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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)

HOUSE OF LORDS
OFFICIAL REPORT

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Abbreviation	Party/Group
CB	Cross Bench
Con	Conservative
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
GP	Green Party
Ind Lab	Independent Labour
Ind LD	Independent Liberal Democrat
Ind SD	Independent Social Democrat
Ind UU	Independent Ulster Unionist
Lab	Labour
LD	Liberal Democrat
LD Ind	Liberal Democrat Independent
Non-afl	Non-affiliated
PC	Plaid Cymru
UKIP	UK Independence Party
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party

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House of Lords

Monday 7 March 2016

2.30 pm

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of St Albans.

Homelessness: Rough Sleeping Question

2.36 pm

Asked by Lord Spicer

To ask Her Majesty's Government what proportion of the £42.5 million grant made through the Homelessness Change programme for hostel bed refurbishment has been allocated to tackling rough sleeping.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Communities and Local Government (Baroness Williams of Trafford) (Con): My Lords, no one should have to sleep rough. Our £42.5 million Homelessness Change programme provided funding for 1,500 new and refurbished bed spaces across 42 local areas. We have increased central funding to tackle homelessness over the spending review to £139 million, and protected homelessness prevention funding. We ran the world's first social impact bond on homelessness and are establishing a new national £5 million social impact bond to improve outcomes for homeless people with complex needs.

Lord Spicer (Con): My Lords, in a recent Written Answer to me, my noble friend the Minister stated that a survey in England found that there were 2,744 people sleeping rough on our streets. At the same time, the number of appropriate beds was 36,540. Can we conclude from these figures that the problem is not so much the availability of beds as the apparent unwillingness of those sleeping rough to take them up? In which case, what are Her Majesty's Government going to do about it?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: My Lords, there are a number of reasons why people sleep rough. The noble Lord has alluded to one of them. But he is absolutely right to suggest that we need to tackle the rough sleepers and make sure that they do not spend a second night out, but also, where it is necessary, provide the bed spaces for those who need them.

Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top (Lab): My Lords, given the Minister's Answer, is she able to tell us why rough sleeping has more than quadrupled during the period of this Government and why we are now unable, particularly in London, to find beds for rough sleepers?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: My Lords, as I say, the reasons for rough sleeping are many and complex—they are. A number of people do actually choose to sleep rough. Without commenting on that, this Government are committed not only to tackling rough sleeping, ensuring that nobody spends a second night out, but in one local authority there is actually a

no-first-night-out programme in place. That is why we have protected, both centrally and locally, homelessness prevention programmes.

Baroness Grender (LD): Does the Minister agree that if the leading cause of homelessness now in England is a loss of private tenancy, we desperately need an increase in social housing alongside a homelessness strategy? If Richard Gere has managed to persuade the Chancellor to make this his next big cause—according to the newspapers at the weekend—does the Minister now regret the lack of policies to increase social housing in the current housing Bill?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: My Lords, it is important that we provide housing of all types of tenure: houses for social rent, as the noble Baroness pointed out; affordable homes; starter homes; shared ownership; Help to Buy schemes; Build to Rent—all the different schemes in place under this Government which we have doubled the housing budget to £20 billion to provide.

Baroness Howarth of Breckland (CB): My Lords, as the Minister says, it is indeed a complex problem. Does she know how many of those sleeping rough have serious mental health problems? What projects are available to go out to those people to try to get them back under cover, when their mental health problems are one of the reasons for them not doing so?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: The noble Baroness raises a very pertinent point—a point which the noble Baroness, Lady Grender, has spoken about previously. This Government have committed to put in place £1 billion per year to help alleviate mental health problems. One of the worrying features that we have seen over the last few years is the rise in cases of young people in mental health programmes. The £40 million Homelessness Change and Platform for Life programmes help to deliver new low-cost housing for young people at the risk of homelessness, and it supports their transition into adulthood.

Lord Young of Cookham (Con): My Lords, has my noble friend seen the recent dialogue between the Association of Residential Letting Agents and the homeless charity Crisis, aimed at encouraging more private landlords to give support and homes to those who are homeless? Has she been able to give any support to that initiative?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I thank my noble friend for raising that question, because I certainly have. Crisis has been absolutely invaluable in providing, for example, underwritten tenancy deposits for homeless people. The programme has seemed to be very successful, with 90% of those people adhering to the tenancy and making it work.

Lord Davies of Stamford (Lab): My Lords, the whole House ought to be grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Spicer, for raising this matter successively at a number of Question Times, because we have had a much more detailed answer from the Government in their initial response today than ever before. Many of

[LORD DAVIES OF STAMFORD]

us suspect, on anecdotal evidence, that the real problem is in London. Can the Minister tell the House the estimated numbers of rough sleepers and available hostel places in London?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: My Lords, the number of rough sleepers was estimated to be 3,569 on a given night last autumn.

Lord Watts (Lab): My Lords, this increase in homelessness is a national scandal. Will the Minister set out the target figure for reducing that over the next 12 months?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: My Lords, as the noble Lord will know, we do not focus particularly on targets but on initiatives that will help reverse some of the trends that we are seeing. Nobody is denying that homelessness and rough sleeping are a problem, which is why we have protected and maintained central and local funding to deal with it, as well as the Homelessness Change programme which I have spoken about.

Lord Cormack (Con): My Lords, has any study been done to find out how many of these rough sleepers are under the age of 30 or over the age of 60, for instance? How many were born in this country, and are there many immigrants?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I do not have any information about how many rough sleepers are over 60 or under 30 but if such information exists, I will get it to my noble friends. Statistics have been put out in the press showing that one in five rough sleepers is a migrant. I will look at government figures to see whether that can be confirmed.

Lord Kennedy of Southwark (Lab): My Lords—

Noble Lords: Time!

E-cigarettes: Regulation *Question*

2.44 pm

Asked by Viscount Ridley

To ask Her Majesty's Government what effect they expect Article 20 of the 2014 EU Tobacco Products Directive, when implemented in May, to have on the rate at which people give up smoking by the use of vaping devices.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health (Lord Prior of Brampton) (Con): The tobacco products directive, which will come into force from May this year, will provide a new regulatory framework for vaping devices and e-liquids, assuring their safety and quality. The Government recognise that e-cigarettes can help people to quit smoking and that quitting smoking completely is the best thing a smoker can do for their health.

Viscount Ridley (Con): My Lords, I thank my noble friend for that helpful reply. Given that the Prime Minister said in the other place that 1 million people have given up smoking as a result of taking up vaping—

including, I believe, my noble friend Lord Brabazon of Tara—given that the public health benefits are in the order of £74 billion, and given that the main loser from this is the pharmaceutical industry, which is seeing falls in the sales of patches and gums, does he agree with me that pharmaceutical industry lobbying may be behind the attempt to regulate these products too heavily and possibly to shackle them with an excise tax? Could he give a Department of Health estimate of the size of the black market that is likely to result from this directive and whether or not it will result in people going back to smoking?

Lord Prior of Brampton: My Lords, the benefits of e-cigarettes are well understood. The figure of 1 million people who have given up smoking by taking up e-cigarettes is a valid and true one. The tobacco regulation that the noble Viscount refers to does not have any proposals for an excise tax—it purely relates to ensuring that these products are used safely and are of a given quality.

Lord Hunt of Kings Heath (Lab): My Lords, the Minister will know that the impact of this directive is to make it much more difficult for e-cigarettes to be promoted. Why is that, given the clear benefit to public health? The answer is that public health programmes can substitute for it—but this Government have slashed those programmes. Given the Prime Minister's success in EU negotiations about a change in direction, can the Minister confirm that we will not now have to implement Article 20 if we do not want to?

