo Owatemi and
Claire Hughes

Question accordingly negated.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Judith Cummins): It has been drawn to my attention by the Tellers that the numbers were incorrectly reported for the Division on the Question that amendment 12 be made. The correct numbers were 81 for the Ayes and 266 for the Noes. I will direct that the numbers be corrected in the *Journal*.

The occupant of the Chair left the Chair (Programme Order, 21 May).

The Deputy Speaker resumed the Chair.

Progress reported; Committee to sit again tomorrow.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

SANCTIONS

That the Syria (Sanctions) (EU Exit) (Amendment) Regulations 2026 (SI, 2026, No. 436), dated 20 April 2026, a copy of which was laid before this House on 21 April, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.—(*Taiwo Owatemi.*)

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS)

Ordered,

That Private Members' Bills shall have precedence over Government business on 4 September, 11 September, 16 October, 13 November, 27 November, 4 December 2026, 15 January, 29 January, 5 February, 26 February, 5 March, 12 March and 19 March 2027.—(*Taiwo Owatemi.*)

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

ENERGY

That the draft Energy Prices Act 2022 (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2026, which were laid before this House on 16 March, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.—(*Taiwo Owatemi.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

RETAINED EU LAW REFORM

That the draft Control of Trade in Endangered Species (Amendment and Revocation) Regulations 2026, which were laid before this House on 19 March, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.—(*Taiwo Owatemi.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

FINANCIAL SERVICES

That the draft Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing (Amendment) Regulations 2026, which were laid before this House on 25 March, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.—(*Taiwo Owatemi.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

RETAINED EU LAW REFORM

That the draft Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 (Amendment) Regulations 2026, which were laid before this House on 25 March, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.—(*Taiwo Owatemi.*)

Question agreed to.

BACKBENCH BUSINESS COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Mr Lee Dillon be a member of the Backbench Business Committee.—(*Gen Kitchen, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Carla Denyer be discharged from the Environmental Audit Committee and Adrian Ramsay be added.—(*Gen Kitchen, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

Maternity Nurses, Nannies and the Infant Sleep Industry

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

8.54 pm

Mr Connor Rand (Altrincham and Sale West) (Lab): Being a parent is the one of the greatest joys we can have in life, but let me be clear, it is also one of the hardest things we ever do. I remember the first year of my son's life and the happiness those precious early moments brought me and my partner, but I also remember the less precious moments, with the daily battle every new parent has with their own anxieties as they ask themselves, "Why are they crying? Why are not they sleeping? Am I doing something wrong?" Those questions swirl around our heads at a time when we are sleep deprived, emotionally drained and totally unsure of ourselves—in other words, we are vulnerable.

What do we do in that situation? We seek out help, expertise and people we think we can trust. In the majority of circumstances, that is absolutely the right thing to do—health visitors and the vast majority of nannies who provide responsible care give parents vital support that helps them get by—but what if, when we turned for help, the person who responded was not someone we could trust? What if they were not the expert they claimed or seemed to be? What if they had no qualifications, no training and no accountability? When that happens, we run the risk of unimaginable tragedy.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Gentleman for bringing forward this really good debate; I spoke to him about it last week. He will be aware that, as it stands today across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, anyone can buy a website domain, call themselves an infant sleep expert or a maternity nurse and charge vulnerable, sleep-deprived parents hundreds of pounds for unregulated, untested and potentially unsafe advice. Does he agree that sleep-deprived and vulnerable parents need to have security that the advice they are taking comes from a solid foundation, and that qualifications—or lack of qualifications—must be clear when advice is offered?

Mr Rand: I thank the hon. Member. The vulnerability that parents feel in that moment is one of the reasons why it is so important that we ensure adequate regulation in this area. At the moment, we run the risk of unimaginable tragedies day after day, and it is happening more and more as the support we used to provide for new parents has shrunk. In the gaps that has created, the infant sleep industry has boomed. The industry is currently a wild west where, as the hon. Member said, anyone can pose as an expert and give parents advice that puts their child's life at risk. Sometimes, these people call themselves maternity nurses, practitioners or consultants. Sometimes they call themselves sleep trainers or specialists. Sometimes they provide care in the home. Sometimes they share their advice to vast and growing audiences on social media. In all cases, there is no requirement for them to have any medical training or qualifications to justify their title. In addition, there is also no legal accountability for advice provided and no recognised standard for support provided.

Chris Vince (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): As a new parent, this is hugely concerning to me and not something I was particularly aware of. Does my hon. Friend have any advice for new parents looking for support about what questions they should ask to ensure they are talking to experts and not so-called experts who, as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said, are people without any qualifications at all?

Mr Rand: Yes, I will come to some of that. Whether parents are following advice or performing these duties themselves, it is important that they think about safe sleeping extremely seriously—that is what any parent should be doing. It is very important indeed to understand the qualifications and medical expertise of those providing advice.

In May, the BBC used undercover filming to expose two prominent figures in the infant sleep industry who were openly giving parents advice on safe sleep that could result in the death of their children. That is not just my opinion; the NHS clinicians who observed the BBC's footage said that it was "horrifying".

Mr Tom Morrison (Cheadle) (LD): Will the hon. Member give way?

Mr Rand: The hon. Member is an assiduous campaigner on these issues and I am always happy to give way to him.

Mr Morrison: I thank the hon. Member very much for getting this debate on the Floor. He references the BBC investigation, and the things that were put out on that were absolutely horrifying. Talking of experts, the Lullaby Trust is a huge leader, particularly around safer sleeping. I was horrified by the lack of regulation—the wild west, as he describes it—so would he agree that we need a proper, legal, regulatory framework to make sure that these charlatans who are putting this bogus safe sleep advice out there on social media and other channels are held to account, and to ensure that parents and their children are protected from these groups of people?

Mr Rand: Yes, I completely agree. I know that the hon. Member has worked with the Lullaby Trust, and I am grateful to have met its representatives myself and to have had their input into my campaign on regulation in this area. Of course, the Government have already begun to set out—quite rightly, after his campaigning work—the approach we need to take forward in early years settings, but it is critical that the whole sector, including advice provided in the home, should have a sustainable legal framework.

The figures who were exposed by the BBC in their undercover filming have thousands of followers online and have published widely bought books. To any parent, they would ostensibly look like an expert. That such unqualified people can operate in that way without any oversight at all is terrifying. How can it be right that an industry dedicated to the care of babies is totally unregulated? We know the answer to that. It is not right and it must change, because without change, more children will die. I do not say that lightly; I say it because of what happened in my constituency.

Two years ago, a four-month-old baby from Trafford died after being placed in an unsafe sleeping position on the advice of a maternity nurse who had no medical qualifications at all. There was no legal accountability for this death because no laws had been broken, but a family had been broken. I cannot begin to imagine what the parents of that child have been through. There are no words to describe it, and I will not try to do so, but what I will try to do is ensure that change is the legacy of their tragedy. It is not just me that is calling for change. The senior coroner who worked on the case issued a prevention of future deaths order to the Secretary of State and, in doing so, called on infant sleep services to be urgently regulated.

What does this change look like? I have three main asks of the Government and the Minister today. First, will the Minister explore the introduction of mandatory minimum safeguarding training and qualification standards in the baby sleep industry and the nanny industry, as has been called for by the National Nanny Association, the Lullaby Trust and other organisations. I am sure that we can all agree on the reason to do this—namely, that people looking after children should have basic medical and early years training, including on safe sleep. This change could introduce standards and safeguards to an industry badly lacking in both.

This change would support the majority of people who provide responsible, home-based care for children while cracking down on the dangerous minority who do not. It would give parents peace of mind and minimum legal standards to hold providers against, and the introduction of mandatory training and standards could lead to the development of a national regulated framework or register for all those providing home-based childcare. With a register, we would strengthen safeguarding, give parents clarity and professionalise the sector.

My second ask is that we need stronger legal protections for the title of "nurse", and in response to the tragedy in my constituency, the Government announced that they would protect the title of "nurse" so that it could be used only by someone with appropriate medical qualifications. That is a really important step forward that I very much welcome. However, people in the infant sleep industry are also calling themselves "practitioners" and "consultants", so I urge the Government to explore legal protections for those titles too, because, like "nurse", they imply a level of expertise that is often not there and that parents might rely on. When announcing that the Government would protect the title of nurse, the then Secretary of State committed to seeking wide input on the proposals to get them right. I appreciate that there have been changes since, but can the Minister update me on that work and set out a timeline for when we can expect action?

My third and final ask relates to the context in which the infant sleep industry has boomed. As I mentioned earlier, this is a sector to which parents are increasingly turning as the support that used to be provided by the state has been stripped back. The number of health visitors has almost halved in the last decade, and home visits are not happening consistently across the country, as overstretched staff battle caseloads of up to 1,000 families. That is the vacuum that causes parents to walk into the wild west of dangers. I would appreciate the Minister setting out the Government's plan to invest in health

[Mr Rand]

visitors and infant care, so that we can protect children and their parents with the highest-quality support possible in our national health service.

Robbie Moore (Keighley and Ilkley) (Con): I commend the hon. Gentleman's excellent speech, particularly the three points that he has just made, with which I absolutely agree. I put on record my thanks to Maria Culley from the National Nanny Association, who has been working tirelessly on this issue, and who is a constituent of mine. I have met Children and Families Ministers under this Administration and previous Administrations and not managed to get too much traction, so I absolutely back everything that the hon. Gentleman is asking for.

Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is not only sleeping tutors and maternity nurses but nannies who are completely unregulated? We need Disclosure and Barring Service checks, a compulsory national register for nannies, and the minimum training standards that he is calling for. Finally, I would be over the moon to work with him to ensure that we can get those asks on the statute book.

Mr Rand: I appreciate the hon. Member's support. We owe it to people who are working in the industry and behaving responsibly to ensure that those standards are in place right across the industry.

This Government are already doing vital work on safe sleeping. Safe sleep guidance in nurseries is set to become statutory, and Ofsted will now assess safe sleep practices during its inspections of early years settings. I pay tribute to the Campaign for Gigi, the Lullaby Trust and the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mr Morrison) for their role in securing these truly transformative steps. The Government must build on that progress. If we accept the urgent need for safe-sleep protections in early years settings, why would we not apply the same standards to care that is provided in people's homes? This is about safety, accountability and support for every parent.

Of all the contributions that I have made in this place so far, this is the one I feel most strongly about. I know from experience the difficulty of being a new parent, and how vulnerable we are in that time of stress, fear and confusion. It is truly chilling that this vulnerability, combined with the desire we all have to do the best for our children, can lead us to seek support from those not fit to give it. But that is what is happening, and we have a responsibility to do something about that.

I hope that today can be the start of that journey. I look forward to meeting and working with Minister, the charities working on this issue, and all those across the House who want to see real progress to develop the solutions we need to protect children and their parents from unimaginable tragedy.

9.8 pm

The Minister for Secondary Care (Karin Smyth): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Mr Rand) for securing this debate and acknowledging the concern that has been raised recently in the field and by the media. We are all deeply saddened to see the impact of those giving poor advice on infant sleeping. Public safety is and has to remain the top priority.

As my hon. Friend said, being a new parent is a difficult time; I certainly recognise that helping an infant settle into a regular sleep pattern can be difficult for new parents and carers. It is a worrying and stressful time, as he said. Rogue advice from so-called experts can have a devastating effect on those who seek reputable advice and guidance.

Before I talk about regulation of the infant sleep industry, I want to clarify that the Department for Education is responsible for the regulation of nannies and childcare services, which my hon. Friend mentioned. The early years foundation stage statutory framework sets the standards and requirements that early years providers must meet to ensure that children have the best start in life and are kept healthy and safe. All early years providers are already required to meet the safer sleep requirements set out in the statutory framework, which currently links to the NHS safer sleep guidance. The Department for Education plans to update the wording in the early years foundation stage statutory framework so that the requirements are set out directly in the framework itself. That is due to come into effect from September 2026, subject to the usual parliamentary and legislative processes. The Department for Education has already written to providers informing them of the proposed new wording and to remind them that they must meet the current requirements.

The "Best Start in Life" campaign provides parents and carers with NHS safer sleep advice through a range of communication channels, including social media, the website and an email programme. Recently, we have collaborated with experts such as Rosey Davidson, a paediatric sleep consultant, to support the promotion of safer-sleep guidance, reaching approximately 40,000 parents through one post alone. The healthy babies programme supports new parents and families by offering integrated, preventive and universal support, including for perinatal mental health, parent-infant relationships and infant feeding, in the 1,001 days from pregnancy to age two. By delivering those services through a physical and digital Best Start family hubs network, we are ensuring that parents and carers have access to joined-up, family-centred advice and support that is delivered in communities where there are high levels of need.

In January, NHS England published a post-natal toolkit to improve the post-natal care experience for women and their families. The toolkit supports integrated care boards, their place-based partners, and health and care providers to work together with service users and professionals to improve the post-natal care experience and both short-term and long-term maternal and infant health outcomes. Additionally, NHS England has published guidance for GPs on the post-natal appointment that women should be offered six weeks to eight weeks after giving birth. That provides an important opportunity for GPs to listen to women in a discreet, supportive environment.

Qualified health visitors and their teams also have an important role, as my hon. Friend said, in supporting infant health, wellbeing and parenting confidence. They promote safe sleeping for babies and provide safe advice to parents. Services such as health visiting are being strengthened by providing over £13.4 billion of public health funding for local government over the three years from 2026/27 through a consolidated ringfenced public health grant.

“Maternity nurse”, “night nurse”, “baby sleep consultant” or other terms for these roles are not regulated professions. Often, those working in a sleep industry role will refer to themselves as a “nurse” to indicate that they are suitably qualified to advise. That can mislead the public by providing an impression that such individuals are qualified and professionally registered to provide a particular level of care, advice or care intervention that they do not hold, which puts the public and babies at risk.

In May 2025, the Government announced our intention to protect the professional title “nurse” within this Parliament. Protecting the title “nurse” will make it a criminal offence for someone to call themselves a nurse unless they are registered as a nurse with the Nursing and Midwifery Council, or part of one of a number of exempt professions, such as dental nurses and veterinary nurses. These new protections will also apply to longer professional titles that include the word “nurse”, such as “maternity nurse” and “night nurse”. To ensure that we get these changes right, we will shortly be publishing a call for evidence on the protection of the title of “nurse”.

I invite everyone present and those interested in this debate to share their views, which will inform the future legislation underpinning the Nursing and Midwifery

Council that will implement this change. We want to hear from those working in healthcare, but also those in other fields such as childcare and care for animals as well as the general public, to understand what exemptions should apply and to ensure that those who may be affected by this change can feed in their concerns. We are also seeking views on protecting other titles such as “nursing” and “health visitor”.

However, ultimately this is about patient and public safety. When someone seeks treatment, support or advice from a “nurse”, there is a legitimate expectation that the individual is suitably qualified and professionally registered. Our proposed changes will make it a criminal offence for someone who does not hold such qualifications and professional registration to claim to be a nurse.

This is an important subject and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising it, and I know there is further interest across the House. I hope people will respond to the call for evidence, and we will of course continue to work with colleagues to make sure this is a safe place for parents.

Question put and agreed to.

9.14 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Monday 8 June 2026

[SIR EDWARD LEIGH *in the Chair*]

Progression of Bills through Parliament

4.30 pm

Lewis Atkinson (Sunderland Central) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 752673 relating to the timely progress of bills through Parliament.

It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Sir Edward, and to open this important debate as a member of the Petitions Committee. I want to start by being clear about what this petition, and therefore this debate, is about. Although the petition was prompted by the parliamentary consideration of assisted dying, it is not about assisted dying; it is about British parliamentary democracy and how—or, indeed, whether—it can work.

The petition poses what I would suggest is an existential question for us here: does our constitutional settlement allow changes that have been backed by the public and their representatives to pass into law? I desperately want the answer to that question to be yes. That is not because I want a specific piece of legislation to be passed; it is because if, as a country, we cannot resolve different views through Parliament—developing legislative proposals and scrutinising them, but ultimately reaching a decision on them—we are in a very troubling place.

Bambos Charalambous (Southgate and Wood Green) (Lab): My hon. Friend has made an excellent start to his speech. Does he agree that if the other place has the ability to block private Members' Bills, that totally undermines the concept of such Bills going forward?

Lewis Atkinson: I agree that private Members' Bills provide an important avenue for democratically elected Members of the Commons to seek important legislative change. For decades, they have been a long-established precedent in how this country introduces social change—whether that is the decriminalisation of homosexuality and abortion, or the abolition of the death penalty. Fundamentally, I do not believe that the unelected Lords should be able to block such key social change, but I will come on to some of the issues that my hon. Friend raised.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Lewis Atkinson: I will introduce the petitioners first, because they ultimately prompted the debate; I will then be happy to take further interventions.

The petition was initially proposed by Nathaniel Dye, a man who felt the urgency for change and looked at his Parliament to deliver it. Nat was a music teacher, and after being diagnosed with stage 4 bowel cancer in his mid-30s, he campaigned for cancer awareness and support, being recognised with an MBE for his incredible efforts.

Nathaniel knew he was going to die, and he believed that Parliament should engage seriously with the issues that affected him and many others with terminal illness. He campaigned strongly in favour of the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill, which was introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Spen Valley (Kim Leadbeater) in the last Session. As a member of that Bill Committee, I had the privilege of meeting Nat on a number of occasions. He was a remarkable man.

In his final months, Nat became frustrated—angry, it is fair to say—at how the Lords were dealing with their consideration of the Bill. True to form, he decided to do something about it, starting the petition that we are here to debate today. Nat died in January this year. I pay tribute to him and his family, who have continued to support his efforts following his death. I am grateful to Rebecca Scott, his sister, for meeting me as part of the engagement process for this debate.