Lord Prior of Brampton: My Lords, this directive originated partly because a number of European countries wanted to ban these products. The fact that there is a directive, which will lead to a regulated market, means that British manufacturers will have access to those large European markets. As I understand it, the main issue that the noble Lord may be concerned about is that where the nicotine content goes above 20 micrograms per millilitre, there will have to be MHRA approval, which may mean that the higher strength nicotine substitutes are less readily available. But that is done on safety grounds.

Lord Brabazon of Tara (Con): My Lords, I have already been mentioned during this Question. I am one of those who smoked for many years but has not had a cigarette now for two years because I have taken up using one of these devices. Can my noble friend tell me why these devices are included at all in the tobacco products directive, because they are not a tobacco product?

Lord Prior of Brampton: I also congratulate the noble Lord on giving up cigarettes and taking up these other products. I do not know whether he has tried unicorn blood or crab leg flavours, but a multitude of flavours is available on the market. The directive has come about purely because of the feeling that although nicotine is better than smoking, it is not perfect.

Baroness Walmsley (LD): My Lords, although these products are clearly much less harmful than smoking tobacco, they are not entirely harmless. They have a

lot of noxious chemicals in them. What are the Government doing to inform people about the research on the potential hazards of these products, including the reduction in resistance to infections, reduction in fertility and changes in behaviour patterns?

Lord Prior of Brampton: My Lords, as I said, these new products are not perfect but are substantially better than smoking cigarettes. One of the purposes of the new directive is that there should be proper labelling on the products.

Lord Turnberg (Lab): My Lords, the noble Lord dismissed the idea of an excise tax, but there is a strong rumour that the EU intends to impose a tax on these products. Will the Government do everything they can to counteract this counterproductive suggestion?

Lord Prior of Brampton: My Lords, as I said, there is no proposal for an excise duty as part of the tobacco directive, as I understand it. I would agree entirely with the intent behind the question, which is that we should be promoting this product not discouraging it.

Lord Naseby (Con): My Lords, is my noble friend aware that, following on from what my noble friend said at the beginning, these vapors ensure that there is no harmful effect from passive smoking, which you normally get from cigarettes? In addition, research in New Zealand shows that they are a far better way to come off smoking than placebos or patches, which saves the NHS money. Is this not just another example of a badly thought through draft directive?

Lord Prior of Brampton: My Lords, I think there is evidence that e-cigarettes are more effective than, or as effective as, nicotine replacement therapies, and that my noble friend is right that there is no danger from passive smoking, which is why the inability to smoke in public places does not apply to e-cigarettes.

Lord Pearson of Rannoch (UKIP): My Lords, do we really need this sort of interfering directive from Brussels? Are we incapable of looking after vaping devices ourselves?

Lord Prior of Brampton: My Lords, we are capable of looking after vaping devices on our own, but if we ever want to sell into the European market, we will have to abide by those regulations.

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean (Con): My Lords, is it not perfectly obvious that big business is lobbying Brussels to shut out competition, that e-cigarettes cost less, which limits the impact of highly regressive taxes on tobacco, and that they enable people to save their health? Will my noble friend admit that the Government are powerless to do anything about this?

Lord Prior of Brampton: No, I do not admit that the Government are powerless to do anything about this. I do not believe that the origins of this directive have anything to do with limiting competition; they are based in trying to have a regulated market where safety and quality are guaranteed.

Affordable Housing Question

2.51 pm

Asked by **Lord Shipley**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what is their definition of affordable housing.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Communities and Local Government (Baroness Williams of Trafford) (Con): My Lords, our definition of affordable housing for planning purposes is set out in annex 2 to the *National Planning Policy Framework*. We recently consulted on our proposals for specific changes to national planning policy, including broadening the definition of affordable housing, to expand the range of low-cost housing opportunities for those aspiring to own their new home.

Lord Shipley (LD): My Lords, I thank the Minister for her reply, but can she explain to the House why it is that the Government persist in defining homes, including starter homes, as affordable when they are clearly unaffordable to very large numbers of households on medium and low incomes?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: My Lords, affordable homes are 20% below market values, and our new starter homes, as I have recently demonstrated in the Chamber, will cost about £145,000 outside London, so will be well within the affordability range for many first-time buyers, but there is a range of other products for people to purchase, should they wish, such as shared ownership schemes.

Lord Beecham (Lab): My Lords, I received a phone call yesterday from the son of a friend who is 48 and lives with his partner and their nine year-old child in a council flat in Hackney. He supports his 15 year-old son from a previous marriage, who also spends time with the family. The rent is £780 a month. The rent for an equivalent private rented accommodation is in the region of £2,500 a month. A single-bedroom flat costs £300 a week to rent. The combined income of the household is £45,000 a year—above the pay-to-stay level in London. Does the Minister regard the rents I have cited for those other properties as affordable? If not, what assurance can she give that this family and thousands like it up and down the country will be able to afford to continue to live in their present accommodation?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: My Lords, we have spoken at length about London and the variability of house prices between and even within different authorities. The noble Lord is not wrong when he says that rents are high in some places in London but, as I pointed out, a number of different products are available, including shared ownership, which may for the first time make the housing market accessible to those who previously were unable to afford it.

Lord Swinfen (Con): My Lords, what effect has immigration had on the supply of affordable housing?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: My Lords, I do not have those figures to hand, but I can go back to the department and see whether such figures are available.

The Lord Bishop of St Albans: My Lords, a recent survey by the Town and Country Planning Association found that only 7% of local authorities believe that starter homes would address their need for affordable housing. Not only that, Her Majesty's Government are going to require local authorities to build these homes, often at the expense of more sustainable forms of affordable housing, regardless of local needs. Will the Minister say how this fits with the Government's localism agenda?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: My Lords, it is not just starter homes. Through the spending review there will be a range of homes of different types of tenures that will be available at each price point to suit a number of different types of first-time buyer or renter.

Lord Bird (CB): My Lords, is it not interesting to consider that this is how Britain spends 87% of the money that banks lend? That is one reason the market is so overheated. What are we going to do to reduce the heat? In Germany, only 20% of the money lent by banks goes on housing. This is a ridiculous situation and we have to address it.

Baroness Williams of Trafford: My Lords, we have had lots of differences in this House over housing and the different types of housing we are going to provide, but one thing that all noble Lords agree on is that we need to increase the supply of housing in order to make it affordable. That is the way forward for the future. This Government are committed to delivering one million homes by 2021.

Lord Brookman (Lab): My Lords, the noble Lord, Lord Shipley, has raised a very interesting point. It has been on my mind for quite a considerable time, with grandchildren growing up and so forth. The situation is very difficult, there is no doubt about that. Where I and many in this Chamber are from—thankfully—in the valleys of south Wales, an affordable, detached house is about £80,000. Where I live, in Hertfordshire, a similar house costs £600,000 and people are extremely concerned about this for the future for their children and their families.

Baroness Williams of Trafford: My Lords, I am not sure what the question was, but I think it was around affordability in different parts of the country. The noble Lord is not wrong at all: you could fit my flat in London into my front room up in Manchester. That is the whole point: the Government are absolutely determined to build more homes of different types of tenure for people.

Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville (LD): My Lords, will the Minister tell the House how many people are in need of affordable homes—or products, as she is now branding them—and whether these are for rent or to buy?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: The noble Baroness and I have had many discussions on this and they are both for rent and to buy. Whether products or homes—they are homes—different types of funding mechanisms and options are available, from affordable homes to rent and starter homes to shared ownership. There are quite a few options, and we have spoken about them in the past.

Motability Question

2.59 pm

Asked by Baroness Thomas of Winchester

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they will reassess as a matter of urgency the Personal Independence Payment assessment which has led to many working-age disabled people losing their existing entitlement to a Motability car.

Baroness Thomas of Winchester (LD): My Lords, I beg leave to ask the Question standing in my name on the Order Paper and declare an interest in that I have a Motability car myself.

The Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions (Baroness Altmann) (Con): My Lords, there are now more people on the Motability scheme than before the personal independence payment was introduced and there is £175 million of transitional support for those who lose entitlement. Personal independence payment maintains the key principles of disability living allowance while better targeting support at those with the greatest needs. The Government are committed to its safe, secure rollout and have no plans to reassess it.

Baroness Thomas of Winchester: Notwithstanding what the Minister has said, does she not agree that it is one thing for a working-age person not to receive enough points at the first assessment to be entitled to a Motability car but quite another to have your existing Motability vehicle snatched away, not because you have got better but because the test has been made impossibly harsh? Does that not run counter to the Government's aim to halve the number of disabled people who are out of work?

Baroness Altmann: The Government are absolutely committed to supporting disabled people but the disability living allowance was inconsistent and subjective whereas the personal independence payment assessment is more consistent and fairer.

Lord Walton of Detchant (CB): My Lords, is the Minister satisfied that the individuals chosen to assess the nature and significance of the disability of disabled individuals are properly qualified and trained to carry out such assessments, and that in doing so they employ well-defined and reproducible criteria?

Baroness Altmann: My Lords, the Government are satisfied that those who carry out the personal independence payment assessments are qualified to do so—and indeed, reports suggest that the assessments are running better than the previous DLA regime.

Baroness Campbell of Surbiton (CB): My Lords, considering the numbers of PIP recipients who win on appeal, does the Minister agree that it would be much fairer to leave the Motability car with the person while they wait for the appeal decision to come through, especially if the car has had an expensive adaptation?

Baroness Altmann: My Lords, the time taken for appeals is being reduced. Certainly the first step is mandatory reconsideration, which in general takes place before the Motability car needs to be returned, as there is a seven-week period. However, the long-standing policy of the department is that if it is assessed that somebody is no longer entitled to a car, it must be removed pending appeal.

Baroness Sherlock (Lab): My Lords, the Minister thinks that the system is working better. One must ask: for whom? The BBC reported in February that 14,000 disabled people had had their Motability cars taken away from them, which is 45% of the 31,000 who had had an assessment. If that scales up, we will see hundreds of thousands of disabled people not having access in future to a Motability car. So I ask the Minister again the question put to her by the noble Baroness, Lady Thomas of Winchester: how does this contribute to the Government's aim to halve the disability employment gap?

Baroness Altmann: The Government are absolutely committed to halving the disability employment gap and we understand that being reassessed for any benefit can be a challenging time. That is why, after discussions with my department, Motability announced a £175 million package of transitional support. Those who lose their cars can get £2,000 for a new one or can buy their old car, and are given time to adjust. But the idea of the reassessment is that the DLA was inconsistent—many people had lifetime awards—whereas PIP offers a more consistent and fairer approach.

Lord Campbell-Savours (Lab): My Lords, should not the mileage on the clock of one of these vehicles determine how long the vehicle is held for, as against the age of the vehicle?

Baroness Altmann: The current rules we use for assessment allow people to buy their used Motability car if they so wish—but the rules of the scheme have been carefully set and assessed.

Baroness Doocey (LD): My Lords, are the Government confident that the four reliability criteria are being clearly explained to claimants by all health professionals in view of the high success rate of PIP appeals?

Baroness Altmann: The success rate of the appeals in PIP has much more to do with the fact that the appeal case hears far more evidence and the person who appeals has had time to put forward their arguments. The appeal would normally hear new and different evidence from that which has been placed before the assessor in the past.

Baroness Grey-Thompson (CB): My Lords, does the Department for Work and Pensions monitor the accuracy of assessments by Maximus and Capita? What action is being taken against assessors who make inaccurate assessments? Perhaps this could be an opportunity where disabled people could be employed.

Baroness Altmann: A very small number of the cases actually go to appeal. At this moment we are confident that the processes in place are doing the work that they need to do.

Baroness Hollis of Heigham (Lab): My Lords, I estimate that perhaps 200,000 people who currently have Motability cars will lose them as a result of the PIP activity. Very many of them will appeal, and they will win. Given that the Minister has accepted, admitted and shared with the House that the appeals procedure is infinitely more reliable than the original PIP decision by virtue of the additional information that it has, can I ask her to reflect on the previous answer that she gave so that people can keep their cars until their appeal has been completed?

Baroness Altmann: The current level of appeals is extremely low and we do not wish to give people any incentive to appeal. I also point out to noble Lords that more people are getting Motability cars now than before PIP was introduced.

Immigration Bill

Order of Consideration Motion

3.06 pm

Tabled by Lord Bates

That the amendments for the Report stage be marshalled and considered in the following order:

Clauses 1 to 9, Schedule 1, Clauses 10 to 29, Schedule 2, Clauses 30 to 34, Schedule 3, Clause 35, Schedule 4, Clause 36, Schedule 5, Clauses 37 to 43, Schedule 6, Clauses 44 to 52, Schedule 7, Clause 53, Schedule 8, Clauses 54 to 57, Schedule 9, Clauses 58 to 62, Schedule 10, Clause 63, Schedule 11, Clauses 64 to 69, Schedule 12, Clause 70, Schedule 13, Clauses 71 to 84, Schedule 14, Clauses 85 to 90, Title.

Lord Taylor of Holbeach (Con): My Lords, in the absence of my noble friend, I beg to move the Motion standing in his name on the Order Paper.

Motion agreed.

Welfare Reform and Work Bill

Commons Reasons

3.06 pm

Motion A

Moved by Lord Freud

That this House do not insist on its Amendments 8B and 8C, to which the Commons have disagreed for their Reason 8D.

8: Clause 13, leave out Clause 13.

Commons Disagreement and Reason

The Commons disagree to Lords Amendment No. 8 for the following reason—

8A: *Because it would alter the financial arrangements made by the Commons, and the Commons do not offer any further Reason, trusting that this Reason may be deemed sufficient.*

Lords Non-Insistence and Amendments in lieu

The Lords do not insist on their Amendment 8, but do propose Amendments 8B and 8C in lieu—

8B: Clause 13, page 14, line 24, at end insert—

“(8) Subsections (2) and (3) shall not come into force until the Secretary of State has laid before both Houses of Parliament a report giving his or her estimate of the impact of the provisions in those subsections on the—

- (a) physical and mental health,
- (b) financial situation, and
- (c) ability to return to work,

of persons who would otherwise be entitled to start claiming the work-related activity component of employment and support allowance.

(9) Regulations bringing subsections (2) and (3) into force shall not be made unless a draft of the instrument has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, each House of Parliament.”

8C: Clause 31, page 28, line 2, at end insert “, subject to section 13(8) and (9)”.

Commons Disagreement and Reason

The Commons disagree with the Lords in their Amendments 8B and 8C to the Bill in lieu of Lords Amendment 8 for the following reason—

8D: *Because they would alter the financial arrangements made by the Commons, and the Commons do not offer any further Reason, trusting that this Reason may be deemed sufficient.*

The Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions (Lord Freud) (Con): My Lords, in these opening remarks I shall cover Motion B as well. Last week the Commons considered the amendments passed by this House to place a duty on the Secretary of State to estimate further the impacts of the changes to the ESA work-related activity component and the universal credit limited capability for work element. The Commons also considered the aspect of those amendments that sought to make the commencement regulations bringing both changes into effect subject to the affirmative procedure.