After Nathaniel's death, his friend Sophie Blake became the petition's sponsor, and it is a pleasure to see her in the Gallery today, as it was to speak with her in preparation for this debate, alongside a campaigner from Dignity in Dying. Sophie has incurable stage 4 secondary breast cancer, first diagnosed in 2020. She is allergic to opioids, which form an important part of the palliative care pain relief toolkit, and unfortunately her family have experienced what she describes as "bad cancer deaths". She does not want her daughter, Maya—also in the Public Gallery—to run the risk of being left with those memories. She wants the option of an assisted death if she feels that that is required.

The key demand of Nathaniel, Sophie and the 114,000 petitioners is that Bills supported by MPs and the public must be able to complete all stages of the parliamentary process and to become law; and that the unelected House of Lords should be able to scrutinise, yes, but not block legislation backed by the elected Commons. Sophie and Nathaniel were both determined that the voices of terminally ill people should be at the centre of parliamentary consideration of the Bill. They closely monitored its various stages. They were in the Public Gallery of the House of Commons on Second Reading and of Committee Room 11 for some of the 100 hours of Bill Committee proceedings, where we made more than 100 amendments, including 30 proposed by MPs who had opposed the Bill on Second Reading.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): In 2009 and 2010, I used to be the Whip in charge of Friday sittings, but even now I would struggle to explain just how things work with some of the Back-Bench Bills, given some of the shenanigans that go on. Does my hon. Friend agree that it destroys our constituents' faith in parliamentary democracy when they feel that we are all playing games—filibustering and resorting to tactics to talk a Bill out, rather than debating things on their merits and moving to a vote to determine the will of the House?

Lewis Atkinson: I agree entirely. I absolutely respect the fact that others, including opponents of the Bill, reach different judgments on this difficult issue. Ultimately, as I said, in our parliamentary democracy that is for Parliament to resolve, on the balance of judgment of its constituent-elected MPs. That is explainable to our constituents. If something that constituents wish for is

[Lewis Atkinson]

decided on by Parliament, that can be explained; what struggles to be explained is when tactics and filibustering are used to not reach a decision at all. I will come on to talk a little about that.

At this stage, it is important to say that I spoke to groups opposed to assisted dying as part of my preparation for the debate—again, not to discuss the substance of assisted dying itself, but, as part of balance, to get their view about the process. It is fair to say that their position includes the assertion that the Lords were justified in not reaching a decision on the Bill because Commons consideration in Committee was flawed. I personally disagree; having sat in Committee for more than 100 hours—way in excess of nearly any other Bill—I might be expected to say that. Those exact same arguments, however, were available to Members before Third Reading.

Daniel Francis (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Lab): As my hon. Friend knows, we both sat long and hard on that Bill Committee. But if we sent the Bill to the other place in good shape, why did the sponsor there table 77 amendments to it? Is my hon. Friend able to outline why that happened?

Lewis Atkinson: I am not here to speak for the sponsor of anything; I am here to speak for parliamentary democracy. Fundamentally, on Third Reading, MPs clearly backed the Bill. That was the final chance for MPs to have their say. In all those debates, my hon. Friend made his points well and ably, as I made mine, in Committee and beyond. I entirely respect his perspective, but I am bringing us back to the issue of parliamentary democracy.

It is entirely appropriate, and no one is disputing—the petitioners are not disputing—that the Lords should scrutinise and indeed amend legislation passed to them from the Commons; what the petitioners find outrageous, frankly, is the failure to consider it. I will come on to that.

Vikki Slade (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): That is the key. Both the sponsor of the Bill in the House of Lords and others tabled amendments that might well, had they returned to the House of Commons, have had the opportunity to improve the Bill. Would the hon. Gentleman agree that the denial of that opportunity to improve the Bill is an absolute travesty?

Lewis Atkinson: Yes, I agree. I will come on to talk about future consideration of the legislation.

The arguments against the process—that the consideration was somehow flawed—were widely debated before Third Reading, and the Commons reached a conclusion on that. All MPs had to make a judgment, independent of the Whips, on whether they wanted to pass the legislation.

Sophie and Nathaniel were in the Commons Gallery on the day of Third Reading. They, like people across the country, thought a clear decision had been made: that assisted dying reform would become law, with significant safeguards, subject to some further iteration in the Lords, if required, including an extended implementation period of up to five years to allow any

other considerations to be worked through. It was the approach of the House of Lords, specifically a small number of peers, that outraged Nathaniel, Sophie and the other petitioners.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It may only have been a small number of peers who tabled amendments, but many others wished to put their names to them. Does the hon. Gentleman not recognise the will of the House of Lords? I think 170 peers had real concerns about the legislation. The role of the House of Lords is to ensure that those concerns are looked at, and it is fully entitled to do so. On this occasion, it was not able to improve the legislation in the timescale provided. Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that?

Lewis Atkinson: It is always a pleasure to receive an intervention from the hon. Gentleman; he is much more experienced in this place than I am. However, over 16 days of debate in the House of Lords, the will of the Lords was not tested once. There were no Divisions. If the will of the peers was so overwhelmingly against the Bill, the Lords could have divided on Second Reading if the House had wished; it chose not to.

The opponents of the Bill in the Lords went out of their way, it is suggested, to avoid Divisions. Some amendments may have passed, but a great number of others would probably have been defeated. With more than 1,200 amendments tabled, and 1% of peers tabling 60% of them, that small number of peers took up more than a third of the total speaking time.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Lewis Atkinson: I will just finish this point. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Daniel Francis) mentioned, Lord Falconer—the Bill's sponsor in the Lords—made clear that he would sit down and discuss amendments with peers: indeed, he accepted and supported amendments that responded to genuine concerns with the Bill. But there was no opportunity for the Lords to reach a conclusion on amendments, because of the tactics involved.

Mark D'Arcy, a BBC parliamentary correspondent for more than two decades, characterised the Lords' treatment as this:

“This is a filibuster. If it walks like a duck, quacks like a duck, and tastes good in orange sauce, it's a duck. If they're going this slowly over this piece of legislation, I'm afraid it's a filibuster. There is no other way to describe what's going on here. It may be in order. It may be within the rules of the House, but what's happening here is that a relatively small number of peers are putting down lots and lots of amendments and debating them very, very slowly.”

Andrew George (St Ives) (LD): The hon. Gentleman is making an excellent speech. He will be aware of early-day motion 2709, which I tabled in January. It is about the role of the House of Lords in scrutinising legislation, and the importance of ensuring that they are there purely to scrutinise and provide sober second thought on legislation. It had strong cross-party support. On 12 February, the Leader of the House responded to a question to say that if there were delays,

“I will find time to see how we can progress it. This is a timely warning to their lordships”. —[*Official Report*, 12 February 2026; Vol. 780, c. 957.]

This was a fundamental attempt—a successful attempt—to block the Bill; it was nothing other than that.

Lewis Atkinson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I agree with him—as does Rod Liddle, a journalist who did not support changing the law and was an opponent of the Bill. He said:

“The truth, I am ashamed to say, is that in the case of the assisted dying Bill, my side won by cheating...What was not right was for opponents of the Bill, no matter how strongly they felt, to use machinery rather than honest debate to get the Bill booted out.”

Dr Marie Tidball (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): My hon. Friend the Member for Spen Valley (Kim Leadbeater), who introduced the assisted dying Bill as a private Member’s Bill, cannot be with us today. Does my hon. Friend agree that the filibustering in the Lords and the inability of the Lords to deal with the assisted dying Bill within reasonable time fetters us as Back Benchers, and has a chilling effect on introducing a range of issues of conscience as private Members’ Bills?

Lewis Atkinson: My hon. Friend is right, as is my hon. Friend the Member for Spen Valley (Kim Leadbeater). I have heard it said that it was inappropriate for this issue to be brought as a private Member’s Bill, but equally we know that it would have been inappropriate for it to be included in any party’s manifesto. I see opponents of the Bill, as well as proponents of it, nodding in assent. Clearly, both public opinion and parliamentarians’ opinions on this issue are not split across party lines. The Prime Minister was clear in advance of the general election that he favoured a free vote to decide this issue—not on what the outcome of the issue should be—and that a private Member’s Bill was an entirely appropriate mechanism to achieve that.

I hear some opponents saying, on the one hand, that a private Member’s Bill was never appropriate to do this but, on the other hand, that it would not have been appropriate to include this issue in a manifesto. Therefore, one is left to conclude that those opponents think there is no viable vehicle for social change in this country.

Dame Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): The challenge was that this Bill was launched very fast in the House of Commons, without pre-legislative scrutiny, whereas other private Members’ Bills have often been knocked around for a long while and discussed in detail, so that their flaws were recognised, adjusted and amended at different times. This Bill came very fast and there was a lot that was missing that had never been debated in the Commons, because of the way that the system works—not just for private Members’ Bills but generally. We need to legislate better in this country—I think we would all agree with that—and the Lords were doing their job.

Lewis Atkinson: I thank my right hon. Friend for her intervention, and I respect her significant experience and expertise in this place. Again, though, I gently say that that very argument was well rehearsed; in fact, I think she made it on Third Reading. And the judgment collectively of MPs was that it did not carry.

Dame Meg Hillier: I did not speak on Third Reading.

Lewis Atkinson: Apologies—my right hon. Friend may not have spoken, but many other Members certainly made that argument, and it was a key argument for voting against the Bill on Third Reading.

We either believe in parliamentary democracy and in the primacy of the House of Commons where each of us independently reaches our judgment—I accept that it is a judgment; I am not an absolutist on this issue—or we do not. We cannot believe in parliamentary democracy when it suits us and not believe in it when it does not suit us.

Nevertheless, I agree with my right hon. Friend on the need to legislate better and I believe that the Hansard Society has put forward some recommendations about how the approach to private Members’ Bills in general could be improved. I absolutely agree that some improvements could be made.

Several hon. Members rose—

Lewis Atkinson: I will finish my point. Fundamentally, the question is whether we can achieve social change in this country through parliamentary means, or not.

I will just go back to how Sophie, the key petitioner, felt. She summed it up in the following way:

“I’m living with incurable cancer and I know how precious time becomes when you’re facing the end of life. Watching Parliament waste that time because of the actions of a tiny number of unelected politicians is heartbreaking”.

It is not that the House of Lords was improving the Bill. It may have been in some cases, but the fact that the House of Lords, in 16 days, did not divide once and decide on one amendment—

Jim Shannon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Lewis Atkinson: I have already given way to the hon. Member.

Michael Payne (Gedling) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Does he agree that wherever people stand on assisted dying, the country is reasonably entitled to expect that after 16 days—more than 75 hours—of debate, the House of Lords should have come to a decision on one of the most profound issues that has been debated in this parliamentary Session?

Lewis Atkinson: I do.

Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair): Lewis—time.

Lewis Atkinson: You want me to make progress, Sir Edward, so I will.

The question then turns to what happens now. What does this mean for assisted dying, yes, but also for the British constitutional settlement? As part of my preparation for this debate, I spoke to Tom Brake, CEO of Unlock Democracy, which campaigns for constitutional reform, including of the House of Lords, to address the democratic deficit. He believes that the case for Lords reform has been significantly strengthened by the behaviour of peers in this episode.

In contrast, the Hansard Society’s director, Dr Ruth Fox, to whom I also spoke in preparation for today, reminded me that the Lords is a self-regulating Chamber. It is not subject to the timetable or expectations of the Commons or anyone else and, she believes, nor should it be. But she is also clear that in the current circumstance the British constitutional settlement provides a clear and appropriate response that the Commons could use to assert its primacy—the Parliament Act 1911. That Act was explicitly designed to be applicable to private

[*Lewis Atkinson*]

Members' Bills. Indeed, when the Parliament Bill was debated back in the 1910s, an amendment to confine it to Government Bills was defeated. The Parliament Act has been used before on issues of conscience—for example, equalisation of the homosexual age of consent in 2000 or the Hunting Bill in 2004, when the Lords refused to accept the decision of the Commons.

The petitioners believe that it is now necessary to use the Parliament Act for assisted dying legislation also. They point out that if the legislation is reintroduced and passed by the Commons a second time, the Lords will again have a chance to do its job properly—to consider the types of amendments that a number of hon. Members have suggested that they believe the Lords want to see. The Lords may pass amendments for Commons consideration, but under the Parliament Act it would be unable to block progress entirely.

I believe that the Parliament Act gives us a way to answer the question whether parliamentary democracy is still fit to tackle the key issues of our time. I am grateful that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House is here and I look forward to his assessment of the situation in response to this debate. I hope that he will specifically touch on the Government's assessment of whether the Parliament Act would be applicable should the Bill be reintroduced and, crucially, whether the Government would make appropriate time available for necessary procedures to take place to allow its use.

Mary Glendon (Newcastle upon Tyne East and Wallsend) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way while making such an important speech on such an important, but also contentious, subject. We know that the Parliament Act has only ever been used seven times and never for a private Member's Bill, and in recent weeks leading figures have opposed use of the Parliament Act in this way. Does my hon. Friend think that something so contentious that is a private Member's Bill should override the present constitution?

Lewis Atkinson: I thank my hon. Friend and regional colleague for her intervention. The Parliament Act was explicitly designed to include provision for private Members' Bills and it has been used on issues of conscience before. I also question the idea of contention. There is no doubt that assisted dying is a really serious matter, but the view of the British public on it is remarkably stable, which makes the resolution through parliamentary means absolutely clear.

As part of my preparation for this debate, I spoke to Sophie Stowers from the polling and insight company More in Common, whose work on this topic, I stress, has been independent and not funded by campaigns on any side. She told me that polling on the introduction of assisted dying has been remarkably consistent from the time of the Bill's introduction to now, with support levels among the British public of 60%, compared with opposition in the teens. That finding is consistent with work carried out by others, including the Nuffield Council on Bioethics, which ran a citizen's jury on this topic, exposing all the participants to lengthy discussions on arguments for and against a change in this place.

When I speak to constituents, they still think assisted dying is coming into force because people do not understand—perhaps they cannot understand—how in 2026, elected representatives of their country can vote

for something and yet it can still be blocked by a small number of Lords who have no accountability to the public. In its insight work, More in Common reports that people do not understand why the Bill fell, they are puzzled about the suggestion that it ran out of time, and they do not believe that it should be the end of the process. In its polling in January, when it was becoming clear that there was a risk of the Bill running out of time in the Lords, more than four in five citizens said that the assisted dying bill should be introduced again in the Session of Parliament that we are now in.

Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair): Lewis, you have to finish now.

Mr Angus MacDonald (Inverness, Skye and West Ross-shire) (LD): In my constituency, I am getting a substantial amount of mail in my inbox from people who are glad that the Bill has been turned away. What they really wanted to see was investment in hospices, and there has been remarkably little to move that forward. I suspect if this Government made a major investment in hospices and the Bill came back in a few years' time, it would make a big difference.

Lewis Atkinson: I note that the Scottish Parliament democratically came to a judgment on the devolved issue of hospice funding that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. The arguments he made were aired extensively before Third Reading and the Commons made its judgment clear.

I will turn to my conclusions, as I know a lot of Members wish to speak. The public expects Parliament to work. More widely than on assisted dying, we can all sense a general public mood of impatience that change cannot be delivered in this country. Many on the Government Benches felt some of that impatience when it took 18 months from our election to pass the Employment Rights Act 2025, partly due to the ponderously slow process of the Lords. We rightly asserted the primacy of the Commons at that stage.

Parliamentary democracy is not a pick-and-mix affair.

Jim Allister (North Antrim) (TUV): Will the hon. Member give way?

Lewis Atkinson: No, I am going to finish now. More in Common reports a shift from frustration to anger among the general public—not on this issue specifically but because it is too difficult to get things done in this country. There is a sense that our institutions are broken and that action is blocked at every turn. That cannot be healthy for anyone, least of all for people who are dying and have a limited number of days left.

For people like Nathaniel and Sophie, parliamentary delay and inaction are not abstract concepts. Delay takes time that they do not have and it prolongs a status quo that MPs clearly voted to change. I would not serve here if I did not believe in British parliamentary democracy. The petitioners believe that we must act to demonstrate that parliamentary democracy remains fit to deal with the issues of the day, including life or death. I pay tribute to them. This issue is not going away, and I look forward to this debate.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair): Order. A large number of colleagues wish to take part. I want this to be an orderly debate, in which everybody has their say, so I shall institute an immediate six-minute limit on speeches. If everybody sticks to that, everybody should get in. Just in case colleagues are tempted to give way to others and therefore prolong their speech, I should say that nobody will be given extra time if they give way to another colleague. That is to ensure that everybody gets in.

In terms of parliamentary courtesy, this is a debate; it is not an opportunity to come in, make a short intervention and then leave. Therefore, if you make an intervention, you are expected to stay for some significant time and to return for the winding-up speeches. I hope that is agreeable to colleagues.

5 pm

Siân Berry (Brighton Pavilion) (Green): Many thanks, Sir Edward, for your firm chairing today, which I now look forward to. I sincerely thank the petitioners, and particularly Sophie Blake for all the work she does and for a very well put petition. I also thank Nathaniel Dye, and I had the genuine honour of meeting him and seeing his work before his death.

I want to add a cross-party voice to the debate. The Greens were not whipped on the issue of assisted dying—we do not whip our Members in any debates—but all four Green MPs voted for this issue of conscience. However, that is not what we are here to debate today; we are here to talk about the process. I was so impressed with it and with the seriousness with which my colleagues and colleagues across the House took this issue. We made our decisions after so much debate and engagement with the Bill text and the amendments, and debates in our offices and with our staff. In our constituencies, we all spoke with constituents from a wide range of different groups. I spoke with young people, disabled people, faith groups, several terminally ill people and people caring for those who were terminally ill. This was serious work.

I was a very new MP when the Bill went through its Second Reading, and I found it so inspiring. It is a sad topic, but I found the debate extraordinary. After all the debate in the House of Commons, which was unwhipped—by any party—and conducted with such seriousness on an issue of conscience, all that work led to a majority for the Bill. We all know what happened next: a refusal by the House of Lords to come to any kind of decision, and the effective blocking of any further consideration of this issue, into which we had all put so much work.

Tom Rutland (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Lab): I thank my constituency neighbour for giving way. Many of my constituents have been deeply upset by the way a small number of peers blocked the passage of the assisted dying Bill, despite the broad support from the public and from a majority of MPs every time it was voted on. Does she agree that debate on the Bill, about which there are strongly held, principled views on both sides, is very welcome, but that intentionally filibustering to prevent its passage is unworthy of this Parliament?

Siân Berry: I quite agree. It was courageous of the House to take on this issue, consider it and then vote. We put our names to positions that we came to with

some courage, I think, because we all knew there were people who felt very strongly the opposite way, whichever way we voted.

On the principle—on this and any other issue where a similar process takes place and the House of Commons has the courage to come to a decision—I agree that it is not for the House of Lords to stop that using these kinds of methods. I agree with the petition writers, who want the Government

“to ensure that when bills are supported by MPs & the public, they have the time to complete all their stages in Parliament.”

That is 114,000-plus signatories, alongside the 69% of people polled this year who believe that the debate on assisted dying should have continued until Parliament reached a conclusion.

I look forward to hearing from the Leader of the House about what can be done so that we can make the important private Members’ Bill process viable again in the future and restore the public’s faith in the health of democracy—I will not beat around the bush—and in the ability of this Parliament to make decisions on issues of such importance to so many of our constituents.

5.5 pm

Lizzi Collinge (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Edward. I want to speak about the process of the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill, which was prevented from completing its parliamentary journey by a small number of unelected peers who showed through their actions that they had no respect for the constitutional settlement of this country, no respect for the House of Commons, no respect for their own role as scrutineers and no respect for the British public.

Mr Angus MacDonald: May I intervene, please?

Lizzi Collinge: I am sorry; I will not give way, as I want to finish this speech.

The House of Lords at its best provides detailed scrutiny of legislation, proposing amendments to make it more workable and addressing criticisms of it. But this was not the House of Lords at its best; this was the House of Lords that I remember from my early adulthood: the Lords who kept blocking the equalisation of the age of consent for gay men and who delayed the repeal of section 28. What august company for these modern-day peers to be in! In each of those cases, the primacy of the Commons was asserted, and I really hope that once again the primacy of the Commons and the will of the British people prevail.

Opponents of the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill will say that the actions of those few peers were the Lords providing the scrutiny that the Commons did not. I say: what utter nonsense. We have already heard that over 1,200 amendments were proposed, including a pregnancy test for all applicants, regardless of their sex or fertility status. Is that scrutiny, or is it filibustering? I think we know the answer.

In the Commons, the Bill had more scrutiny in terms of debate on the Floor and hours in Committee than any Government Bill of recent times. I remember those debates in the Commons; for the most part, they were nuanced, thoughtful and well intentioned. I remind Members that the issue of assisted dying has been debated for over 100 years in this country. I have also sat on multiple Bill Committees, including some of the longer and more contentious ones in this Parliament,

[Lizzi Collinge]

and they did not last as long or see as many amendments debated as the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill did in the Commons. If a process that went above and beyond the process for any Government Bill is not sufficient to pass a law, what is?

The debate in this place and the subsequent amendments to the Bill addressed matters of substance that were raised because of often understandable concerns. They were supported by many of us who support the right of someone to choose the timing and manner of their own death in principle, but who would not support a Bill that exposed people to the risk of not making that choice freely or that did not have strong guardrails. My conclusion, and the conclusion of the Commons debate, was that this was about how a Bill would operate in practice. What we saw in the Lords was not that. The majority of Lords were first prevented from voting on any aspect of the Bill whatever, and the clogging of the debate with unserious amendments prevented a proper debate on matters of substance.

Where does that leave us? It leaves us in a dangerous status quo where terminally ill adults, with the means to do so, go abroad to die, often too early. It leaves us with a legal situation where the manner of someone's death and the intention of the people who were with them are determined after someone is dead and cannot make their views known. It leaves hundreds of terminally ill adults taking their lives every year, often in very upsetting circumstances. Most people will die a perfectly ordinary death, managed well by palliative care, but palliative care cannot help everyone, no matter how good it is. Anyone who says otherwise is unfortunately not telling the truth. That has been demonstrated, unfortunately, by too many difficult deaths and by the pain of too many families who are left behind.

The debate today is about something even bigger than those tragedies; it is about the constitutional settlement of the United Kingdom. It is about the reasons why we have decided that those with no democratic mandate should not be able to block the will of the elected Chamber. It is about trust in Parliament—trust that we will act with dignity and respect for the proper way of doing things, and know our constitutional places and the limits placed on our power, which are there for a very good reason. It is about the ability of the Lords to behave in a way that allows us to have flexibility in our constitutional settlement, to move with the times and not to be bound by a single, rigid written document. I see great value in having flexibility in our constitutional mechanisms. However, that relies on individuals and groups of individuals operating with honour—something that, unfortunately, this episode did not demonstrate. I worry that if that is repeated, we risk having to move to a more rigid system to enable the primacy of the Commons.

The British people expect high standards of scrutiny from parliamentarians, in both this place and the other place. In the case of the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill, the House of Commons did its job very well. In the other place, the Lords were prevented from doing their job properly by the actions of a minority. Not only for the memory of Nat—our friend and fellow campaigner—but for every person in this country, that cannot be allowed to stand.

5.11 pm

John Cooper (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under the iron grip of your chairmanship, Sir Edward.

We are here not to relitigate the substance of the assisted dying Bill, but to consider a profound change to the way we in this place carry out our duties as legislators. The petitioners seek, in short, for a failed Bill to be smashed through, as though it had not been subject to proper procedure, and for us to accept that it fell through procedural malfeasance. It is not so: this Bill failed because a gamble was taken to proceed down the private Member's Bill route. It is well known that such Bills can run out of road due to time constraints.

The emotive nature of the subject of the Bill is obvious, but just as the Commons debate was dominated by deeply moving yet ultimately anecdotal accounts of painful deaths, we cannot decide here on emotion. Bad cases do not make good laws. We must decide on cold, hard facts. It is a fact that this Bill carried a major flaw at its heart, in that it was not part of the Labour manifesto on which this Government were elected.

It is also a fact that the Lords' scrutiny role is designed to prevent the passage of poor legislation. This was flawed legislation, replete with issues unresolved at Committee, and passed to the Lords in a situation that Cabinet Office guidance warned would "likely kill the Bill". I have seen all too often the result of a paucity of scrutiny when legislation has passed through the Scottish Parliament. Holyrood lacks a revising Chamber entirely, with its Committees expected to do the hard work of line-by-line consideration.

This petition is couched in terms of fairness and democracy, but it is neither fair nor democratic to usurp our system for reasons of dogma. No matter the subject of a Bill, if it lacks a manifesto heritage, staggers through Committee amidst a welter of chops and changes, and ultimately fails on contact with the Lords, we have no place attempting to resurrect it because we admire its aims or because it is popular.

Jonathan Davies (Mid Derbyshire) (Lab): It continues to be the case that the royal medical colleges and many of the organisations representing disabled people take issue with the Bill as it stands. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, while many among the general public would like to see assisted dying, or assisted suicide, introduced in principle, the detail of the legislation matters, and therefore the House of Lords was doing its job in providing that scrutiny?

John Cooper: I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman that this Bill has huge difficulties, and its popularity does not capture those. The Salisbury-Addison convention that the Lords will not seek to prevent the Government from implementing manifesto pledges simply does not apply. In this case, it has not been breached. The Government made repeated declarations that they were neutral on the Bill—that it was a private Member's Bill—and so the convention does not arise. We cannot let the emotional baggage of the assisted dying Bill override proper parliamentary procedure.

Lizzi Collinge: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

John Cooper: I will finish.

Of course, the legislation approving abortion in this country came through the private Member's Bill route, but that was backed by the then Labour Government, who appointed a medical advisory committee that also supported its passage. That was a gold standard, against which this Bill is mere base metal. It fell—and fallen it should remain.

5.14 pm

Dr Simon Opher (Stroud) (Lab): I thank the 326 signatories from Stroud who helped to make this debate possible, as well as the many petitioners who are in the Public Gallery. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland Central (Lewis Atkinson) for what I thought was an absolutely excellent speech.

Even before taking up my role as an MP, I cannot say that I was a massive fan of the other place. There are undoubtedly many wonderful peers whose expertise and scrutiny make a valuable contribution to our legislative process. However, the idea that individuals should by virtue of their religious office or, until very recently, the lottery of life—or, indeed, because of political donations or cronyism—have a role in shaping, and blocking, our laws is impossible to justify in a democracy.

My views on the issue were cemented by my experience with the Terminally Ill Adults Bill. I had the privilege of serving on the Bill Committee, which sat for more than 100 hours, considered hundreds of pieces of written evidence, heard three full days of oral evidence from experts and accepted more than 150 amendments. I also explored my constituents' views on this during many surgeries. I take issue with the idea that the Bill is not a good piece of legislation. I have worked in palliative care for many years, and this is an excellent piece of legislation. Saying that it is weak is simply a tactic used by those who do not agree with assisted dying.

Through abuse of parliamentary procedure, a handful of peers were able to impede the progress of the Bill, despite it being endorsed by the Commons and the public. According to polling, only 14% of people believe that the House of Lords should be able to prevent the Bill. Just 1% of peers took up more than a third of the speaking time on the Bill, tabling 60% of the amendments. As we have heard, although many of those amendments were tabled in good faith, others, which I will not go into, were absolutely ridiculous. The obstruction we saw with the assisted dying Bill can never be allowed to happen again. I am grateful that we have and can use the Parliament Act, but it is increasingly clear that we must look at other mechanisms. We need to completely change, and possibly even get rid of, the House of Lords.

Peers continue to frustrate the timely progress of Bills that were passed by the democratically elected Commons. There was not just the assisted dying Bill, but the Employment Rights Act 2025, when Opposition peers refused to put down their bats in the game of ping-pong. That is why I, with others, set up the all-party parliamentary group on House of Lords reform to examine the options for reform.

Comprehensive reform may take time, but there are practical changes that could be implemented in the shorter term. The self-governance of the House of Lords is fiercely guarded by many peers; however, without underpinning rules, those gentlemen's agreements are open to abuse, as we saw over the course of the previous

parliamentary Session. I had the pleasure of speaking to Baroness Smith, the Leader of the House of Lords, and although she managed to deliver all the Government business in a difficult Parliament, the ability of a small number of peers to disrupt, due to the lack of authority of the House of Lords Speaker, was abundantly clear.

For private Members' Bills, it was open season, as in those circumstances the Speaker has no powers of curtailment or to insist on the grouping of amendments, nor can the party leaders in the Lords impose any discipline. There are, in fact, no rules, which allows a small number of peers to block legislation based on their own particular views. It is time that the other place adopts rules about conduct and the primacy of the Speaker. In the longer term, we need to abolish the House of Lords Chamber and replace it with something that is fit for purpose.

The public expect Parliament to debate, scrutinise and improve legislation, and not allow a small, unelected minority to prevent the will of the elected House from being carried into law. I hope that the Government will work with hon. Members to ensure that what happened to the assisted dying Bill will never happen again, and that the will of the Commons on that point is made in law.

5.18 pm

Andrew George (St Ives) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Sunderland Central (Lewis Atkinson) on the way in which he introduced the debate and the strong case he made about not only the Bill and its treatment, but the recommendations for reform of the House of Lords. As he said, we do not want to rehash the debate on the Terminally Ill Adults Bill, but as we have seen, people on both sides of the debate were disgusted by the way in which a small minority of their lordships were able to abuse the powers available to them, not to scrutinise but to block the Bill. Indeed, a strong opponent of the Bill, Rod Liddle, described his side winning "by cheating", which is exactly what happened.

Their lordships on many occasions in a rather condescending way told the democratically elected Chamber of the House of Commons that the Bill it passed on Third Reading was not fit for purpose. The fact is that if we all designed a private Member's Bill, there would be 650 different versions. The concept of a perfect Bill can no doubt be debated by everyone that looks at it, and they would say, "I would prefer it to be amended in this manner" or "in that manner". The fact is that the way in which the hon. Member for Spen Valley (Kim Leadbeater) proceeded, accepting very sensible amendments, meant that we ended up with a stronger and very effective Bill.

Daniel Francis: Is the hon. Member aware that I fought long and hard on the learning disability issue in the Bill Committee? The sponsor in the House of Lords had amendments that would have undone some of those commitments. If the Bill had passed in the Lords, we could have then been stuck in a ping-pong situation with the amendments that had been passed in the Commons being undone by the Lords.

Andrew George: The hon. Member makes a very strong point. There were more than 100 hours of debate and scrutiny in Committee and in the Chamber. I am

[Andrew George]

sure that we all in this Chamber engaged in thousands of hours of discussion with specialist bodies and had private meetings and investigations on the matter. I am on the Health and Social Care Committee and therefore take these issues very seriously.

I have mentioned the early-day motion that I tabled at the end of January, which castigated the House of Lords and proposed that if it continued with its filibuster, we needed to accelerate reform of the House of Lords. It has certainly precipitated a justification for that from the House of Commons and the Government, and I hope the Leader of the House will follow that accelerated reform through in the light of what has happened, which I think is quite disgraceful.

Olly Glover (Didcot and Wantage) (LD): My hon. Friend is making a very good speech, so I say this with some trepidation, given how well he has done in the private Member's Bill ballot this time round. Something that could unite people with differing views in this Chamber would be significant House of Lords reform and meaningful reform of the private Member's Bill process.

Andrew George: My hon. Friend makes a strong point. I was No. 4 this time round. Having been No. 1 in 2014, I know what it is like to go through the process. On that point, I find it unacceptable that I am under significant pressure to take this Bill through again, which denies me the opportunity to take through the many other options that I should be entitled to take forward. I leave the House awaiting my announcement on the 17th.

As I mentioned earlier, the Leader of the House said in his answer to me on 12 February that

"I will find time to see how we can progress it. This is a timely warning to their lordships".—[*Official Report*, 12 February 2026; Vol. 780, c. 957.]

It should not now be down to a private Member to take the matter through. It should be down to the Government. If the will of the House has been decided, the Government need to find time to use the Parliament Acts to ensure that democratic principles are upheld.

If we are looking at reforming the House of Lords, we need to start by asking what we want a second Chamber for and, indeed, if we want a second Chamber. We need scrutiny and a sober second thought. Others might mention a democratic deficit. In my view, the best thing is to abolish the place. I would rather see it replaced with a citizens' assembly and an appointments commission bringing the brightest and best from all walks of life into the Chamber. What we do not want is a second Chamber in competition with the House of Commons. I look forward to the concluding remarks from the Leader of the House, and I hope that he will think hard about his words to me and will find us time to take this Bill through.

5.24 pm

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith and Chiswick) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland Central (Lewis Atkinson) for his excellent opening speech.

In the 21 years that I have been entering the private Members' Bill ballot, my name has been drawn out once, in 2018. My Freedom of Information (Extension) Bill—a very fine piece of legislation that I will have to tell hon. Members about another time—was talked out by a Conservative Back Bencher who tried to console me afterwards by saying that he supported my Bill, but wanted to make sure that the Bill after mine was talked out properly. It is therefore right to say that private Members' Bills are fragile things, are often subject to headwinds, most commonly because the Government do not want the Bill to proceed, and are susceptible to sabotage.

But I do not believe that that is or should be the case with the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill. It is an exception because it received the endorsement of the House of Commons on Second and Third Reading because of successive polls of the public. We are all doubtful about the veracity of polls, but when one has a very substantial majority of people over many years, we are wrong to ignore the will of public in that way. The Government are allowing passage of the Bill, so it is only the filibuster in the Lords, by a small number of peers, that has harpooned this piece of legislation thus far. Frankly, I would respect the Bill's opponents if they were clear and up front that they were using procedural means to talk out the Bill because of their position on it, rather than pretending that the amendments tabled are serious.

Mr Jonathan Brash (Hartlepool) (Lab): My hon. Friend used a word that has been used several times today: filibuster. In essence, that means "stop at all costs". Given that that has been the behaviour of the House of Lords, has it not given up its rights as a revising Chamber if the intention is to stop this at all costs?

Andy Slaughter: I am coming to that. I will not take up all my time, because I suspect that we all know each other's minds on this matter and are unlikely to change them. We need another vote so that the Bill can progress, and there is a mechanism in the Parliament Act for that to happen, which is a perfectly legitimate and logical next step.

I think that there is arrogance in the way the Bill has been opposed, because it restricts the agency of the individual and seeks to take control of their lives. I am quite surprised that some Members, particularly those who come from more individualistic traditions than I do, are prepared to see that. It also increases the suffering of our fellow citizens. I think those are moral and constitutional issues; I do not believe that state actors should be able to constrain the freedom of the individual. There have been legitimate concerns about safeguarding in the Bill. They have been debated and provided for, and I do not believe that a sufficient alternative has been provided.

In conclusion, there is a credibility problem here for Parliament. Our constituents will look at us and say, "We have asked you to do something and you have failed to deliver it, despite the fact that you have the ability, the will and the mechanisms to do it." Let us just get on with it now, and let us use the Parliament Act as it is intended to be used.