The Commons voted solidly to reject those amendments, and the Motion now asks this House to accept that decision. In addition, the Commons Speaker has also ruled that these changes attract financial privilege. As noble Lords have not tabled amendments to the contrary, I will make the presumption that the House is now prepared to accept the changes, albeit with great reluctance, and will not defy convention.

I put it to noble Lords that as a House we have performed our duty. We have rigorously scrutinised the legislation to remove unintended consequences and sent back a number of concerns for the Commons to reconsider. Indeed, on the ESA work-related activity component and the universal credit limited capability for work element, we have twice asked the Commons to reflect on the measures and twice it has voted down proposed amendments with substantial majorities. I think that our duties are discharged, and there comes a point when we must accept the decision of the Commons on this financially privileged matter.

I am proud of the important work this House has done to improve and refine the Bill. I remind noble Lords of the important changes they have secured. We

have put in place additional statutory protections around the publication of low-income data; we have secured exemptions from the benefit cap for recipients of carer’s allowance and guardian’s allowance; and, in the case of the limit on support through child tax credits and universal credit, we have secured exemptions for certain children being looked after by family-and-friends carers and adopted sibling groups. On the social rents measure, supported accommodation will now be excepted from the changes for one year, and across the Bill we have accepted—in full or in part—recommendations from the Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee.

Speaking personally, I thank noble Lords for the precision and clarity with which they have made their arguments. It has made immeasurably easier my task of relaying the concerns back to my colleagues in the department and across government and getting an agreed response. The quality of scrutiny in this place amplifies the power of the arguments within government.

On this occasion, I will not expand on the measures at issue; we have had an extended opportunity to do so during the Bill’s passage. However, I remind the House of the improvements it has helped to secure: improved guidance for those with progressive conditions, £15 million for the flexible support fund, and removing the 52-week permitted work limit in ESA to reduce barriers to part-time work.

I am proud of the work this House does to scrutinise legislation and highlight unintended consequences—as it has in this case to improve these measures to help more sick and disabled people back into employment. It is, I believe, the right moment for the Lords to accept that it has done its job in communicating to the Commons areas of concern for it to reconsider. I am confident that noble Lords have done an excellent job in scrutinising the Bill, and I am grateful to colleagues throughout the House for a series of powerful and thoughtful speeches.

In the light of the convincing votes in the Commons and the application of financial privilege, I beg to move the Motion.

Baroness Grey-Thompson (CB): My Lords, I am deeply disappointed that we have got to where we are today with the Welfare Reform and Work Bill, but I thank the Minister for continuing to meet Members of your Lordships’ House. I and others spent a great deal of time last week working through every possibility of tabling another amendment to send this dreadful and punitive part of the Bill back to the other place. Unfortunately, because of parliamentary procedure, that was not possible. Placing financial privilege on these amendments means that the other place ultimately has its way, and it is entitled to do that—just as we were entitled and absolutely right to ask the Commons to think again.

As a Chamber appointed because of our expertise in areas such as this, we know and understand the impact this Bill will have, even if no formal impact assessment was carried out. I apologise to the people affected by this Bill that, at this point, we could not do any more. This may be the end of the legislative process, but it is the start of the negative impact the Bill will have on thousands of people’s lives. It may be

seen as a victory in terms of voting numbers in another place, but we cannot forget that there are many disabled people who will lose out. That may be realised only when the letters come flooding in.

3.15 pm

I would like to reiterate the effect of these measures. They will make it harder for disabled parents to move into or remain in work if their condition deteriorates. They will not help to halve the disability employment gap. Single parents or second earners are likely to be worse off under universal credit. Disabled parents will lose much more as, unlike in the current system, they will receive no more than a non-disabled parent and there are additional costs that are simply not covered by Access to Work. Transitional protection does not help if someone needs to reduce their hours of work after a move to universal credit. Universal credit will not provide any additional support for a disabled parent who qualifies for the limited capability for work group but who is in work. The position will be the same for those parents who become newly disabled. Compared with the current system, disabled parents will find that their financial incentive to work substantially decreases under universal credit, especially with these measures. Removing the limited capability for work element will make it harder for disabled people to move into work or to remain in work if their condition deteriorates.

Providing jobcentres with a £15 million discretionary fund, which is not ring-fenced, may help some. However, many disabled people have little in the way of savings and assets, so this will plunge people further into debt and is unlikely to make them more work-ready. We should be particularly mindful of the fact that half this group have mental health issues, autism and learning difficulties. It is unlikely that mounting debt will have any positive effect on work-readiness—quite the opposite, as our review found.

Finally, I would like to ask the Minister just one question: if Her Majesty's Government are so convinced that they are doing the right thing, will they monitor the impact, in order to know that what they are doing will not cost any more in the long term?

Baroness Campbell of Surbiton (CB): My Lords, I echo my noble friend Lady Grey-Thompson's deep regret at the Government's rejection of my noble friend Lord Low's amendments—amendments that were carried in this House with a considerable majority, twice. In my view, our arguments were pretty indisputable, especially with regard to the absence of evidence that cutting severely disabled people's employment support allowance would incentivise them to work. I think that, deep down, we all know that it is attitudinal and environmental discrimination that prevents this group from accessing employment. This will be borne out very soon in the evidence of the forthcoming Select Committee report on the Equality Act and disability, which is to be launched at the end of this month.

Last week, when I listened to the Government's arguments in the other place in the debate on the Lords amendments, I have to say that words failed me, particularly when Members were told to separate the

“issue” from the more important principle of Commons primacy. I find it very difficult when the niceties of parliamentary protocol trump the lives of disabled people. However, we are where we are, and I have to salvage what I can to protect those who will undoubtedly struggle significantly to make ends meet as a result of such a severe cut to their weekly income.

The Minister has generously—and I mean that—acknowledged the deep anxiety that I and expert disability organisations feel about this policy. He has made great efforts to assure me and them that they will be fully involved in the preparation of the White Paper. He also underlined his commitment to detailing in the annual report on full employment progress towards halving the disability employment gap. He said, “No ifs, no buts. We will do it”. In good faith, I therefore withdrew my amendment on additional reporting on disability.

The Minister is asking us to have faith again today, but I hope and pray that we do not look back on this day as the moment when we pushed some of the most severely disabled people in Britain over the edge. I will try not to let that happen and I will do what I can to become involved in the White Paper and the reporting, but, this time, please will the Minister involve disabled people centrally throughout that process?

Lord Low of Dalston (CB): My Lords, perhaps I might be permitted to say a word about the Commons rejection of my amendment. Despite the Minister's best efforts to soften the impact of the £30 cut in the incomes of disabled people in the employment and support allowance WRAG, which I readily acknowledge, this is a black day for disabled people. The Commons has spoken decisively and we must bow to their wishes, but we do so under protest. Do not let anyone kid you that this is democracy in action. There is more to democracy than just being elected. Questions of representativeness, accessibility, openness and responsiveness all come into it as well. From these standpoints, this House, though unelected, is much more democratic. Organisations representing the needs of poor and dispossessed people find it much easier to get their point across and have it taken on board in the House of Lords than in the House of Commons, which is more politicised and subservient to the Whips—and the Whips were certainly working overtime last Wednesday night in the House of Commons, going round handing out bribes and blandishments like there was no tomorrow.