5.28 pm

Sir Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): Thank you very much for calling me, Sir Edward.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Sunderland Central (Lewis Atkinson), in part of whose constituency I fought an election more than 40 years ago, on his excellent speech. He has focused us all on the fact that we are discussing not the issue itself, but the way in which Parliament has handled it. I have enormous respect for those who are against the assisted dying Bill. I was against all that when I came into the House of Commons, but I have changed my mind over the years for many reasons. I am particularly grateful to the Leader of the House for giving up his time to respond to this debate, underlining that it is for Parliament to sort out how we handle this issue. We have a considerable problem: if we get the Bill through the Commons again without invoking the Parliament Act, those few Lords will filibuster it all over again. What the highly respected BBC journalist Mark D'Arcy said, which the hon. Member for Sunderland Central quoted, is absolutely right.

A large number of our constituents want the Bill to go through, but we must remember the background. Judges, lawyers and the Crown Prosecution Service have made decisions that encroach on the area. The Lords had made the decision before, in relation to Lord Falconer's Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults Bill. Everyone said, "No, this is for the elected House of Commons to decide." It is for us—the elected Members—to decide and give our judgment, and that is what the Commons did during that memorable Second Reading debate—one of the best debates I have seen in nearly 40 years in the House.

Now, for whatever reason, Parliament has not delivered what the public expect it to deliver, and that has had a belittling effect on Parliament. Individually, Members of Parliament may not be the subjects of great respect, but Parliament itself is. If Parliament can find time for technical transport, fisheries and regulatory measures, it can surely find Government time for a major question of life, death and personal choice—that is my submission this afternoon. Respect for Parliament will erode, and our many constituents will be deeply dismayed, unless we deliver the Bill. That is the wish of Parliament.

The Abortion Act 1967 was a private Member's Bill, but the Government recognised it as a major issue of conscience and public policy, and ensured that sufficient parliamentary time was available. Without that, the Bill would not have got through. We should remember that, as I think has been alluded to, other landmark reforms of the '60s, including the abolition of the death penalty and the decriminalisation of homosexuality, relied on Government support for additional parliamentary time despite being private Members' Bills. I say to the Leader of the House that assisted dying falls in the best traditions of those decisions. I hope that he and his colleagues will feel able to make the same sort of decisions that our forebears did back in the '60s.

Unless we have Government time, this will not work. It will gravely damage the reputation of Parliament, which will not have opined either way on this vital issue of conscience for reasons of procedure. Our constituents will feel that we are not coming to a conclusion either way, and we will have let them down. The answer is Government time.

5.32 pm

Dame Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. Before I go on to make some other comments, I want to nail a few myths that have been brought up.

There has been some talk of how Government Bill Committees that Members have sat on have been shorter than the private Member's Bill on assisted dying. That is because Government Bills are timetabled. Guillotines are put in because the usual channels get in touch to limit the debate, and there is always an in-built Government majority on those Committees. It is not unusual for more time to be spent on a Bill that does not have those constraints. It is also worth noting that the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill Committee had a majority built in by the sponsor, so there was very little chance of any change in that. A lot of people voted on Second Reading for change and discussion in Committee, but few changes were made—most of the amendments were made by the sponsor. Bills relating to hunting and equal marriage were supported by Government, whereas assisted dying is not explicitly supported by this Labour Government. If they were to support it, I think there would be a major crisis in the party, as that policy was not in the manifesto and was not discussed in any of our normal policy procedures.

It is important to correct what my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland Central (Lewis Atkinson) kept saying in his opening speech about there being no votes or opportunities to divide in the Lords. That is because Committee stage in the Lords is not an amending stage and there is no opportunity to vote—the votes happen at a later time. That is just the way that the House of Lords works, and it is really important not to criticise the Lords for following their normal procedures. There was not anything special or different in their approach to the Bill.

Lewis Atkinson: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Dame Meg Hillier: I need to make progress, but I will give way in a moment.

Most of the Lords speeches on the Bill were very short. Filibustering, which many hon. Members in this Chamber will have done or seen, is when Members stand up to speak for prolonged periods. Sometimes the Whips ask Members to do so, perhaps because someone is off site and they need to prolong a debate—those things happen. Yet most of the speeches in the Lords were around five minutes or less.

The pregnancy amendment, which has been discussed, was often ridiculed, but when the Bill went to the Lords, there had been no discussion in the House of Commons about what would happen if someone who was pregnant wanted an assisted death. In some jurisdictions, such a person must have a termination before they can have an assisted death, while in others, they must have given birth.

Lizzi Collinge: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Dame Meg Hillier: No.

The point is that the Lords had a discussion about what to do in those circumstances, for which there was no policy. Such things are important to nail down and resolve, yet that issue is still not resolved.

[*Dame Meg Hillier*]

There is public support in principle for the Bill but that is not *carte blanche*. There is massive concern about the detail, but I do not have time to go into all of it. We know that most of the royal colleges are concerned about the Bill. It is important to remember that we are legislators: we make law that must be deliverable and unambiguous. The Commons is not simply a debating Chamber. Members debate, and this Chamber is a debating Chamber—we are not voting on law in this debate—but it is important that we legislate for the real world.

There is a role for a revising Chamber, because, frankly, we do not do that well in the Commons. We often have very little scrutiny, alongside in-built Government majorities. In recent times, perhaps because of the nature of a large majority, business has run short in the Chamber. We are unable to make changes in secondary legislation because of the in-built Government majority on delegated legislation Committees. The assisted dying Bill had an awful lot of Henry VIII powers: 42 delegated powers for any future Government—who may be mad, bad or dangerous, and of any existing party or one yet to be thought of—to make these decisions. That is what we would be giving away if the Bill were to pass. That is why we have a revising Chamber to discuss such matters. As I mentioned in an intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland Central, there was no real pre-legislative scrutiny of the Bill and little time for MPs to engage with it. The Bill Committee sat for a long time but it had an in-built majority.

It is important that we discuss how we legislate, but let us not demonise the House of Lords. We in the Commons need to do a better job. That is not just about standing up and reading out pre-prepared speeches; it is also engaging and having discussions. In my 21 years in this House, I have had the privilege of engaging on issues with people with whom I disagree. Sometimes we find points of agreement, but we challenge each other in the House on such issues. We are not doing that well enough in this place. We need the Lords to do it.

Dr Opher: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Dame Meg Hillier: I have very little time left and I need to make a couple of other points. [*Interruption.*] Well, we have had strict instructions on time. I will, as I said at the beginning of my speech, take an intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland Central in a moment.

The Bill that was introduced did not benefit from Government drafting, from policy development or from the whole weight of the machinery of Government and Whitehall, which includes interaction between Departments, such as on how money is spent.

Lewis Atkinson: Like others, I sat with officials from the Department of Health and Social Care after Second Reading, so there absolutely was DHSC involvement, including in many of the amendments that Lord Falconer introduced. Going back to the principle of parliamentary democracy, I respect the point that my hon. Friend makes, but all the issues she has highlighted were aired before Third Reading. She says that we are not a debating Chamber but a decision Chamber, so why—

Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair): Order. Briefly, please.

Lewis Atkinson: We reached a decision. Does my hon. Friend not agree that it should be respected?

Dame Meg Hillier: The whole point of the process is that we have a revising Chamber. If the Bill were to be reintroduced under the Parliament Act, we would be in dangerous territory. We are mischaracterising the Lords. We need to be careful about that, and very careful about using a parliamentary mechanism such as the Parliament Act to set a precedent for any mad, bad or dangerous Government to take things that were never in their manifesto and ram them through Parliament via a private Member's Bill. That may appeal to many people in this Chamber in relation to the assisted dying Bill, but we must also look at the long-term precedent. In considering how we legislate in this place, let us not demonise the Lords for doing their job in the current system.

5.39 pm

Luke Taylor (Sutton and Cheam) (LD): It is, as always, a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Edward. I thank the hon. Member for Sunderland Central (Lewis Atkinson) for introducing the debate so capably, as well as the petitioners, who are the reason we are having this debate.

The petition is incredibly simple. It asks to apply the very basic principle that when Bills are supported by MPs and the public, they have time to complete all their parliamentary stages. We have heard a couple of extraordinary arguments against that in this debate—that is a surprise. I no longer have to read, “We won’t hear a credible argument against that principle”, although I think that is still true. It is entirely possible to support the need for a reviewing upper Chamber while believing that, if there is significant popular will in favour of a piece of legislation, and valid evidence in favour of its implementation, the Commons’ view that a Bill should at least be considered should ultimately prevail. Unfortunately, we are here because that principle has not been applied to the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill.

Let us quickly remember the Bill was given its Second Reading by 330 votes to 275. It was given its Third Reading by 314 votes to 291. As we have heard, in May 2025, after being told about the specific eligibility criteria and key provisions of the Bill that had passed its Third Reading, 73% of the public backed it. Even its opponents must accept that the Bill was supported by MPs and the public.

When the petition was launched in February, there was hope that it would not be necessary—that the Lords would complete their scrutiny of the Bill and a stronger, improved Bill would come back for debate in the Commons. Unfortunately, that was not to be. As the Government’s response to the petition on 26 February made clear, the Parliament Acts of 1911 and 1949 established the primacy of the House of Commons as a cornerstone of democratic process.

Ashley Dalton (West Lancashire) (Lab): I wonder whether the hon. Member might clarify something. He stated that the Bill could have come back to be debated in the Commons. A Bill does not come back to the Commons to be debated after it has been to the House

of Lords. All the Commons can do is consider Lords amendments. It cannot debate the Bill again. Would he like to correct that?

Luke Taylor: We could have considered it, but we never got the chance because it was filibustered—it was spoken out.

As with so much of our unwritten constitution, that principle's ability to prevail, including for private Members' Bills that enjoy significant support, relies on the good chaps and chapesses theory of government. Peter Hennessy described that theory as an unwarranted faith that

“those who rise to high office will be ‘good chaps’”

and chapesses who know “the unwritten rules” and want to

“adhere to them, even if doing so might frustrate the attainment of their policy objectives”.

When we examine the amendments and speeches in the Lords, it is clear that, in this instance, that theory has spectacularly failed.

When the Bill fell, 1,280 amendments had been tabled. Seven of the most vocal opponents put forward nearly 700 amendments between them. It is worth looking at a couple of those who are most responsible for blocking the Bill. Baroness Finlay of Llandaff tabled 169 amendments and Baroness Grey-Thompson tabled 131, including amendment 458, which proposed, as we have heard, that every applicant, including men, people over 75 and those who are infertile, must supply a negative pregnancy test.

Lord Carlile of Berriew tabled 72 amendments, as did Baroness Coffey, whose amendment 15 sought to exclude anyone who had left the UK in the previous 12 months, which would have meant anyone who had been on holiday or received a terminally ill prognosis of six months while abroad. Lord Sandhurst tabled 68 amendments, Lord Goodman of Wycombe 59 and Lord Moylan 46, including amendment 236, which would have forbidden the patient's co-ordinating doctor from ever being employed in any way by the NHS at the same time that the process was being followed.

None of those amendments was about making the Bill better, improving safeguards or refining the Bill. They were meant entirely to frustrate the will of MPs and the will of the public. In the same way that Boris Johnson obliterated the good chaps theory in the Commons, those seven Members of the House of Lords have been most directly responsible for finally obliterating the good chaps theory in the Lords.

As we have heard, constitutional expert Mark D'arcy said that the process was clearly a “filibuster”. We have heard Rod Liddle, who was opposed to the Bill, say that his “side won by cheating”, and that opponents of the Bill had used

“the machinery of government, rather than honest debate, to get it booted out”.

Lord Moylan, who tabled 46 amendments, openly posted on Twitter that,

“Peers are justified in blocking assisted dying bill”.

He also shared an editorial from *The Times* saying that,

“Peers who want to continue blocking this bill and prevent it from ever becoming law are justified in doing so.”

Clearly, that is a reference to the use of amendments and speeches to block the Bill.

Thus far, I have focused on the process, but it is important to mention the real human costs of those who are faced with one of the most heartbreaking decisions possible at their most vulnerable time. As with so many other private Members' Bills in our long and proud history, the human story that hides behind the constitutional fray that we have been arguing about can get lost. Once it reaches the statute book, the net gain and the quality of life of those that it affects shine through.

It was the same for the right to an abortion, and for someone's rights to love and marry who they love. Now, it is the right to the most fundamental exercise of individual will and liberty imaginable. This debate is about hope, choice and taking control of the end of life. That hope and choice has been taken away by a tiny number of unelected legislators who have wilfully tested the good chap theory to destruction. We must take every opportunity to ensure that this is not allowed to go unchecked, that the lessons do not go unlearned and, most crucially, that the alleviation of suffering offered by the Bill is not lost for another generation.

5.45 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Sir Edward. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland Central (Lewis Atkinson) on the thoughtful and intelligent way he introduced the debate. As in every constituency, there are strongly held views on this issue in Cambridge. My constituents continue to write to me frequently. Most want the assisted dying Bill to proceed, as do the wider public.

I supported the Bill at every stage, as I supported similar proposals a decade ago when they were introduced with great dignity by Rob Marris. I will continue to support such proposals. Although I appreciate the need to guard against vulnerable people being subjected to pressure, I do not believe that should stop rational, responsible people having agency over their lives.

This debate is not about that; it is about the ability of the upper House to frustrate the will of the Commons. That, too, is a delicate issue in a country without a written constitution. I should declare a long-held interest, as I was once the organiser of the campaign for a democratic upper house. It was a small group, dedicated to achieving change within the Labour party. I pay tribute to my friend Damien Welfare for his tireless efforts over many years, which bore fruit in achieving promises in various Labour manifestos, but change comes slowly.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): We all know the amount of public concern following what happened in the House of Lords. The hon. Gentleman touched on how the Labour manifesto said there would be considerable modernisation. I wonder whether he would be interested in the private Member's Bill of my colleague, Baroness Smith of Llanfaes. Her House of Lords (Alternative Second Chamber) Bill calls on the Secretary of State to run a public consultation, and I think the public should have a say in how the House of Lords operates. I imagine that many of the public feel very strongly about the legislation we are discussing today.

Daniel Zeichner: I can assure the right hon. Lady that there are many people in Cambridge who follow these things very closely, so I do not disagree.

I also pay tribute to my friend Meg Russell from the constitution unit, who has become something of a go-to person on Lords reform. I credit her with persuading me of the merits of a serious revising Chamber, because those of us who put ourselves forward for election have an in-built bias in favour of elections. Frankly, it can be pretty hard to get here—it took me 20 years and five attempts—so I find myself wondering why an appointed Chamber should have the power to frustrate.

I will not go through the well-rehearsed arguments, but suffice it to say that, from experience, I am aware that an elected Chamber does not always get things right first time. I have great respect for the experience and seriousness of many colleagues in the Lords, but—and there is a but—the delicate relationship is based on an understanding that the elected Chamber has primacy, and that is where this petition has force. I do not doubt the sincerity of those who have chosen to filibuster the Bill, and that practice has a long tradition in many jurisdictions, but here there has long been an understanding that the Lords may delay but not destroy.

On this issue, the will of the elected Chamber is clear, and it reflects the will of the people. Those in the Lords using these procedures to thwart that will should think hard about what they have done. They have put the relationship between the Lords and the Commons under scrutiny, and if this cannot be resolved, I am afraid it is clear what must come next: the relationship must change. I doubt that is what they want, but if this Parliament cannot find a way forward, much less sympathetic successors almost certainly will. I have long been in favour of a democratically elected second Chamber, reflecting the regions and nations of our country—a revising Chamber, yes, but one with democratic legitimacy. I hope this debate and this petition help to bring that a step closer.

5.49 pm

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge) (Con): It is always a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Sir Edward. The challenge this case brings up has been seen over and over again in this place. It is not just about the legitimacy of the Commons. The hon. Member for Sunderland Central (Lewis Atkinson) said this is about not just parliamentary democracy, but constitutional reform. That is a perfectly acceptable position to hold, but it is not a matter specifically related to the assisted dying Bill.

What the hon. Member is suggesting, and it is a perfectly legitimate point to make, is that, actually, our parliamentary system is completely broken, that no revision is possible from the second Chamber, and that the second Chamber should not have a voice on how those amendments are made. Again, that is a perfectly acceptable point to make, because if we are to have the system that we currently have, and if we are to use it in the way that we currently do, I am afraid the position that the Lords have taken is completely legitimate. What they have done—totally within their own rules and totally in the way that House works—is that they have listened to outside voices; they have heard from other sources, as well as from those that were heard in Committee or in the debate in our own Chamber; they have tabled some amendments, some of which have been accepted and others rejected by various people in the Lords; and they have come to a position.

Lizzi Collinge: Will the right hon. Member give way?

Tom Tugendhat: I will not be giving way on that. If the hon. Member for Sunderland Central does not like that position, or the way in which the Lords run their business, that, again, is a perfectly legitimate thing to say, but then he is asking for very fundamental constitutional reform. Again, that is completely okay, but to do it on the basis of a petition of 140,000 names strikes me as a somewhat ambitious reading of the settled will of the British people. We have somewhere between 60 million and 70 million people—I am not quite sure where the figure sits today—and 140,000 does not sit very high against that number; it sits pretty low, frankly.

Lewis Atkinson: I think the right hon. Member is rather mischaracterising what I said. As I said, and as the Hansard Society says, I think there is a clear constitutional response within our existing settlement. It is not about fundamental Lords reform, though I may be in favour of that; it is about use of the Parliament Act. Does he agree that, if the Commons agrees to this again, using the Parliament Act is entirely appropriate?

Tom Tugendhat: On the contrary, I think what the hon. Gentleman is arguing, although he may not think he is arguing it, and he is perfectly entitled to ignore what he is arguing—it happens all the time in this place, it is absolutely standard, for Members on our Benches to make one argument and mean another—[*Laughter.*] Members on all of our Benches. Come on! Let's not have the hypocrisy; we all know it is true.

It is absolutely true that we hear, on every side of the House, people making one argument and meaning another all the time. Today, the hon. Gentleman is making the argument for constitutional reform, but he actually means he is in favour of assisted dying. Again, that is a completely acceptable position, but it is not frank; it is not being straight with the House and it is not being straight with people.

All I ask on this is that, when we look down at the questions that have been raised and when we hear, for example, the voices of the disability groups, the various different medical groups and all the royal colleges, all of which rejected this Bill, and we say to them, "Look, we really must legislate at speed because there is a pressing need to do so,"—the hon. Member is really making the Mark Zuckerberg argument. He is making the "move fast and break things" argument.

Lewis Atkinson rose—

Tom Tugendhat: I will not be giving way again. That is a perfectly acceptable argument for those who can afford to fail, but the problem is that the hon. Member is not dealing with the investment of a few people, which may or may not start a business or software company that fails or succeeds; he is playing with the lives of thousands, tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of people.

Dr Opher: Will the right hon. Member give way?

Tom Tugendhat: I will not be giving way again. The hon. Member for Sunderland Central is instead saying that the role of democracy is to behave like the private interest group of a small cabal. I do not believe that is

the case. I believe that the role of democracy is to measure, to weigh and to take matters slowly. If, on a matter of life and death, that is not the case, when are we supposed to be measured and take time?

Before people say that we had a long time in Committee, they should never forget that we start working on Government Bills years before—not weeks, not months, but years. Any of us who have introduced a Bill in this place know exactly what I mean. A Bill starts as an idea. It takes two years, normally, before it even gets to the Leader of the House and his various Bill committees, where we test, adjust and play with the Bill with the different Ministers, and the write-round process. The argument that that period of expertise, from Government, civil servants, lawyers, medical experts and all the others, can be replaced with a brief hearing in Committee is, I am afraid, simply not true.

Lizzi Collinge: Brief? Will the right hon. Member give way?

Tom Tugendhat: The hon. Member may think it is long, but she really has no idea of time if that is her perception. The reality is that Government Bills take time because they have to be got right. This Bill is wrong. The only thing that stopped it was the Lords. If the hon. Member for Sunderland Central wants to abolish the Lords, that is fine, but if he could make that argument, I think we would all be a lot happier.

5.55 pm

Daniel Francis (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Edward. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland Central (Lewis Atkinson) for his opening remarks. I am one of five Members in the room who were members of the Bill Committee, and I think I am the only one of those who voted against the assisted dying Bill on both Second Reading and Third Reading.

As Members know, I support the principles of the Bill, but I continue to have concerns about the issues of mental capacity and learning disability. I want to talk about the Bill that we sent to the other place. It should be remembered that the Bill we passed on Second Reading was not open to people with cancer, HIV or multiple sclerosis. It was not open to people under the definition of disability in the Equality Act 2010, which includes those three conditions. We had to put that right in Committee, because the original Bill was not open to people with cancer.

[PETE WISHART *in the Chair*]

In Committee we took evidence, and we accepted evidence from somebody who said, “Move to a panel situation.” However, that person also said to us, “Look at the law in Spain and how it treats the families of people with learning disabilities.” As a Committee, we decided to accept that person’s evidence on having a panel but disregard their evidence on the role of the families of people with learning disabilities.

It was clear that there was a cross-party whipping operation in place. Very early in the process, we saw that anyone from an opposition position, like me, had their amendments rejected. For example, my early amendments on learning disability were rejected. The Minister would

stand up and say, “The Government advice is to reject these amendments,” and they would be rejected. However, as the public criticism grew, with my later amendments on learning disability, the same Minister would get up and say, “The Government’s position is to reject them,” and then vote in favour of them with the majority of the Committee. We ended up, against Government advice, accepting some amendments on learning disability but rejecting others, and that was the Bill that went to the Floor of the House.

I also note the comments from my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland Central that he had advice from DHSC officials, because that advice was not given for my 26 amendments. It appears that advice was given to supporters of the Bill, but not to those who were against it. Those issues continue to concern me about the Bill that we sent to the other place.

We have heard a list of Members of the other place who tabled amendments, but we have not heard that the person who tabled the fourth highest number of amendments was the Bill’s sponsor in the other place. They tabled 6% of the amendments, 77 of them, to make the Bill stronger. The Bill that we said was the strongest possible Bill when we sent it to the other place had 77 amendments tabled by its sponsor.

Dr Opher: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Daniel Francis: I will give way just once.

Dr Opher: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. He is making a very powerful speech. These types of debate are slightly triggering for some of us who were on the Committee. I have absolutely no problem with the House of Lords amending the legislation. In fact, that is its job. What it cannot do is simply block the legislation. I wonder what my hon. Friend thinks of that.

Daniel Francis: My view is that some Members most probably tabled too many amendments, but the Bill’s sponsor tabled 77.

Amendments 548A and 549A, which were not reached, would have undone the very measures that other Members and I sought for the learning disabled community. If they had come back to the Floor of the House, I can assure Members that I would have fought tooth and nail during the ping-pong process to ensure that they were not introduced. It is all well and good saying, “They talked it out,” but there were measures to undo what was accepted in Committee and on the Floor of the House to protect people with learning disabilities. I will continue to oppose those.

I would also say that the House of Lords Committee took evidence from a great number of royal colleges and disabled groups that we had not heard in Committee in the Commons, and it was that evidence that led to a number of Lords amendments.

Do I believe that the House of Lords needs reform? Yes, most probably it does, but we need a good, long, hard look, folks, at how we scrutinise in both Houses. There were 310 days between the Bill being sent to the House of Lords and Prorogation. Well, it took 327 days to deal with the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026, and 347 days to deal with the Tobacco and Vapes Act 2026, so the situation is not unique to this Bill. It applies to Government Bills as well.

[Daniel Francis]

I will be very careful as the Leader of the House is here—I serve with him on the Modernisation Committee—but there is also an issue about how much time we spend scrutinising Bills in the Commons. In 2007-08, we spent 12.4 hours scrutinising Government Bills; we now spend less than eight hours before we send a Bill to the other place. We now spend 26% of our time on the Floor of the House scrutinising Government Bills.

There is a question for ourselves, folks. Is our priority having clips for social media or sending Bills to the other place in a proper manner? That is the question we should ask ourselves. I support the principles of the Bill, but I continue to believe it had issues that were not corrected. If it had come back during the ping-pong process, I would have opposed it, but there is a question we need to ask ourselves about reforming the other place and our own House.

6.1 pm

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Sunderland Central (Lewis Atkinson) on supporting this debate and pay my own tribute to Nat Dye and Sophie Blake, the sponsors of the petition. Over the last 10 years or so of campaigning on this issue and talking extensively about it, I have always been amazed at the number of dying people who give their final days, weeks and months to this campaign, determined that no one else should go through what they are going through. I watched with horror as peers tabled their 1,200th amendment, knowing that the clock for Nat, and indeed for Sophie, was ticking very loudly in their ears.

I am a Conservative, as I hope everybody knows, so I have a natural tendency to support our institutions and to understand the value of tradition. Hitherto, I had bought into the argument that the Lords was an eccentric but essential part of our democracy, that it brought an aspect to our legislative process that other countries lacked, and that the expertise it injected into our laws was valuable enough for us to tolerate its status within the constitution. However, the passage of the assisted dying Bill shocked me in a number of ways, to the extent that it has tugged in a profound way on a piece of wool in the constitutional jumper, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge (Tom Tugendhat) said.

The Bill's passage shocked me in three ways. I sat in on a lot of the debates and I watched even more on television. One of the things that really shocked me was the pretence at scrutiny. I am surprised that the Chair of the Treasury Committee and others have collaborated in the pretence that somehow a filibuster was not taking place. There were the repetitive speeches and endless amendments. We know that opponents were going around the House of Lords encouraging peers to table amendments to spread the air of suspicion. It was not just the odd one: there was the mandatory appearance in court and the increase in the number of doctors to five, alongside the pregnancy test and the travel ban. There were endless amendments that were specious and often openly cruel.

The second thing that really shocked me about the process was the disconnection of Members of the House of Lords from the wider population, and indeed from the number of our fellow citizens who find themselves in extremis and seeking relief from their pain. It was

clear from what I am afraid was the casual cruelty in many of the speeches and amendments that those Members had just not sat down and talked with people, or spent time to understand the awful circumstances that so many of our citizens find themselves in.

The third thing that really shocked me—I profess to being ashamed at my ignorance; I had not realised this—was that the House of Lords has no rules. There is no orderly way in which it can be described as an orderly House; they basically make it up as they go along. As the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Luke Taylor) said, we have operated on a rather gendered “good chap” model of trusting that they would do their job. However, it seems to me that the gentlemen's agreement has run very short of gentlemen.

I saw the same thing again and again, Friday after Friday—let us not forget: in the demand for this scrutiny, the number of Fridays was increased very significantly, so that the Lords could do the job. A small cadre of peers were determined to block the Bill by any means—or by cheating, as Rod Liddle said. My right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge, and he is my friend, says that the House of Lords came to a position, but the point is that it was prevented from doing so. I would have accepted it if the House of Lords had voted against the Bill, and if Parliament had come to a decision and finished the task that it had been set by the British people. However, it did not. A small number of peers, some of whom had been specifically rejected by the electorate just a few weeks earlier, decided to block the Bill for God knows what reason.

I have three questions for the Leader of the House, who I am very pleased to see here. One of his duties, alongside liaising between the Government and the House of Commons, is the defence of this House, particularly our rights as Back Benchers to consider the question of mandate and conscience. First, if the Bill is reintroduced, will time be given for it to complete all its stages in this House during this Session? Secondly, can he confirm that the Parliament Act will remain the settled safety net that it has been in the past? That safety net exists not to force a result but to ensure that a question asked of the House of Lords has to be answered, rather than just being refused.

Thirdly, given that this wool has been tugged, will the Government commit to some public examination, such as through a royal commission, of our constitutional settlement? It has become clear that this issue, which seems to some people like a small abuse of the rules, is actually a domino undermining trust in our entire parliamentary structure. It has called into question whether a bicameral system with an unelected Chamber filled with appointees, pretty much all of whom are subject to the patronage of one Prime Minister or another, is really appropriate for our democracy.

6.7 pm

Alison Bennett (Mid Sussex) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Wishart. I really just want to make a single observation. I supported the assisted dying Bill. In looking at the motion for the e-petition today, I tried to imagine what would happen if the boot was on the other foot or if a future Parliament had a Government who were, as the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Dame Meg Hillier) said, “mad, bad or dangerous”.

To be frank, that reality may not be many years ahead of us and that Parliament might have a very different outlook on conscience issues from that of the current House of Commons. There might be a private Member's Bill on a conscience issue that I profoundly opposed, but would I want the Lords to filibuster that Bill as they did just before Prorogation? If I am perfectly honest with myself, I suspect that I might if it were a conscience issue that I felt deeply opposed to.

However, Members should consider what the reaction would be to the filibustering of a conscience Bill that somebody like me might oppose. Remember that the Lords did not get to pass judgment on the assisted dying Bill. Imagine what would happen if such a future conscience Bill were filibustered and talked out, so that there was no vote on it in the House of Lords. Imagine the public reaction to that. Imagine what some political actors who are currently doing quite well in the national polls would do if that was what the House of Lords did.

Public trust in this place is already low, and public trust in politicians is through the floor. If we believe in democracy and in the primacy of the Commons, we cannot accept this situation for a Bill that I might support in the future, or one that I might profoundly oppose.

6.9 pm

Mr Peter Bedford (Mid Leicestershire) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wishart, and I thank the hon. Member for Sunderland Central (Lewis Atkinson) for the impassioned way in which he opened this debate.

Last week, an article in *The Spectator* wrongly suggested that a co-sponsor of the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill had softened his stance on getting assisted dying over the line. To my surprise, I was that very co-sponsor. Let me be absolutely clear to *The Spectator* and any journalists seeking to play games and misrepresent this sensitive issue that I continue to support the principle of a compassionate society helping those at the end of their lives to slip away peacefully and on their own terms.

I do so in part because of my own lived experience, having witnessed at first hand the cruelty that a terminal diagnosis can bring. I think back to the Christmas of 2019 at the dinner table with my late nan, who was unable to eat and in considerable pain. She turned to me and said simply that she was "ready to go". Those words have never left me. They have forced me to confront some deeply uncomfortable truths: as a society, we too often shy away from death and in doing so we allow those whom we love the most to suffer for perhaps too long.

However, I am a pragmatist and a realist about parliamentary realities. I have concerns that if a similar private Member's Bill were introduced in future, it would face the same filibustering in the House of Lords, even if a clear and absolute majority in the Commons voted for it on Third Reading.

As a Conservative, I value tradition, respect procedure and recognise that the conventions of this House—and indeed of the other place—are central to making our Parliament one of the finest democratic institutions in the world. However, as has been well established, Britain's unwritten constitution provides the agility to modernise

our procedures for the world we now live in, rather than our merely sticking by some of the more arcane procedures of times gone by. It was therefore disheartening to see the ability of a small number of peers to table quite literally hundreds of amendments to frustrate the democratic will of an absolute majority in the Commons.

I am well aware of "Erskine May" and I understand the historical precedents that allow for such tactics, but we must ask ourselves: do they show Parliament at its best? This place is at its best when real debates take place, and when arguments are made, tested and challenged. Even when I disagree about something, I recognise the quality of debate.

I listened carefully to the hon. Member for East Wiltshire (Danny Kruger) in the main Chamber; although I do not agree with his conclusions, I respect the clarity and conviction with which he made his case. In the other place, Baroness May set out her opposition in a similarly considered and coherent manner. On my own side of the argument, colleagues such as the hon. Member for Spen Valley (Kim Leadbeater) and my right hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) spoke with equal seriousness and compassion when they made their speeches. That is Parliament at its best.

Parliament is not at its best when Bills such as the assisted dying Bill are simply spoken out; it is not at its best when process replaces principles; and it is certainly not at its best when debate is prevented. The Bill, whatever one's position on it, certainly did not lack scrutiny. It passed through the House with numerous amendments; each one was debated and voted on. It was considered for more than 100 hours in the Commons alone. That is longer than for most pieces of legislation, which often receive just a few hours of debate at the fag-end of a plethora of urgent questions or ministerial statements. And it was right that it received that attention.

Daniel Francis: On that point, will the hon. Member give way?

Mr Bedford: No, I will carry on, because of time.

In the other place, 13 of the 14 allocated private Members' Bills days were dedicated to the assisted dying Bill, so that amendments to it could be discussed fully and in a proper way. Yet despite all that, a select few Lords were able not simply to oppose the Bill but to shut down debate altogether. That should concern all of us.

Whatever side of the debate hon. Members are on, if we want our constituents to have confidence in our parliamentary democracy, we must ensure that the right to debate—the right to make considered decisions—is not lost to procedural dark arts. That is what the public expect of us, and it is what will ensure that this place continues to be one of the most respected democratic institutions in the world.

6.14 pm

Liam Conlon (Beckenham and Penge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Wishart.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland Central (Lewis Atkinson) for the way he opened this debate, recognising, as we all do, the different perspectives that are held. I also thank the petitioners.

[Liam Conlon]

When I first wrote to my constituents about the reasons why I voted against the Bill, I said that the debate was not one in which there were two sides, but rather multiple perspectives. Members and our constituents may have one view about the principle of assisted dying and another about the specific Bill that was put before us. Eighteen months on, they may have another view about whether Members in the other place were within their rights to scrutinise it as robustly as they did.

It is clear that everybody who engaged in the process has been motivated by a desire to reduce suffering. That was the driving force behind every vote, speech and amendment in both Houses during the time the Bill was before us, and the petition we are now discussing is no exception to that. The primacy of the House of Commons as the elected House is not in doubt, and it is right that there are robust constitutional conventions in place to protect it. But that does not mean that the work of the revising Chamber should be dismissed as illegitimate. To view its role as being little more than a rubber-stamping exercise would be to fail to recognise the value of challenge in our democracy.

The overwhelming public interest is not in Parliament doing its work as quickly as possible or without disagreement; it is in ensuring there is strong and workable legislation. The scrutiny of the Bill in both Houses was important and highlighted a number of significant concerns that have still not been resolved.

Lizzi Collinge: My hon. Friend is making some excellent points about the need for challenge, debate and quality in this place and the other place. Does he agree that it is a shame that the Lords did not have an opportunity to express their view on the Bill because we never got to the end of business?

Liam Conlon: It was a shame that it was timed out, but the amendments that were accepted through the scrutiny process were important and demonstrated the inadequacies of the Bill as it stood and the need for the process to continue.

It remains the case that no disability organisation or charity supported the Bill and none was confident that the safeguards would have adequately protected vulnerable people from being coerced or socially pressured into choosing a premature death.

From speaking to constituents, I know the importance of palliative care. I welcome the Government's announcement last week and the extensive consultation with hospices into the future of palliative care. It is vital that the commitments we have made on palliative care are in no way derailed. I remain as concerned as ever that that would be the inevitable result of introducing assisted dying into our NHS without it being fully costed.

A number of issues were raised throughout the Committee process, and against that background, it would have been surprising if the Lords had not asked questions or tabled amendments. As all Members know, that is how answers are secured from the Bill's sponsors and the Government, especially when the consequences of getting legislation wrong would be unimaginably devastating.