Last week, the noble Lord, Lord Young of Cookham, took me to task for quoting selectively from the Commons debate on our amendments, but I did so because the debate ran largely one way. Last Wednesday, the Minister had a bit more support, but some telling points were still made against the Government. Commenting on the Commons reason for refusing our amendments—that is,

“Because it would alter the financial arrangements made by the Commons, and the Commons do not offer any further Reason, trusting that this Reason may be deemed sufficient”—

Neil Gray, MP for Airdrie and Shotts, said:

“So the Commons did not offer ‘any further Reason’, which I found shocking. The Government could not come up with anything else to say—no empirical evidence, no logical argument, nothing

[LORD LOW OF DALSTON]

socially responsible or of any consequence. It relied on a pseudo-constitutional technicality to explain the decision to remove £30 a week from the pockets of sick and disabled people on ESA WRAG ... What message does that send from this Government to ESA recipients? It says, ‘We don’t need to justify why we are cutting your ESA, we just are. We just can and we just will. We trust that this reason may be deemed sufficient’”.

Helen Goodman, MP for Bishop Auckland, said:

“The Minister said that she was going to spend another £100 million on supporting these people. If her scheme was going to work, she would not need to cut this £30 from such people’s weekly income, because she would get the savings as they all moved into work. This is doomed to fail and the Minister knows it. If she was convinced that it was going to work, she would do the impact assessment, because she would be confident of the upshot. She is not doing so, and she is ignoring the very real impact that this will have on the health of the most vulnerable of our fellow citizens”.

From the Conservative Benches, Stephen McPartland, MP for Stevenage, said:

“I genuinely think we would not have been in this position if the White Paper had been brought forward already and we were not having to take on faith something we are not really sure is going to happen, who the Ministers will be, who will be in charge of the money, and how we are going to move forward for these disabled people”.

With those words in mind, it is essential that the White Paper focuses on better back-to-work support for disabled people and better support for employers. Jo Cox, MP for Batley and Spen, said:

“If implemented, these cuts will surely also hinder the Government’s ambition to halve the disability employment gap. Instead, they will push many disabled people further into poverty and have a significant and harmful impact on the health and wellbeing of many people, including many in my constituency”.

Accordingly, I agree with the noble Baroness, Lady Grey-Thompson, that the Government must monitor how these cuts affect disabled people, both in and out of work, and gather evidence as to the impact on disabled people’s physical and mental health and their finances as well as their ability to move towards work, as called for in your Lordships’ amendment.

A little later on, Jo Cox said that,

“it is time to listen to Macmillan, Scope, Sense and Parkinson’s UK, to the many experts who have lined up”,

to oppose the cuts to ESA. Stephen Timms said:

“The judgment that the House has to make ... is whether”,

to listen to Ministers or to the organisations representing disabled people. Your Lordships have listened to disabled people, but the House of Commons, which ultimately determines how things play out, has preferred to listen to the Government, who have not been able to give any convincing reason for their decision to cut £30 a week from the incomes of 500,000 disabled people. As I said, it is a black day for those 500,000 disabled people—and for disabled people in general because this action is emblematic of the way in which this Conservative Government have chosen to treat disabled people. As Helen Goodman said:

“The fact is that Ministers are looking for large savings at the expense of the poorest and most vulnerable. That was not made clear in the general election campaign; then, the Prime Minister said that disabled people would be protected”.—[*Official Report*, Commons, 2/3/16; cols. 1052-58.]

By this action, the Government have betrayed the trust of disabled people and they should not be surprised if they forfeit it for the rest of their time in office.

Lord Kirkwood of Kirkhope (LD): My Lords, before the Front Benches wind up this final session on this important Bill, I am prompted to follow the noble Lord, Lord Low. I am sure that I speak for the whole House when I commend him and his colleagues on the Cross Benches who experience some of the problems facing disabled people for their work and for the contribution that they have made to the Bill—and I agree with the Minister that some of the contributions have been important. Their experience and the report of the commission chaired by the noble Lord, Lord Low, helped me to understand exactly what was at stake in some of these measures.

Concentrating on Clauses 13 and 14 and sending this back to the Commons for further consideration was the right decision. It was the right part of the Bill to concentrate on. There are a number of things that we will need to watch carefully. I support those who have said that we must now engage in careful and urgent monitoring across the piece of how the ESA support group is catered for in future. Something that particularly worries me is the perverse incentive that will now be introduced into the scheme for people to hide from the truth in terms of the statements that they make when applying for their work capability assessment, because the cliff-edge for getting into the group will be that much steeper. These things must be carefully monitored going forward.

I think that the Minister has done everything that he could and that this is a better Bill, but it is still a severe Bill that will cause hardship for the rest of this Parliament. I look forward to the discussions with colleagues on the White Paper. That will be an important moment when we can remedy some of the defects that are still in the Bill and the savings that will be occasioned by it. Mental illness and fluctuating conditions are other areas that we will need to study carefully.

Finally, over the weekend I read an interesting report from the think tank Reform, *Working Welfare: A Radically New Approach to Sickness and Disability Benefits*. Reform has come up with interesting ideas that are new to me and it would be reassuring if the Minister could ask his officials to look at it; some of those ideas are worth pursuing. This Bill will now go for Royal Assent and I think that the best thing the Minister can do in concluding these proceedings would be to commit himself and the department to urgent and fine-print monitoring of how it works in practice.

3.30 pm

Baroness Manzoor (LD): My Lords, perhaps I, too, may voice the disappointment that has already been expressed by other noble Lords at the outcome of the House of Commons’ decision. The amendment of the noble Lord, Lord Low, was fair and reasonable. In the end this House was left merely asking the Government to undertake a full impact assessment before they cut £30 a week in benefit to some of the most vulnerable people in our society. We must remember that these are people who have been assessed as having limited

capacity for work: people with disabilities, mental health problems, autism and learning difficulties, as well as those with progressive diseases such as MS and Parkinson's. At the very least, and not only because it is good law-making, the Government should have undertaken a full and detailed impact assessment before these cuts are introduced. Clearly, this will now not happen.

I fear the negative consequences that some may be faced with once these cuts take effect. Will they push more people into the support group? I do not know. Could they hinder their health and well-being and delay their recovery? I do not know. Which employers will create more jobs for these groups? I do not know. I could go on with the questions to which limited or no answers have been given by the Government. Instead, I suspect that the DWP may well have to deal with more complaints and appeals. And I would not be surprised if a legal challenge was mounted, particularly by people with disabilities. We are all familiar with the current legal challenge going through the courts in relation to the so-called "bedroom tax".

The Prime Minister has stated that he wants a fairer and just society, but these cuts will not aid that ambition. We are the fifth richest country in the world. To let down people who find themselves with limited capacity to work due to circumstances beyond their control cannot be right. Coupling this with the fact that many employers are not equipped, resourced or willing to take on people with disabilities or with fluctuating work patterns, can make good employment opportunities for some of these people difficult. Cutting their benefits without a full and detailed impact assessment should not be the first thing a modern, compassionate and caring society such as ours does.

I find it difficult to square this circle when sweetheart deals are being reported between the Treasury and some multinational companies such as Facebook regarding what tax they should pay, losing billions to the public purse. As noble Lords know, I and my colleagues have looked at this Bill through the prism of work, and, like many other noble Lords, I am delighted that the Government intend to halve the employment disability gap; that is a very laudable aim. But without proper analysis and impact evaluation, I fear—as other noble Lords, including the noble Lord, Lord Low, have stated previously—that the target may become just window-dressing.

We accept that the Commons has had ample opportunity to review and accept the amendments of your Lordships' House and, should they have wished to do so, they could have voted otherwise. For that reason, with a very heavy heart we accept that there is little more that we can do but accept the Commons' decisions.

But before I sit down, I will take this opportunity sincerely to thank the noble Lord, Lord Freud, for the concessions that he has managed to secure and for his courteous willingness to engage so constructively throughout the Bill. However, I put him on notice—and I know that he will not expect anything less—that we on these Benches will come back robustly to the arguments on monitoring that were made in this House when the White Paper is published later in the year.

Baroness Meacher (CB): My Lords, I do not plan to make a speech; I simply want to put on record the terrible fear that has been conveyed to me by sick and disabled people at the prospect of what we are doing here today. It is very easy for us to sit here, comfortable and secure, and just pass another clause to another Bill—but for these people it is terrifying, and that terror and fear has been conveyed to me. What they face is inevitable debt. They may be people who have not been in debt before; they hate debt and are frightened of it—and of the loss of their homes. As the noble Lord, Lord Low, rightly said, this is a truly black day for these people. That is a glib phrase, some might say, but it is terribly real for people up and down the country.

I, too, applaud the Minister for what he has done to ameliorate in some small ways what I regard as the truly terrible actions of, I would say, the Treasury in imposing these cuts on the most vulnerable people in our society. I just want to pose one question to the Minister. Will he monitor the number of suicides in the year following the introduction of this cut? I am certain that there will be people who cannot face the debts and the loss of their homes and who will take their lives. If the monitoring shows what I believe this cut will do, will he assure the House that he will seriously consider reviewing this action?

Baroness Deech (CB): My Lords, I rise to speak in support of my noble friend Lord Low. Until about a year ago, I was by no means an expert in this field, and I am still not, but I have had the privilege for nearly a year of chairing the House of Lords Select Committee on the Equality Act 2010 and Disability. This afternoon, we have listened to a litany of shameful government actions that will undermine the struggles of disabled people. Disabled people are not "them over there"; any one of us could become disabled tomorrow by an accident or an illness. This applies to all of us; it is not something to be put in a corner. I find it quite shameful that we are removing Motability cars and that we are not carrying out an impact assessment.

My conclusion is that there is nobody in the Commons to champion the rights of disabled people in a holistic manner, and that it falls to this House, which has, fortunately, a good share of disabled people and those who are experts, to do so. I want this House to put on record its dismay, disagreement and disappointment with the way that disabled people are being treated—the very people who are trying to get back to work and trying to be independent. And it could be you, tomorrow.

Lord McKenzie of Luton (Lab): My Lords, as others have said, this is a sorry occasion when we have to accept that the Government will have their way on the £1,500 a year reduction in ESA WRAG and universal credit limited capability for work component for new claims from April 2017, but in doing so we should make it clear that we reject the Secretary of State's assertion that this House was somehow usurping parliamentary procedure in asking the Commons to defer its introduction until there is a proper impact assessment. We remain concerned that, in pressing ahead with this measure, the Government have continued to fail their public sector equality duty, which is to

[LORD MCKENZIE OF LUTON]

consider the impact of their policies on the elimination of discrimination, the advancement of equality of opportunity and the fostering of good relations.

Noble Lords may have had circulated to them correspondence between the Equality and Human Rights Commission and Roger Godsiff MP, which commented on the very limited analysis of the ESA work-related activity proposals. It said:

“These are the kinds of matters that we might have expected a more thorough analysis to have considered. Without this level of evidence, the assessment does not, in our opinion, sufficiently support consideration of alternative options which might have less of an impact on people with particular protected characteristics”.

We know that the EHRC wrote to the Secretary of State last September, offering to work more closely with the DWP on the Bill, but we understand that the offer was rejected. Will the Minister confirm that that was the case?

At Third Reading, my noble friend Lady Sherlock, while acknowledging some improvements along the way—the Minister outlined those and we thank him for his engagement—asserted that this is still “a bad Bill”. My noble friend was right. The retention of Clauses 13 and 14 is a particular manifestation of its unfairness. It is therefore a regret that, given what this House considers to be the right thing to do, as expressed by strong votes, we have been unable to convince a sufficient number of the elected House to our point of view.

We hold fast to the view that including these provisions will not act as an incentive to work—quite the reverse. We remain dismayed at the paucity of the analysis that underpins the Government’s position and their refusal to hold back until a proper impact assessment has been undertaken. It seems perverse in the extreme to rush ahead with these changes and at the same time promise the publication of a White Paper to address in part the disability employment gap. It is not helped much, either, by some meagre concessions that bring some uncertainties in their wake.

We should express our thanks to the noble Lord, Lord Low, for the leadership that he has shown on this issue, and for the work that he and the noble Baronesses, Lady Meacher, Lady Grey-Thompson and Lady Campbell, have done in the *Halving the Gap?* review. It seems to us that this stands in stark contrast with the Government’s effort by helping us better to understand the lives which many disabled people live, their aspirations for work, the barriers that they face to getting and sustaining work, and the poverty and poor health which challenges so many of their lives—issues that are brought home to us also by the work of the Disability Benefits Consortium. As we have heard, it has asserted that these clauses will bring savings of £640 million to government by the last year of this Parliament. In a couple of weeks’ time we will hear from the Chancellor who is to be favoured in his next Budget. We will hold in our minds the price that is being extracted from disabled people as a contribution. But our task in the mean time, as others have said, is to continue to press the Government on how these cuts are affecting disabled people both in and out of work and, as the DBC urges, to argue for a proper impact assessment about the consequences for their physical and mental health, and for their finances.

Lord Freud: I thank noble Lords for their contributions. I reiterate that we are committed to working with interested Peers to improve the existing guidance around the progressive conditions and the reassessment. I share the aim of getting greater awareness among people suffering from these conditions—that is awareness in the jobcentre and the disability charities, and with claimants. I have asked officials to set up a meeting with that group of Peers on that work as soon as diaries can be juggled together—soon.

I pay tribute, along with other Peers, to the group of Cross-Bench Peers who have argued so passionately against the changes that we are introducing in ESA WRAG and the universal credit limited capability for work provisions. I refer, of course, to the noble Lord, Lord Low, and the noble Baronesses, Lady Campbell, Lady Grey-Thompson and Lady Meacher. I assure them that we have heard what they said and that those concerns will be right at the forefront of our minds—certainly of my mind—as we work with ministerial colleagues to finalise the White Paper.

3.45 pm

The main question I have been asked by a number of noble Lords—the noble Lord, Lord Low, the noble Baroness, Lady Grey-Thompson, the noble Lord, Lord Kirkwood, and the noble Baroness, Lady Manzoor—concerns the assessment. The context of that will be the White Paper that we are producing. As we consider the White Paper, I will make sure that we look very hard at the right way to make the assessment. The noble Lord, Lord Kirkwood, referred to making an assessment across the piece, but, clearly, within that we will look at this area as well.

I say to the noble Baroness, Lady Meacher, that the monitoring of suicides will not be included in the assessment. It is such a difficult and fraught area. Suicide is always a tragedy and a lot of different reasons are always involved. We look at a number of suicides but on a private basis, as a lot of the information cannot be shared, so that is not a useful approach. I know that because I have looked at this several times as those tragedies have come up.

Baroness Meacher: The Minister says that some of this information cannot be given away. Obviously, you cannot give away any personal information. However, if, for example, the suicide rate in that group is 10% or 20% higher in the year after the introduction of this cut than in the year before, it should be perfectly possible to make that information public, and surely it would be highly significant. If the department could issue that sort of figure, I would be very grateful.