I will finish on the question raised by some Members, including from my own party, on what comes next and whether the Bill should be reintroduced. Two years ago, the British people elected a Labour Government because they wanted change. After years of economic stagnation, failing public services and declining trust in politics, they voted for a Government focused on raising living standards, rebuilding the NHS, delivering safer streets, expanding opportunity and driving economic growth. That is the promise on which I and others sought a mandate, and it is a promise that we must unite around and deliver.

Lewis Atkinson: My hon. Friend is making a considered speech, but he did point out that part of the issue is declining trust in politics. Whatever our individual views on this matter, does he not see that for the House of Commons—the elected Chamber—to reach a conclusion that is then blocked by the Lords risks further significantly undermining trust in politics and democratic institutions in this country?

Liam Conlon: It is fair to say that the point I made in response to an intervention earlier stands: there were amendments being tabled and accepted that demonstrated the inadequacies in the Bill, and that process should have been allowed to continue. I am supportive of reform to the House of Lords, but not of cutting short the scrutiny of a Bill that has such significant consequences on the matter of life and death.

6.19 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a real pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Wishart. I refer hon. Members to the 2019 report produced by the Constitution Committee, "The Legislative Process: The Passage of Bills Through Parliament", which summarises well the roles each House of Parliament plays. It is instructive when considering this petition. I quote:

"The House of Commons usually addresses the policy and politics of bills, while the House of Lords tends to focus more of its scrutiny on the details and technicalities. This characterisation is not universal, but the complementarity of the broad approach of the two Houses is beneficial to the legislative scrutiny process." Similarly, "Erskine May" part 2, chapter 11, paragraph 11.4, concerning the rights and functions of the House of Lords, says:

"The House of Lords, as the unelected Chamber, recognises the primacy of the House of Commons. It does, however, retain substantial powers, particularly over legislation (see Part 4). The House uses its powers to legislate and to scrutinise primary and secondary legislation, to hold the Government to account, to investigate matters of public policy".

My concern is that the petition emphasises the primacy of the Commons—which I wholly agree with—but neglects the function of the House of Lords in scrutinising legislation. Fundamentally, I am deeply troubled by the proposition that any Bill that passes this House, irrespective of its subject matter, should become law regardless of its flaws or the risk it may pose to the vulnerable. This is particularly so in the case of the assisted suicide Bill, which was not a manifesto commitment.

The House of Lords is constitutionally entitled to subject proposals to sustained scrutiny, arguably especially on a morally significant subject such as assisted suicide. The assisted suicide Bill was introduced as a private Member's Bill, but it did not have the rigorous pre-legislative testing that Government Bills benefit from.

Lizzi Collinge: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Jim Shannon: No.

That scrutiny cannot simply be a rubber stamp. If it is conceived of as a rubber stamp, that is a false understanding of what scrutiny entails. The Hansard Society has stated clearly during the previous Session that

“The House of Lords has the authority to reject, delay, or otherwise block the assisted dying bill.”

That myth needs dispelling.

The second myth that needs to be dispelled is the absurd accusation of the blocking or filibustering the assisted dying Bill by just a small handful of Lords. Amendments were tabled or co-signed by more than 90 peers, and some 140 peers with a range of views on the principle of assisted suicide expressed opposition to the Bill in the Lords, in the form of amendments, speaking in debates or Parliamentary questions. Some have pointed out that hundreds of amendments were tabled by a small number of peers, but it is important to note that dozens of other peers would have tabled the same amendments. It is a total fiction to suggest that opposition came from only a few—there were multiple peers involved.

I will tell hon. Members who those prominent peers were. They were lead signatories on these amendments because of their expertise. They included Baroness Grey-Thompson, who tabled amendments relating to disability—who has better knowledge than that lady? Baroness Finlay, a leading palliative care professor, tabled amendments on medical issues—again, her knowledge is significant. Lord Carlile KC, tabled amendments related to legal concerns. Had they not put their names to those amendments, countless others would have done so. They led on those amendments, and the fact that others did not add their names does not mean that they would not have done so in turn.

It is also important to understand that, having been sent to the Lords by this House, the Bill was scrutinised by three separate Committees: the House of Lords Constitution Committee, the Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee, and a Lords Select Committee. The Delegated Powers Committee was scathing about the skeletal nature of the Bill’s provisions, which included handing more than 40 sweeping, unspecified and unjustified powers to future Ministers to determine what assisted suicide under the Bill would actually look like.

The final myth, on which the petition partially rests, is that Lords scrutiny of a Bill should be rendered null due to public support for this particular proposal. That is an exceptionally flimsy argument and does not stand up to scrutiny. Putting aside the veracity of claims of 70% public support for the Bill, a recent multi-level regression and post-stratification poll found that, across the country, just 8% of the public would support pushing a non-manifesto commitment into law without approval and full scrutiny of both Houses of Parliament. The same poll found only 7% ranked it among their top three priorities for their MPs to focus on.

We should listen to our constituents. I always listen to my constituents, in Strangford. I suggest that others may need to do the same.

Dr Ellie Chowns (North Herefordshire) (Green): Will the hon. Member give way?

Jim Shannon: No.

I understand the desire of those who support the Bill to see it enacted and perhaps even their disappointment and frustration that the Bill fell at the conclusion of the previous Session. However, to consider use of the Parliament Act to force through this specific, uncorrected, flawed version of the Bill would be foolhardy. A law that is bludgeoned on to the statute book is not one in which we could or should have confidence. I urge right hon. and hon. Members to consider this. I have a different opinion from some in this House, but I have a right to express my opinion on behalf of my constituents. I am doing that. The Leader of the House knows that I do it regularly in the House. I respect others and always have done, but I know one thing for certain—in this case, the procedures have been used correctly.

6.25 pm

Andrew Ranger (Wrexham) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wishart. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland Central (Lewis Atkinson) on his opening speech and thank the petitioners for the hard work that they have done on this issue.

When I first came to this place, just short of two years ago, I came with a real zeal for reform of the second Chamber. Having said that, I believe—and it is important to say—that the House of Lords in its current form offers great value to our democracy. As has been said, unlike the way in which debates sometimes function in the Commons, the Lords has the capacity to discuss, scrutinise and add meaningful substance to the way in which our laws and legislation are made. Unfortunately, over the last parliamentary term, as we have been discussing today, a minority of peers conducted themselves in a way that has let down the Lords, undermined the way in which it functions and raised serious questions about the role that it should hold in the future, as well as public trust in the parliamentary process. As you can tell from that, Mr Wishart, my reforming zeal is still in place.

We need only look back through history to find examples of the Lords blocking progress. They range from, way back in 1909, Lloyd George’s people’s Budget, which looked at old age pensions and national insurance, to the equalisation of the age of consent in 2000 and the Hunting Act 2004, among others. In all those cases, the Lords sought to frustrate the will of the elected Chamber. Scrutiny is important—indeed, vital—to our Parliament. I do not think anyone on either side of the debate about the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill would dispute that. But it became abundantly clear during the Lords process that to describe some of the contributions as scrutiny would be, at the very least, generous. There were speeches that were near identical in content and added nothing new to the debate, amendments tabled for the sake of amendments, and the use of egregious statements. One peer was quoted in *The Times* as saying that there were

“plenty of black arts that could be used to kill the bill off”, and it is clear that that approach was pursued.

It is therefore not only ironic but factually untrue when we hear some opponents claim that the Bill received limited scrutiny. The facts do not support that. The Bill faced significant scrutiny—more than any private Member’s Bill in history and more than many other Bills—and

[*Andrew Ranger*]

that scrutiny began long before it reached the Lords. The Health and Social Care Committee inquiry had 68,000 responses from the public, more than 300 submissions of written evidence, two closed-door roundtable discussions and five oral evidence sessions, and reported in 2024. The Commons Bill Committee received evidence from 50 witnesses and 444 pieces of written evidence, and spent more than 100 hours scrutinising the Bill in 2025, as we heard. The House of Lords Committee, although weighted against assisted dying, with more opponents than supporters of the change, heard evidence from 43 witnesses.

The scrutiny was there. It happened. Ultimately, the fall of the Bill represents the frustration of a decision made by the democratic Chamber of this country. The elected House voted for the legislation. The public, when asked consistently over many years, have supported it. I have been clear that I will support, in whatever way I can, the effort to ensure that the Bill is given its rightful passage through both Houses of Parliament and becomes law, as is the will of the elected Chamber and the will of the majority of the public. That is vital to restore badly needed trust in our political process. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will be able to expand on how that can progress.

6.29 pm

Claire Young (Thornbury and Yate) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Wishart. I thank the petitioners who provoked the debate.

I agree with the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Dame Meg Hillier) on one important point: there are benefits of having a revising Chamber. However, I believe that the proper duty of the Lords is to scrutinise, improve and revise, not to block or frustrate. That distinction matters most of all in the case of private Members' Bills, which proceed with limited time allocated to them and, for conscience issues, without a whipped vote.

When our constituents send us to this place, they trust that we will apply our judgment to serious matters carefully and thoughtfully, and while taking their views into account. I certainly tried to take that approach when I voted on the assisted dying Bill, as, I believe, did Members on both sides of the House, regardless of the view that they took. When we consider the time spent scrutinising the Bill, which a number of Members have mentioned, we should not overlook the time that individual MPs committed to learning, researching and listening. I suspect that it was far more than is typical for a Bill that emanates from a manifesto.

The questions on the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill were among the most difficult and personal to come before us in Parliament, yet in debates on the Bill, I saw the House at its very best. There was careful argument, deep feeling and genuine respect among Members who profoundly disagreed. What followed did not reflect the same spirit. In the other place, the Bill fell not because peers had weighed it up and rejected it, but because its passage was run down by delay, by more than 1,000 amendments and by a refusal to let the elected House reach its conclusion. The clock was allowed to defeat what a vote could not. I cannot accept that an

unelected Chamber should be able to set aside the settled will of the elected Chamber simply by running down the time.

It is precisely because of such episodes that I support a wholly elected second Chamber, as I have for many years—I, for one, am not relying on this specific petition to decide my view. An unelected House should not hold the power to block a Bill that commands a majority in the elected House. The Government's removal of hereditary peers was a welcome step but, as I have said before, they too often tinker at the edges when our constitution needs fundamental reform. That reform will never be completed if an unelected Chamber can override the wishes of the people whom the public chose. In plain terms, that is undemocratic.

The petition, which was signed by more than 114,000 of our fellow citizens, is just the latest evidence that the public will no longer accept an unelected few standing in the way of the elected many. I commend the petitioners and urge the Government to introduce the reform that this moment so clearly demands.

6.32 pm

Ashley Dalton (West Lancashire) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wishart. I thank the petitioners for giving us the opportunity to have this debate.

I know that we are all mindful of the sincere and strongly held views that led to the submission of the petition. The previous Session's debates on the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill were, in both Houses, consistently heartfelt and moving, with people on both sides of the argument often speaking from real, difficult experience. The debates also provided many people outside Parliament with a chance to talk—in many cases, for the first time—about the reality of death and dying, and what compassionate and respectful care should look like as people move towards the end of their lives.

As some hon. Members will know, I have actual, first-hand experience of being given a terminal diagnosis. I have stage 4, incurable breast cancer myself, so this is not an abstract debate for me either. Like all of us, I am going to die. However, my diagnosis means that I know what is most likely to kill me, and without the intervention of medical science, it would be killing me a damn sight sooner than it currently is. That does not necessarily give me any more wisdom, but it perhaps gives me a certain clarity on the issue of end-of-life care.

One thing that I am very pleased has emerged from the debate is that the state of palliative care is now firmly at the heart of the political agenda. Whatever our different views on the Bill, I hope that the passion of both sides will serve as a clear, united call for better, more accessible care for everyone. I do not think there is similar consensus on the proposal we are debating today. Proper parliamentary scrutiny of the laws before us is one of the most important safeguards—perhaps the most important safeguard—in our constitution.

Our democracy is not a matter of ensuring that legislation reaches the statute book as quickly as possible. That was not why we or our colleagues in the other place were given the privilege of serving in Parliament. It is not why every single one of us takes so much care over our decisions, speeches and the causes we champion, or why we sit late into the night to ensure that every

voice is heard. As time-consuming and as uncomfortable as it can sometimes be, our legislative process was deliberately designed to allow opportunities for challenge, scrutiny and improvement. They are a feature, not a bug.

The petition argues that if MPs vote for a Bill and opinion polls suggest public support for its principle, the Government should use their powers to ensure that the Bill progresses. I disagree. Parliament's role is to pass the best possible legislation, not to vote on a principle and let the detail work itself out later. Sometimes our work begins with campaigning but, ultimately, we are legislators dealing with detail and specifics. MPs, peers and Ministers share a responsibility to uphold the integrity of Parliament not as a matter of dry academic principle, but because bad legislation has truly terrible consequences.

Kit Malthouse: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ashley Dalton: I will not; there is not enough time.

Once we begin asking Governments to override democratic protocols or decide that the revising Chamber's scrutiny should be optional, we create a precedent. Constitutional principles must apply consistently. We have our constitutional arrangements because it is our responsibility to consider not only the outcomes we want today, but the outcomes we might not want tomorrow.

The petition is specifically about the role of the House of Lords. In my time as a Minister, it was a great honour to work alongside Members from the red Benches as well as the green. Peers are our colleagues, not our enemies or rivals. The Lords, as an institution, has made a vast contribution to the work and reputation of our Parliament. There is no doubt whatsoever about the primacy of the elected House, which is why peers do not vote against legislation that secured a mandate from the public because it was in a Government's manifesto. In fact, they rarely vote against legislation at all—as we have heard, they did not vote against the Bill. Still, however, the House of Commons is not sovereign—our Parliament is. Our Parliament is a trinity of the Commons, the Lords and the Crown, and each has a distinct and critical role to play.

We cannot believe that a piece of legislation is serious and important, but also demand a weaker and worse process for passing it. I am also cautious about relying too heavily on opinion polls as a justification for altering parliamentary processes. Public opinion matters enormously, of course, but polls can be crude instruments. Governing involves more than simply measuring public sentiment at a particular moment in time. If supporters of a Bill are confident in its merits, they should welcome scrutiny. Good legislation survives challenge. Strong arguments withstand examination. Many laws emerge better because difficult questions were asked during their passage through Parliament, including by the experts in the revising Chamber.

Ultimately, this debate is not about whether one supports or opposes a particular Bill; it is about what kind of parliamentary system we want. Do we want a Parliament that carefully examines legislation, especially that dealing with matters of profound social change, or do we want one in which surface popularity becomes a reason to accelerate the legislative process and reduce opportunities for scrutiny? I believe that we do not.

6.38 pm

Pippa Heylings (South Cambridgeshire) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Wishart. I congratulate the petitioners on their resilience not just this evening, but over time. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Sunderland Central (Lewis Atkinson) on the excellent way in which he put across the central tenets of the petition and our debate, which I think has been misrepresented by several Members, unfortunately.

I am grateful to the hundreds of constituents who wrote to me over the course of the debates on the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill to share their views and perspectives. I pay tribute to all those who provided compelling, powerful and emotive evidence on, and personal testimony to, what they thought should be the choice available to people with a terminal diagnosis in their dying days.

This is also personal to me. I have long held with the principle of assisted dying, but I have had long, deep conversations with my husband over the last couple of years about the choices he would like available to him if and when his leukaemia eventually becomes terminal. I know which choices he would want to be available.

The Bill had well over 175 hours of scrutiny in both Houses, and that followed the Health and Social Care Committee hearing evidence and expert testimony on assisted dying and assisted suicide—18 months-worth in 2023-24, before the private Member's Bill was introduced—to determine how such a Bill could be acceptable to the legislature and the public, so there was plenty of evidence, testimony and analysis before the private Member's Bill came forward. After all that, a principle is clear to me and many constituents: legislation should succeed or fail because our elected body in Parliament has reached a decision on it—it has primacy.

The House of Lords does indeed have a role in scrutinising Bills that come before Parliament, but it works through conventions, such as self-regulation. Earlier, the Chair set a strict speaking time for today's debate so that every single one of us could have the chance to make our points, and also to ensure that we had a timely discussion and a conclusion to the debate. That does not happen in the House of Lords because of self-regulation. The Lord Speaker also does not group amendments to make sure that there is timely progression of the proceedings. That, ultimately—because the process was abused—failed both Houses, democracy itself and faith in democracy, because the House of Lords did not allow the Bill to be returned to the Commons in time for further decision.

No matter one's view of the Bill, I believe, like many constituents and the petitioners, that Parliament should determine the fate of any Bill. I therefore ask the Leader of the House if he will seriously consider the reform that is now needed of the procedures for the timely passage of Bills through Parliament, and his view of the relationship between both Houses and the fact that we can no longer have an unelected House of Lords that frustrates the will of the House of Commons.

6.42 pm

Jim Allister (North Antrim) (TUV): When the hon. Member for Sunderland Central (Lewis Atkinson) introduced the debate, he said that it was not about the assisted dying Bill; he proceeded for the next 25 minutes

[Jim Allister]

to talk about little else. It is quite clear that many of that Bill's supporters, out of a sense of churlish resentment of the House of Lords daring to do its job, have come today to give vent to that view. Of course, for some of them, it dovetails with their aversion to the very existence of the House of Lords in the first place.

In the most compelling and effective speech that we have heard, the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Ashley Dalton) pointed out that when we talk about parliamentary democracy, we do not have the luxury of just talking about the House of Commons. Ours is a bicameral situation—we have an elected House of Commons and a House of Lords, and both have an essential and irrefutable function in passing the laws of our land. That is a fundamental component of our parliamentary democracy. It might cause some to resent the existence of the other House, but it is the reality. Just as we, as Members of this House, are entitled to have our say and to vote as we please, Members of the House of Lords, so long as they exist, have the same right to express themselves, and to move, speak to, and ultimately, if they ever get to the end of the process, vote on amendments. That is how that place works, for better or for worse.