Lord Freud: We have recently produced a large analysis on this, which I will send to the noble Baroness. That analysis makes it absolutely clear that you cannot make these causal links between the likelihood of dying—however you die—and the fact that someone is claiming benefit. As I say, I will send that analysis to the noble Baroness but I wanted to make that absolutely clear now rather than set hares running.

As regards the point made by the noble Lord, Lord McKenzie, the Secretary of State has been absolutely clear that the impact assessments that we have used

provide the most robust analysis that is available. The White Paper will touch on many issues related to health, disability and work, and will cover a lot of new ground which we have not had the chance to debate in the context of these provisions. I commit to taking on board views directly from the group, as a number of noble Lords have requested. We will seek those views, and value them, as we aim to get better outcomes for disabled people and those with health conditions. Therefore, I hope that noble Lords agree that in the context that we are talking about there is no need to test the opinion of the House on this matter. I beg to move.

Motion A agreed.

Motion B

Moved by Lord Freud

That this House do not insist on its Amendments 9B and 9C, to which the Commons have disagreed for their Reason 9D.

9: Clause 14, leave out Clause 14.

Commons Disagreement and Reason

The Commons disagree to Lords Amendment No. 9 for the following reason—

9A: *Because it would alter the financial arrangements made by the Commons, and the Commons do not offer any further Reason, trusting that this Reason may be deemed sufficient.*

Lords Non-Insistence and Amendments in lieu

The Lords do not insist on their Amendment 9, but do propose Amendments 9B and 9C in lieu—

9B: Clause 14, page 14, line 27, at end insert—

“(2) This section shall not come into force until the Secretary of State has laid before both Houses of Parliament a report giving his or her estimate of the impact of the provision in this section on the—

- (a) physical and mental health,
- (b) financial situation, and
- (c) ability to return to work,

of persons who would otherwise be entitled to start claiming the limited capability for work element of universal credit.

(3) Regulations bringing this section into force shall not be made unless a draft of the instrument has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, each House of Parliament.”

9C: Clause 31, page 28, line 2, at end insert “and subject to section 14(2) and (3)”.

Commons Disagreement and Reason

The Commons disagree with the Lords in their Amendments 9B and 9C to the Bill in lieu of Lords Amendment 9 for the following reason—

9D: *Because they would alter the financial arrangements made by the Commons, and the Commons do not offer any further Reason, trusting that this Reason may be deemed sufficient.*

Motion B agreed.

Refugees and Migrants: Royal Navy and NATO Interception in Mediterranean *Statement*

3.50 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Earl Howe) (Con): My Lords, with the leave of the House, I shall now repeat in the form of a Statement the Answer given by my right honourable friend the Secretary of State for Defence to an Urgent Question in another place on the announcement that the Royal Navy will

join NATO forces in the interception and return of migrants and refugees in the Mediterranean. The Statement is as follows:

“The scale of the migration challenge requires NATO, the European Union, and other European countries across Europe to work together to address both its symptoms—the constant flow of migrants and the conditions we see them face—and the causes in Syria and beyond. We must also work with local civilian authorities to tackle the gangs that profit from smuggling of migrants. The UK has already been engaged in this work for several months, with the Home Office’s ship “VOS Grace” deployed in the region since November with a detachment of Border Force officers. On 11 February, NATO Defence Ministers took the decision to participate in international efforts better to enable Turkish and Greek coastguards and FRONTEX to intercept the migrant boats and disrupt the smugglers’ business model. NATO’s Standing Maritime Group 2 arrived in the region within 48 hours of that decision, and has been conducting initial reconnaissance and surveillance of illegal crossings since then.

The NATO Secretary-General outlined in a statement yesterday evening that discussions between NATO, Turkey and Greece have agreed that NATO vessels can now operate in Greek and Turkish territorial waters. We have decided that the UK contribution is to send Royal Fleet Auxiliary “Mounts Bay” and a maritime Wildcat helicopter to the Aegean Sea. Their roles will be to support the NATO monitoring and surveillance task. They will work alongside three Border Force boats – the “VOS Grace”; the cutter “Protector”, which is on its way to the region; and a further Border Force cutter that is expected to start operations later this month. Together, they will support the Turkish and Greek coastguards and the EU FRONTEX mission.

The Prime Minister is attending today’s EU Turkey summit on migration. Contributing to the EU and NATO missions to counter smugglers is only part of the Government’s wider approach to tackling the root causes of irregular migration. We are providing up to £65 million of funding to the Europe-wide response. This includes a new fund of up to £10 million to meet the needs of refugee children in Europe. The UK is leading the way in tackling these issues at their source, providing significant amounts of aid to assist in stabilising troubled regions, lessening the need for people to leave. The Royal Navy contribution is an important part of the international effort to assist the Turkish and Greek authorities in breaking the business model of criminal people traffickers”.

My Lords, that concludes the Statement.

3.53 pm

Lord Touhig (Lab): I thank the Minister for repeating the Answer to the Urgent Question in the other place as a Statement. It is right that we should do everything possible to help these poor people who have already suffered so much and now risk their lives again trying to make the sea crossing between Turkey and Greece, but will the Minister say more about our role?

The Statement said that the Royal Fleet Auxiliary “Mounts Bay” will be supporting NATO monitoring and surveillance tasks. Will the Minister confirm that

[LORD TOUHIG]

“Mounts Bay” will be picking up refugees whose boats are at risk of sinking, if we encounter such craft? What will happen then? There are no international waters in that part of the Aegean. If we pick up in Greek waters, do we take the refugees to Greece; and is it the same if we pick up in Turkish waters—do we take them back to Turkey. Do we disable, impound or even sink the boats from which we rescue people? “Mounts Bay” will be supported by three Border Force boats—is it correct that we have just five? Where will the three for this operation come from? Are any coming from our own territorial waters? Are the other two vessels at sea or being repaired? Finally, will the Minister say more about the overall NATO plan to bring to an end this evil exploitation of migrants’ sufferings?

Earl Howe: My Lords, I am grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Touhig, for his questions. The principal role of “Mounts Bay” will be to gather information and provide it, for example, to the Turkish coastguards to help them intercept migrant boats in their territorial waters and return those boats to Turkey. That can happen straightaway. In cases where RFA “Mounts Bay” needs to come to the rescue of a migrant boat in distress, we are working with the relevant authorities in order to get to a position where we can carry out returns.

The noble Lord is absolutely right to talk about the origins of this crisis. We believe we need to take a tougher approach in order to stem the flow of migrants into the EU. While the NATO deployment is currently a support and surveillance mission—it is important to emphasise that: it is not a search and rescue mission—we are considering the practicalities and legalities of returning any rescued migrants to Turkey. These are complex considerations, particularly given the various territorial waters. Discussions are ongoing today at the EU-Turkey summit, and Parliament will be updated in due course.

We are not alone in the efforts that we are contributing. The NATO operation is under German command. The German command ship FGS “Bonn” is already in the area. It will be supported not only by “Mounts Bay” but by a Canadian escort, the HMCS “Fredericton”; a Turkish escort, the TCG “Barbaros”; and a Greek escort ship, the HS “Salamis”. The key thing will be to spot the migrant boats as soon as possible after they leave the Turkish shore, and preferably before they do so. That, of course, is the role of the Wildcat helicopter and the other helicopters in the area. I shall need to write to the noble Lord on some of his detailed questions about the exact location of the other British ships that I mentioned.

Baroness Jolly (LD): My Lords, we welcome the inclusion of RFA “Mounts Bay” in the NATO maritime task force, and that of the Wildcat helicopter. Will the Minister tell the House, for the operation as a whole, what arrangements have been made for NATO ships to dock in Turkish ports should the need arise, and for the safe onward passage of migrants after the processing of their claims for asylum?