I suspect that if we had a Reform or a Conservative Government in two or three years' time who decided to extract the United Kingdom from the European convention on human rights, the very people complaining the loudest today about the functioning of the House of Lords would be cheering it on as it attempted to filibuster that. We need to dissect their argument and discover that it is not quite as altruistic as some would have us believe; there is a lot more self-interest at play. The complaint amounts to a desire to have an unsafe Bill forced into law—that is the real complaint. Of course, it is the function of the House of Lords to apply rigour and scrutiny. I salute the Lords for the rigour that it supplies, and the many notable peers with expertise on these issues far beyond that of anyone in this Chamber.
[Interruption.]

Pete Wishart (in the Chair): Order.

Jim Allister: Was it not so obvious that not a single royal society of experts supported this Bill, just as not a single Member of this House was elected on a manifesto to support it? Yet we have this cry that it should be railroaded through—where is the democracy in that?

We hear this audacious demand to use the Parliament Act, which has never been used for a private Member's Bill and is only ever used for Government Bills, to ram the Bill through. If we take scrutiny seriously, we must not bring Parliament into disrepute. Passing a flawed Bill that allows the state and doctors to end vulnerable lives would most certainly bring Parliament into disrepute. This was a Bill riddled with flaws—my goodness, look at what the Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee said—[Interruption.]

Pete Wishart (in the Chair): Order. This has been a very good-natured debate and we have allowed everybody to be heard. Mr Allister expects the same courtesy.

Jim Allister: Thank you for your protection, Mr Wishart. I was not certain that I needed it, but I am very glad to have it none the less.

This was a Bill so eminently flawed that the Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee eviscerated it, saying that it relied so much on delegated legislation that proper scrutiny was difficult. It was a shell of a Bill to give future Ministers the right to make all sorts of life-and-death decisions on this most critical issue—supposedly one of conscience. It was an appallingly flawed piece of legislation, demonstrated by the number of amendments that had to be moved by its own supporters and the number that then had to be counteracted by its supporters in the House of Lords. The thing was a farce, and the House of Lords did it a great service by putting it out of its misery.

6.48 pm

Lisa Smart (Hazel Grove) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Mr Wishart.

We have heard compelling and passionate arguments from across the Chamber about the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill and its progress—or lack of progress—through Parliament. This is a really important topic. It generates strong feelings and absolute clarity of thought from some, but it really should require nuance and understanding from us all. We should be able to agree that the other place has a vital role to play in the scrutiny of legislation, but also that when elected MPs vote for a Bill and the public back it, it should be able to become law.

The petition we are debating was signed by more than 114,000 people across the country, including 214 of my constituents in Hazel Grove. Hundreds of my constituents, on both sides of the assisted dying debate, wrote to me, and I am grateful to each of them for the time they took to do that. Their participation, whether by signing parliamentary petitions or writing to their MP, matters. It highlights that so many people are paying attention. I particularly welcome the petitioners in the Public Gallery this evening.

The fact that so many people signed the petition, many of them from constituencies whose MPs hold very different views on the legislation that prompted it, shows that this is not only about one Bill; it is about something bigger. When a Bill is prevented from passing through Parliament by the House of Lords, it is not just scrutiny. The lack of progress for the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill highlighted once again the many issues with the other place. From the Peter Mandelson scandal to the reports in *The Guardian* of 15 peers having claimed over £500,000 in expenses while not speaking in a single Lords debate, it is clear that we should be implementing meaningful reforms. As Tom Brake, a former Member of this House and now the director of Unlock Democracy, was quoted by the hon. Member for Sunderland Central (Lewis Atkinson) as saying, the case for reform of the other place has been strengthened by this debate.

The Modernisation Committee was established to examine how this House uses its time and how our procedures can better serve democracy. Directly relevant to this debate, it has already opened inquiries into how Backbench Business Committee and Petitions Committee debates are conducted. The Liberal Democrats would

welcome an evaluation of the constitutional relationship between the two Houses, and of whether a Chamber that is not elected should be able to override one that is. The Liberal Democrats have argued for decades that the House of Lords needs to be replaced with a fully elected second Chamber with a proper democratic mandate, elected by proportional representation, so that every region, nation and community has a genuine voice. I welcome some of the new travellers on the path to that cause who have outed themselves this afternoon. Those who make the law should be accountable to those who must live by it.

We on the Lib Dem Benches welcome the House of Lords (Hereditary Peers) Act 2026, which removed the remaining hereditary peers. Although it is pretty timid and tightly written, it was long overdue. However, removing those peers from being legislators for life is not enough and cannot be called truly meaningful Lords reform. Having a Chamber that remained unelected, still shaped by prime ministerial patronage and capable of blocking the will of this House, felt wholly unsatisfactory in the last century, never mind this one.

I agree strongly with the hon. Members for Stroud (Dr Opher) and for Hammersmith and Chiswick (Andy Slaughter), my hon. Friend the Member for Thornbury and Yate (Claire Young) and the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir Andrew Mitchell), but the speech of the afternoon was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Alison Bennett). She gave a belter of a speech about the importance of trust in politics and the role we all have to play in maintaining that for our constituents.

The Government have announced a removal of peerages Bill, which I welcome as a step in the right direction, albeit another tiny and timid step that fails to rise sufficiently to the moment. There remains an untaken opportunity to deliver long overdue reform of the other place. My Liberal Democrat colleagues and I stand ready to play our part, and we urge the Government to show the same resolve.

6.53 pm

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Mr Wishart.

I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Sunderland Central (Lewis Atkinson), my colleague on the Petitions Committee, for introducing the debate on behalf of the Committee and the petitioner. I thank the more than 100,000 people who signed the e-petition. Whatever view Members take on the arguments advanced in the petition, the number of signatures demonstrates the strength of feeling on this issue and the importance of Parliament's engaging seriously with those concerns. I also thank all Members who have contributed to the debate. We have heard thoughtful and strongly held views from across the House, reflecting both the significance of the legislation that prompted the petition and the wider constitutional questions now before us.

It is important to recognise that the petition arose from concerns about the progress of the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill, a private member's Bill. However, today's debate ultimately is not about the merits of assisted dying; it is about parliamentary process. Specifically, it is about whether Parliament should change

the way that it approaches legislation where a private Member's Bill has secured support from MPs. The petition argues, in essence, that where a private Member's Bill has support from MPs and the public, the Government should do everything within their power to ensure that it has sufficient time to complete all its parliamentary stages.

It is sometimes overlooked that that is not simply a request for more parliamentary time. It is effectively a request for a new constitutional principle: that where the concepts underlying a private Member's Bill have secured sufficient public support and a Commons majority, the Government should take active steps to ensure the Bill's passage despite significant unresolved issues. That would represent a significant departure from our existing constitutional arrangements, under which scrutiny, amendment and even failure remain possible outcomes of the legislative process. I do not believe that public support, however significant—particularly as measured by polls, rather than at the ballot box—can be a substitute for proper parliamentary scrutiny. Parliament's role is not simply to facilitate legislation but to examine it, challenge it and improve it before it becomes law.

The petition also raises questions about the role of the House of Lords. It is important that we approach those questions accurately. Some have suggested that the Lords somehow acted improperly by failing to return the Bill Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill to the Commons. That assertion is not supported by the constitutional authorities.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): I have not participated in the debate because I was not able to be here at the beginning, but I heard many of the speeches. In a number of them, it was suggested that the Bill received unusual levels of consideration. That is simply not so. Many of us have been in this House for a very long time and have seen legislation that has had pre-legislative scrutiny in both Houses, and independent reports commissioned on it, long before Second Reading. This Bill had none of that.

John Lamont: I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's insight from his many years of experience in this place. We are not a unicameral system. As the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Ashley Dalton) stated in her powerful speech, Parliament consists of three separate parts: the House of Commons, the House of Lords and the Crown. The House of Lords is independent and shares the task of making and shaping laws. The House of Lords Constitution Committee made it clear that it was constitutionally appropriate for the Lords to scrutinise, amend or reject the Bill, and the Hansard Society similarly confirmed that the Lords

"has the authority to reject, delay, or otherwise block" legislation of its kind.

Dr Chowns: Does the hon. Member not recognise the fundamental problem that the House of Lords has not had the chance to approve or reject this piece of legislation because it has never come to a vote? The House of Lords has therefore not fulfilled its constitutional responsibility to fully scrutinise the legislation. Would it not be appropriate for this House to send the Bill back to the House of Lords until it does fulfil its constitutional responsibility to complete scrutiny with a vote?

John Lamont: I am grateful for that point but, as other hon. Members have made clear in this debate, the House of Lords did not vote because that is part of its process of scrutinising. The Lords was performing the role that it is constitutionally required to perform.

The Bill in question was not a Government Bill and not a manifesto commitment. A deliberate choice was made by the Prime Minister to take an approach that did not put the policy, or even the promise of a free vote, before the electorate. As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries and Galloway (John Cooper), the Salisbury-Addison convention reflects the principle that the House of Lords should not frustrate legislation that gives effect to commitments on which the electorate have conferred a democratic mandate. As Viscount Cranborne spelled out at the time,

“it would be constitutionally wrong, when the country has so recently expressed its view, for this House to oppose proposals which have been definitely put before the electorate.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 16 August 1945; Vol. 137, c. 47.]

Kit Malthouse: I am slightly intrigued by my hon. Friend’s approach. In the election, I stood on a personal pledge that I would support assisted dying, having voted for it before, in 2015. In my hon. Friend’s view, what importance should we attach to an absolute majority of the House of Commons? The assisted dying Bill passed with an absolute majority of all eligible Members, not counting Speakers and others, who could vote. What he is essentially saying is that that is just an ordinary part of the process, rather than what it should be in a democracy, which is decisive.

John Lamont: The House of Commons expressed its view. The Bill then went to the House of Lords for further consideration. I know from conversations with a number of MP colleagues that they supported the principle of the Bill to allow it to progress, so that the House of Lords could look at it further and in the hope that improvements would be made. I reflect on what happened in the Scottish Parliament, where a similar Bill achieved the support of MSPs at the first stage. After it received further scrutiny and further amendments, it went back to the Scottish Parliament, and it was rejected—[*Interruption.*]

Pete Wishart (in the Chair): Order.

John Lamont: That was because amendments could not be secured to satisfy people’s concerns.

This was a private Member’s Bill. In such circumstances, there was no constitutional obligation on the Lords—as I stated earlier in relation to the Salisbury convention—to ensure that it completed its passage through Parliament. Indeed, it is worth remembering that the vast majority of private Member’s Bills do not become law. That is not a constitutional failure; it is a long-standing feature of our parliamentary system.

Similarly, scrutiny should not be confused with obstruction. One reason why many peers believed that further scrutiny was necessary was that significant issues remained unresolved after the Bill left the House of Commons. More than 500 amendments had been tabled during Public Bill Committee, but only a small proportion not supported by the sponsor were accepted. On Report,

88 amendments were deemed in order, but only seven were selected for debate and decision by the House as a whole. That was the wrong approach to take.

The breadth of concerns, underpinned by expert testimony, should have prompted deep reflection on what more needed to be amended. The Cabinet Office’s guide to making legislation is very clear: if a private Member’s Bill is to make it on to the statute books,

“As far as possible, amendments should be made at Committee Stage in the first House.”

It is therefore hardly surprising that many peers concluded that further scrutiny was required. Indeed, several Members indicated during proceedings in the Commons that they expected the Lords to undertake detailed scrutiny and improve the legislation where necessary. The Lords therefore performed precisely the role that many MPs expected it to perform.

It is also important to recognise that the nature of the concerns that were raised. This was not simply a handful of peers attempting to delay legislation; more than 140 peers expressed opposition to, or serious concerns about, the Bill. Those concerns came from individuals with substantial expertise, including former leaders of the medical profession, senior NHS figures, specialists in psychiatry and palliative care, legal experts and representatives of vulnerable groups. Whether one agreed with their conclusions or not, those concerns deserved careful consideration. That is exactly what parliamentary scrutiny is intended to achieve.

Some supporters of the petition have pointed to opinion polling as evidence that Parliament should ensure legislation progresses. Public opinion is, of course, important, and Members of this House are elected to represent the people who send us here, but our constitutional system has never operated on the basis that polling alone determines whether legislation becomes law. Parliament is a representative democracy, not a system of government by opinion survey. Members of both Houses are expected to exercise judgment, consider evidence, scrutinise proposals and weigh consequences. If legislation were to acquire a special constitutional status simply because it polled well, we would fundamentally alter the balance between public opinion and parliamentary scrutiny. That would be a profound constitutional change, and it should not be undertaken lightly.

Dr Chowns: Will the shadow Minister give way?

John Lamont: I am short on time, so I will not take any more interventions.

I thank again those who signed the petition and all those who have contributed to today’s debate. Although there will undoubtedly remain differences of opinion on the specific legislation that gave rise to this petition, I hope there can be broad agreement on one fundamental point: democratic legitimacy and parliamentary scrutiny are not competing principles—they are complementary principles. Public support and votes in Parliament matter, but scrutiny matters too. The lesson we should draw from this debate is not that scrutiny prevented democracy from working, but that scrutiny is democracy working.

The House of Lords acted within its constitutional role. The concerns of experts were heard, amendments were tested and evidence was examined. Whether one supported or opposed the legislation itself, that is exactly how Parliament is supposed to function. Parliament

best serves the public not when it rushes legislation through, but when it takes seriously its duty to examine, improve and—where necessary—challenge legislation before it becomes law. That is how we protect the integrity of our legislative process, preserve public confidence in Parliament, and ultimately make better laws for the people who we are elected to serve.

7.5 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Sir Alan Campbell): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wishart, and I thank the Father of the House, the right hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh), for chairing the debate earlier.

I thank the petitioners for their hard work and the Petitions Committee for scheduling this debate, and I thank all the Members who have taken part. This has been a well-attended debate and it makes the case, dare I say it, for petitions to be heard in the main Chamber. However, that is another discussion.

Let me say at the outset that I understand the strength of feeling on this issue and appreciate some of the frustration that has come across this afternoon. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland Central (Lewis Atkinson) for the way in which he introduced the debate on behalf of the Petitions Committee. I am also grateful to the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir Andrew Mitchell) for reminding me of my duties and responsibilities in this place. I make no apology for saying that those are absolutely what I endeavour to carry out on any issue at any time. I am genuinely grateful for the opportunity to listen to the debate and to respond, but given the role I play, I make no apology if I say some unpalatable things. The problem, with an issue of such importance and such division, is that what I have to say will probably end up being unpalatable to both sides, not just one.

There are two interrelated elements to this petition and, subsequently, to this debate: first, the principles surrounding the role of each House and, secondly, the passage of the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill. I will begin by dealing with the first, which is the primacy of the Commons. The primacy of the elected chamber, the House of Commons, and the way in which it has primacy over the House of Lords, is absolutely fundamental to our constitution. It is reflected in the legislation and the conventions that govern how Parliament works. For instance, the Parliament Acts 1911 and 1949 reduced and then further reduced the ability of the House of Lords to delay legislation against the will of the Commons. Since its passage, the Parliament Act 1949 has limited the ability of the Lords to delay the will of the Commons to just one year, and I can confirm that that applies to all Public Bills, including private Members' Bills, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland Central said.

The Government's democratic mandate and the primacy of the Commons are also reflected in the Salisbury-Addison convention that the House of Lords should not reject on Second Reading any Government legislation that carries out a manifesto commitment and that such legislation will not be subject to "wrecking amendments" in its passage. However, the key fact is that the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill was a private Member's Bill and therefore, unlike the Parliament Act 1949, the Salisbury-Addison convention did not apply.

The will of the Commons is given precedence over the will of the Lords. However, I want to place on record the Government's view that we greatly value the work of the House of Lords in scrutinising and improving legislation. There have been many occasions where the Members of the other place have drawn on their experience and expertise in their field—whether that is law, science, public service, military matters or indeed medicine—to bring a depth of scrutiny to legislation that sometimes the Commons is unable to.

A great deal of legislation is significantly improved because of the patient, rigorous work done in the Lords, and the Government do not have any plans to further curtail the ability of the Lords to scrutinise legislation passed on by the Commons. It seems to me that it is for the Lords to decide what their rules are, and even if the Government set about trying to change the rules, they do not have a majority in the House of Lords. We need to bear that in mind.

But—it is a very big "but"—there clearly needs to be a balance between how scrutiny takes place and how rules and conventions are respected. History shows that where the House of Lords overrides the expressed will of the elected House and is considered to be preventing legislation from completing its stages, pressure builds to revisit those rules and conventions—that is one of the first and last times I think I will ever have agreed with Tom Brake. [*Laughter.*]

I want to turn to the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill. I will not rerun the Bill, its progress and who was right or wrong, but it remains an issue of profound ethical and personal importance to many. As is the convention for matters of conscience, the Government maintained a neutral position throughout the passage of the Bill, except to ensure that, should it have passed, they would assist to make it workable. That position has not changed. All MPs and peers, including Government Ministers, will have had their own personal views, and it is right that, as MPs, we had a free vote on the Bill. On two occasions—on Second Reading, by a majority of 55, and on Third Reading, by a majority of 23—the Commons, including myself, supported the legislation.

In the Commons, the Bill received over 500 amendments and, as we have heard, was in Committee for something like 100 hours. Many of those amendments were agreed to. In the Lords, there were more than 1,200 amendments. There are some key differences, of course, in the way the two Houses can deal with those hundreds of amendments, but I suggest that some Members of the Lords who spent their time putting down amendment after amendment and urging that they be debated genuinely believed that the Bill that left the Commons was not of merit and was flawed. They have a right to scrutinise legislation, and they used that right. I heard some of the examples that were given of some of the amendments, which quite frankly ran the risk of making the process rather farcical, but there were many others that were genuine and sincere attempts to make the Bill right.

Behind all this is an issue that is central to private Members' Bills: the question of time. Unless rules on private Members' Bills change, any private Member's Bill—whether in the House of Commons or the House of Lords—can be timed out because it is simply talked out. The right hon. Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) said, in retrospect, shouldn't the House of Commons and the Government have made time for

[Sir Alan Campbell]

this? I remind him that there was time in the House of Commons—the Bill passed there. It was not in the House of Commons that we had the problem; it was in the House of Lords.

However, it is a matter for the Lords themselves, where the Bill had 90 hours and 45 minutes of debate. As a private Member's Bill both in the Commons and the Lords, it is to a large extent the Bill's sponsors who decide how that time should be used. As in the Commons stage, that time was allocated and used in such a way in the Lords. It took a very long time in Committee in the House of Commons, and it took quite a long time on Report in the House of Commons. That was time that might otherwise have created some space later in the process, which the Lords might have been able to make better use. However, I suspect that I am being slightly optimistic when I say that.

Daniel Francis: I have sat on a Committee for a private Member's Bill that took 45 minutes, and I sat on the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill Committee, which took 100 hours. With an issue like this, we need to look at how the private Members' Bill process works. As Committee members, we were expected to receive 242 pieces of written evidence and 159 pieces of written correspondence the day before line-by-line scrutiny commenced. We also had no equality impact assessment, human rights assessment or delegated powers memorandum throughout the entire Committee process. All I would ask is that, for these larger, more contentious Bills, we go away and look at how the private Members' Bill process works.

Sir Alan Campbell: I certainly will go away and reflect on that, but as my hon. Friend knows, because he is a very distinguished member of the Modernisation Committee, we are looking at how the House of Commons should best use its time. Part of that discussion will relate to when private Members' Bills are debated and how long they are debated for. He will know that a number of Commons Committees have looked at this question over a period of time—not least the Procedure Committee, which, if memory serves, is looking at it again.

However, limited time is available for private Members' Bills. There might be a clear decision at the end of a debate—on a time-limited Second Reading, for example, although that would be novel, given that the aim is often to get to 2.30 pm having talked out a Bill, and sometimes the Government of the day help in that process [*Interruption.*] They do; that is part of how private Members' Bills are dealt with. The more I look at the issue, the less I am sure whether they are necessarily fit for purpose.

However, if we were to get to that point, that would not address the issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Daniel Francis) about how long the House should take to consider these matters. This House rose to the occasion on Second Reading—recall the great fear that there would be a great row, which would show the House at its worst. The House rose to that occasion, but we had at least five hours of debate on Second Reading, so I worry slightly about what would happen if the process were curtailed.

At the heart of the issue, although I am not commenting on the Bill in this context, is the fact that Members need to reflect on whether a private Member's Bill is the route for certain legislation, particularly when it concerns a big issue and there is a question of conscience.

Kit Malthouse: I understand the point that the Leader of the House is making. However, if the House of Commons is determined that even a private Member's Bill should go through, even in the face of a Government-attempted filibuster, does he agree that it has tools at its disposal to allow it to do so? As he will remember, even in the assisted dying debate, we had to move that the Question now be put. If the House of Commons, in convocation, has the majority to override the Government, it can do so, even in those circumstances. What we have found is that in the Lords that is not the case.

Sir Alan Campbell: That is the case in the Commons. I am trying to recall Second Reading, but I assume that is what happened. If there is a majority in favour of a Bill and a motion to bring the debate to an end, that motion will succeed—it does not matter what the Government of the day say. I was talking about other Bills that the Government might dispute, rather than distinctly private Members' Bills where there is a matter of conscience and a free vote.

The right hon. Member for North West Hampshire is drawing out the contrast, and there is a wider debate about how the House of Lords conducts its business. As I have said before, at the end of the day if the House of Lords to carry out independent scrutiny, it is not for the Government of the day to set those rules. It might be for them to look at an issue in the context of the Parliament Act, for example, but it is not for them to set the day-to-day rules. Unless the Government had a majority in the House of Lords, they would not be able to do that.

Tom Tugendhat: The right hon. Gentleman is making the entirely valid point that democracy is not just what happens in either Chamber, whether it is the Lords or the Commons, and democracy cannot be reduced to a number, whether it is an electoral number at a general election or a number in the Chamber. Democracy is what we do between times.

I keep hearing that we Conservatives had 14 years in government—I do not deny that, and I recognise many of the errors that we made. But is it not also true that there were 10 years between the first and second votes on this campaign? Much of the democratic process could have been done in those 10 years through public debate, engagement and lobbying, instead of its being reduced to the actions that happened in the Chamber? Frankly, that is reducing democracy to a game of mathematics.

Sir Alan Campbell: This is cold comfort to people who want to see the Bill pass, and pass soon, but I would say to the right hon. Gentleman that this has all been part of that process. I do not want to play with hypothetical situations, but let us imagine that this legislation was taken forward. I have no evidence to suggest this will happen, other than the fact that it could, but if one of the MPs near the top of this year's private Members' Bills ballot decided to pick up the

assisted dying Bill and run with it, there would be lessons to be learned. There would be lessons about how we use time, and about how wide the scope of the Bill should be because of the amendments that would be tabled. There would be a lesson about how the Lords should deal with the situation, even though it would be deeply uncomfortable for them.

I gently say to the proponents and opponents of the Bill that, if someone picks it up and runs with it, and prays in aid the Parliament Act—as I have said, our view is that it falls within the scope of that Act—there would be rules around that, too. Lessons need to be learned on top of what the right hon. Member for Tonbridge is getting at, which is about how we take public opinion with us and build consensus, which, as we have heard, takes time.

Andrew George: The Leader of the House said earlier that he felt that a private Member's Bill was not necessarily the most suitable vehicle for legislation of this nature and gravity; as someone who has come out fairly high in this year's ballot, I am interested in his remarks in that regard.

Leaving that aside, does the right hon. Gentleman not feel that, even if a private Member's Bill is not the most suitable vehicle, it is now incumbent on the Government to find the time and the means through which the legislation can now be delivered, given that the Bill has the overwhelming support of the House of Commons?

Sir Alan Campbell: No, I do not, although who is to say whether in future the Government—or a Government—will decide to make the issue part of their manifesto, bring it forward and deal with it differently in that way? It is rather unfair for the hon. Member for St Ives (Andrew George) to expect this Government to pick up this Bill—or his Bill, if he picked it up and it failed. The hon. Gentleman has been through this before: he had a private Member's Bill, which had quite a lot of public support. It got through its Second Reading and to Committee, and he got through clause 1. The reason why it did not get any further was that the Government of whom he was part—the coalition Government—stopped it. I have to say, in this well-tempered debate, that it is a bit rich for him to talk about Governments picking up Bills and running with them when he knows full well that it is much more complicated than that.

Dr Chowns: Would the Leader of the House agree that there may be a way to respect both the principle of the primacy of the Commons and the importance of parliamentary scrutiny, including full scrutiny in the Lords, by coming to the point of a vote? That would not be the Government taking forward the Bill, but him, in his role as Leader of the House—the role of representing the Commons to the Government—reintroducing this Bill in the Commons so that it could be sent directly to the Lords to complete the process of parliamentary scrutiny: to the point of a vote in the Lords. That would fulfil the fundamental democratic principles that have been argued for on both sides of the debate today.

Sir Alan Campbell: The hon. Lady makes an interesting point, but it is not for me, or for the Government, to tell the Lords how to conduct their affairs. It is not the Government's job to pick up this Bill, after it has been through this first, stalled, failed, stage—

Sir John Hayes *rose*—

Sir Andrew Mitchell *rose*—

Sir Alan Campbell: Hang on. As we have already said, we have just been through the private Members' Bill ballot again. We will have to wait and see. With respect, the hon. Lady does not know whether somebody is going to pick up the Bill and run with it in future.

Dr Chowns *rose*—

Sir Alan Campbell: Hang on. I would want to see what happened here. We talk about private Members' Bills changing the law on matters of profound conscience and social policy, such as, for example, abortion or capital punishment; I was not around at the time, but I doubt that those got through at the first go. I do understand that many people rightly regard this issue as a matter of life and death, but there were many people at the time who regarded abortion or capital punishment as matters of life and death. We have to be slightly patient and see what progress any future private Member's Bill, if that is the route taken, might make.

Dr Chowns: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Alan Campbell: I will give her one more go and then I am moving on.

Dr Chowns: I thank the Leader of the House for allowing me to clarify my point. My point is not about the specific content of the Bill; it is about the constitutional crisis caused its blockage. Is it really okay that the only way out of that is to wait for another private Member's Bill? Is there a role in ensuring that it comes through the Commons?

Pete Wishart (in the Chair): Order.

Sir Alan Campbell: Thank you, Mr Wishart.

I am sorry if it was not explicit, but implicit in what I said was that I think the Lords need to reflect on what they have done. [*Interruption.*] Hang on. The stakes are quite high and we need to be careful that the conventions and rules in place are being used properly, so that the trust that we want to see is engendered in our political system. I want to address something else: the constant theme that, despite however many hundreds of Lords there are, there was a cabal—a handful of people—in the House of Lords who somehow managed to hijack this process and stop it all.

Luke Taylor: That is exactly what happened.

Sir Alan Campbell: The hon. Gentleman says that that is exactly what happened. There have been five private Members' Bills and one amendment on this matter in the House of Lords. They did not go anywhere. That was not because the person proposing them at the

[Sir Alan Campbell]

time did not believe that they had merit. That person did not push them because they did not think there was support in the House of Lords.

We can pick whichever side we want on this issue. We have talked all afternoon about how the issue was never tested. My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Dame Meg Hillier) explained why it was never tested. Members can say, “Oh, it was never tested. We do not know.” If I wanted to, I could argue that it was never tested and we do not know either. We do not know whether there was a majority in the House of Lords for the Bill. Let us just be careful before we go out chasing those arguments.

I will conclude because I want to leave my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland Central some time. Business managers made it clear that had the Bill returned from the Lords before the end of the Session, the Government would have sought to provide time to consider changes. As I have already said, the Lords play an important role in scrutinising legislation, but it is clear that people do not view the Commons and the Lords as being in isolation from each other. The actions of each House directly impact on the perceptions of this place more broadly. It is about what my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland Central described as a question of trust. I am sure that Members of both Houses will wish to reflect on that and ensure that the actions of one House do not detrimentally affect the other.

I am sure that this debate will continue. I welcome that because at its heart is a Bill of profound importance to many of us, whatever side we sit on. It is also a debate of profound importance when it comes to the relationship between the elected House and the upper House. I am sure the debate will continue.

Pete Wishart (in the Chair): Mr Atkinson, as you can see you have two and a half minutes.

7.27 pm

Lewis Atkinson: All that remains is for me to thank Members for their many contributions today and the spirit in which they were made—the same spirit in which we participated in the Second and Third Reading

debates. Those, including the contributions from opponents of the Bill, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford, improved the Bill.

I agreed with my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch when she said that we are not here as a debating Chamber, but as legislators. To be clear, the petitioners do not believe that the Lords or anyone should unquestionably take up what has been done, but they do question how social change is possible in a democratic society, which is what we profess to be in our constitutional settlement. As the Leader of the House ably set out, that constitutional settlement has been evolving over time, including through the Parliament Act.

The Hansard Society is absolutely clear that the Lords were within their rights to do as they did under the current constitutional settlement. It is also clear that the Bill therefore passes back to the Commons, should it be reintroduced, and that the Parliament Act would be an entirely appropriate means to do that. Let me be clear, because there has been some suggestion that that would force the Bill through without amendment. Should the Bill be reintroduced, there would again be opportunity for the Lords to consider and pass amendments to it. But there would not be an opportunity for the Lords to not reach a conclusion.

I am far from being a constitutional radical. The right hon. Member for Tonbridge did a good job of painting me as some radical saying that I wanted to abolish the Lords. Maybe his AI suggested that I wanted to do those things because he certainly did not listen to my speech. Perhaps we can have a cuppa to discuss it.

The petitioners want to see that change is possible within our constitutional settlement. These are issues of life and death; they are not abstract concepts for the petitioners. I again thank Nathaniel and Sophie for their work in introducing the petition and thank everyone who signed it.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petition 752673 relating to the timely progress of bills through Parliament.

7.30 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 8 June 2026

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

Fusion Energy Generation

The Minister for Energy (Michael Shanks): My hon. Friend Lord Vallance of Balham, Minister of State for Science, Research and Innovation has today made the following statement:

The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero is today publishing a draft national policy statement—NPS—for fusion energy generation (EN-8).

Fusion energy has the potential to play a key role in the UK future energy system, supporting long-term energy security, delivering an abundant source of zero-carbon energy and with the potential to export the technology globally. In the shorter term, it is helping to drive growth across the country, delivering high-skilled jobs, inward investment and supply chain development. As fusion technologies continue to advance and private investment accelerates globally, a clear and proportionate planning framework is essential to ensure the UK remains competitive and able to capitalise on the long-term economic opportunities that fusion energy presents.

Today a draft national policy statement for fusion energy infrastructure, EN-8, was laid before Parliament. This delivers on the Government's commitments within both the UK's modern industrial strategy and the UK fusion strategy to develop a fusion-specific NPS and publish a draft by summer 2026. Publishing this draft marks an important milestone in creating the conditions for fusion to move from research to commercial deployment in the UK. It will help to ensure that the planning system in England and Wales is ready to support future fusion energy projects. This will support the growth of the UK fusion industry, enable innovation and skills, and reinforce the UK's position as a leading destination for fusion investment.

The draft EN-8 does not identify specific sites for fusion energy infrastructure and is technology-agnostic (it will apply to the different types of fusion energy technology, e.g. magnetic and inertial confinement), ensuring flexibility for developers and responsiveness to innovation in fusion design. This is consistent with the Government's July 2025 response to a consultation on a new NPS for fusion energy. That Government response also set out 19 fusion-specific considerations, grouped into environmental, safety & security, operational and developmental themes. Draft EN-8 provides the detailed requirements for developers and the Planning Inspectorate in these areas, in addition to those that already exist in the overarching national policy statement for energy (EN-1). EN-8 has a scope different from EN-7, which is the national policy statement for nuclear (fission) energy generation.

Today marks the start of the formal parliamentary process to designate EN-8 and bring it into force under the Planning Act 2008. From today until 30 November, Parliament will have the opportunity to scrutinise the draft, raise questions and make recommendations. A public consultation on EN-8 will run alongside this stage of the parliamentary process, and officials will provide a summary of consultation responses to the relevant parliamentary Committees once all responses have been received.

Following consultation, EN-8 will be laid in Parliament in its 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.

[HCWS92]

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Participation in Democracy

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Samantha Dixon): Healthy participation is fundamental to a strong and resilient democracy. Yet engagement in democratic life cannot be taken for granted, and too many people and communities continue to face barriers that leave them feeling disconnected from it.

The Government are committed to encouraging broader and more inclusive participation in our democracy. To support that ambition, I am today announcing the launch of the democratic engagement fund, a new Government grant to support civil society organisations to design, test and deliver place-based interventions aimed at helping to widen participation in democratic life.

The fund will focus in particular on groups and communities that have historically experienced lower levels of turnout and participation. Evidence indicates that barriers to engagement, including capability, opportunity and motivation, can disproportionately affect groups such as young people, frequent movers, ethnic minorities, people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, disabled people and those experiencing homelessness. There remains, however, limited evidence on which interventions are most effective in reducing or overcoming these barriers. By testing and evaluating a range of approaches in different local contexts, the fund will help to build a stronger evidence base on what works to enhance democratic engagement.

The fund also aims to provide early insight on engaging young people in our democracy, which can then be built upon ahead of the expansion of the franchise to 16- and 17-year-olds. This will support the successful delivery of the Government's commitment to encouraging the participation of young people in our democracy.

Backed by a total of 2.5 million, the democratic engagement fund will provide grants of £1,000 to £50,000, with most awards expected to be around £25,000. The fund will support practical, locally led approaches that can build trust, remove barriers to participation and deepen people's connection to democratic life. At a time when confidence in democratic participation must be actively renewed, this investment will support action in communities across England while strengthening understanding of how different interventions can address barriers to engagement. Applications to the fund will open on 22 June 2026 and close on 31 August 2026, with projects taking place in 2027.

Further details of the fund, including its objectives and eligibility criteria, are set out in the prospectus published today on www.gov.uk. Through the democratic engagement fund, the Government are taking practical action to support innovation, deepen understanding of what works, and help to ensure that more people, in more communities, can participate meaningfully in our democratic life.

[HCWS93]

Written Correction

Monday 8 June 2026

Other Correction

LAYLA MORAN

Health Bill

The following extract is from the Second Reading of the Health Bill on 1 June 2026.

Layla Moran: Recently in my surgery, I spoke to a woman called Freya-Rose, who described how repeatedly recounting traumatic experiences compounded her own

suffering... Above all, the Bill will be judged not by us, but by Chris and Freya-Rose, the very patients who deserve to be put at the heart of this legislation moving forward.

[*Official Report*, 1 June 2026; Vol. 786, c. 916.]

Written correction submitted by the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran):

Layla Moran: Recently in my surgery, I spoke to a woman called **Kiera**, who described how repeatedly recounting traumatic experiences compounded her own suffering and **that of her child, Freya-Rose**... Above all, the Bill will be judged not by us, but by **Kiera** and Freya-Rose, the very patients who deserve to be put at the heart of this legislation moving forward.

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