Earl Howe: My Lords, if it became necessary for our ships to dock in a Turkish port for any overriding reason, I have no doubt that the Turkish authorities

would allow us to do that—but not to disembark anyone that we may have picked up en route; it would be purely for the servicing of those ships. But I do not anticipate that that will be necessary. As regards asylum claims, it is important to understand that migrants cannot make claims for asylum in the UK on UK-flagged vessels outside UK territorial waters—lest that should be a concern of the noble Baroness. If we do pick up any migrants—again, I stress that that is not our primary role—we would take them to Greece in the first instance.

Viscount Hailsham (Con): My Lords, can the Minister tell the House the degree to which we are liaising with the Turkish authorities? It really does seem that the Turks are much better placed to stop those ships leaving their coasts than we are to intercept them on their way.

Earl Howe: My noble friend is absolutely right. This is why NATO is in a support role, as I emphasised, to alert the authorities in the Turkish coastguard and FRONTEX, which is the EU border control agency, to intercept the ships. It is not our role to intercept those ships; it is for the Turkish and, if need be, the Greek coastguard authorities. They have assets in the area which are well placed to do that.

Lord Stirrup (CB): My Lords, what degree of co-ordination will be maintained between the NATO mission and the EU’s anti-people-smuggling mission in the Mediterranean, Operation Sophia? While the two have separate areas of operation they will both require access to strategic capabilities such as surveillance, reconnaissance and helicopters, which the noble Earl has mentioned, and which are in short supply. It would seem essential that a high degree of co-operation is maintained between these two operations if those scarce resources are to be used as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Earl Howe: The noble and gallant Lord is absolutely right. As he knows, the UK has provided a significant contribution to the EU naval force operation countering migrant smugglers in the Mediterranean off the coast of Libya. We have been doing that since July last year. HMS “Enterprise” remains committed to that operation over the winter, identifying potential migrant-smuggling vessels off the coast of Libya. He is also right to draw our attention to the whole of the Mediterranean as an area of concern. We must not forget that Operation Sophia is just one part of the overall, comprehensive approach to tackling the migrant crisis. The migrants who come up from sub-Saharan Africa are, by and large, those who leave the Libyan coast. In the main, those arriving at the Turkish coast stem from Afghanistan and Syria.

Lord Hain (Lab): My Lords, what exactly did the Minister mean when he said that any migrants picked up by British ships would be returned or sent to Greece? Does that not put even more pressure on the Greek authorities, which are being overwhelmed by flows of refugees? Can the Minister also give assurances to the House that Amnesty’s recent report on serious violations of human rights affecting migrants within Turkey is being acted upon by the Government?

Earl Howe: We are aware of the concerns mentioned by the noble Lord. That is exactly why I referred to the discussions ongoing today at the EU-Turkey summit about the legalities of returning these migrants to Turkey. In the mean time, the advice I have received is that should we pick up any migrants—I do not necessarily anticipate that we will—the default position at present is to land them in Greece. The Greek authorities have indicated that they are willing to accept those individuals.

Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon (LD): My Lords, as my noble friend has said this is a welcome move, if a small and rather late one. But have we not now reached a position where Her Majesty's Government's policy is to rescue such refugees as they find with their lives endangered and then to abandon them, because they will not take a single one of the refugees now fleeing for their lives from the Syrian battlefields? Yet we are perfectly happy, of course, to criticise Europe for not being able to cope with a million of them. I am not allowed to use the word "hypocrisy" in this Chamber so let me confine myself to saying: does the Minister not find that, overall, that is a pretty discreditable policy?

Earl Howe: My Lords, I do not share the noble Lord's view. The Prime Minister has announced that we will resettle 20,000 of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees over the next few years. That will build on an existing scheme for Syrians, designed to support refugees based on their vulnerability. We have now settled more than 1,000 vulnerable Syrian refugees and, in addition to those 20,000, we have partnered with the United Nations refugee agency to identify vulnerable child refugees in the region for resettlement to the UK, where it is in the best interests of the child. The £10 million aid package to which I referred will be devoted to that.

Tax Credits (Income Thresholds and Determination of Rates) (Amendment) Regulations 2016

Motion to Approve

4.04 pm

Moved by Lord O'Neill of Gatley

That the draft Regulations laid before the House on 14 January be approved.

Relevant document: 23rd Report from the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee

The Commercial Secretary to the Treasury (Lord O'Neill of Gatley) (Con): My Lords, I confirm that the provisions contained in the regulations before your Lordships today are compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights.

I will start by setting out the purpose of the regulations that are put before the House today. These regulations make a single change: reducing the income rise disregard from £5,000 to £2,500, taking it back to the original level it was set at when tax credits were introduced and aligning it with the income fall disregard. This change was announced in the summer Budget of

8 July 2015. This means that awards will more accurately reflect the claimant's recent earnings, meaning fewer overpayments and that fewer people will go into debt as a result.

Tax credits were introduced in 2003, at which point the income rise disregard was set at £2,500. At the time, the tax credits IT system was unable to cope with the unpredictability of family incomes, and in 2006 the amount by which a family's income could increase before their tax credit award would adjust within the year—the income rise disregard—was increased to £25,000. This meant that two families with significantly different incomes could receive the same tax credits award.

Following the 2010 election, the coalition Government reduced the rate of the disregard to £10,000 and then to £5,000. Improvements to stabilise the tax credits system and the increased use of real-time information—RTI—mean that the system is now able to be more responsive to claimants' changes of circumstances. I reassure noble Lords that when considering bringing forward this change, the Government considered the impacts on claimants in accordance with their legal obligations, and that there will be no cash losers from this measure in the tax year.

The purpose of a disregard is to provide a buffer zone in which a family's income can increase during the course of a year without affecting their tax credit entitlement. It has been a feature of the tax credits system since its inception in 2003 and was originally set, as I said, at £2,500. Let me explain how the disregard works in practice. Following receipt of a claim, HMRC makes an initial tax credit award based on the claimant's current circumstances and income from the previous tax year. As the current tax year progresses, claimants can notify HMRC of changes in their circumstances. Some changes must be reported within one month: for example, a partner moving in with a previously single claimant. However, other changes, such as a change in income, do not need to be reported until the year's end, although claimants are encouraged to keep HMRC informed of changes in earnings.

After the end of the tax year, HMRC sends claimants renewal papers. The purpose of these is to determine the claimant's actual entitlements for the year just ended and, if appropriate, to initiate a claim for the year ahead. HMRC does this by asking the claimant to confirm their income and circumstances for the year that has just ended. Where the claimant's income has stayed the same, or if the income in that year has risen by less than the disregard amount compared to the year before, the increase in income does not affect the tax credit award in that tax year. It is disregarded from the final calculation of a tax credit award. If, on the other hand, their income has risen by more than the tax credit disregard, their tax credit award is decreased in the year. However, it is important to emphasise again that individuals will still be taking home more money, owing to the increase in their income.

Either way, in the subsequent year a claimant's tax credits award will be calculated in the usual way, using their full annual income from the previous tax year to

[LORD O'NEILL OF GATLEY]
determine their tax credit entitlement. After the change in the tax year, whether the recipient's pay rise was above or below the disregard level, their tax credit award for the following year will be adjusted downwards to what it would have been had no disregard existed.

I turn to fairness. In practice, this means that when the income rise disregard was set at £25,000, someone on tax credits could get a pay rise of £2,000 per month and still be technically entitled to the same tax credits award until the tax year end. Even under the current system, a household's income can rise by £400 a month and they will still be entitled to the same tax credits award until the end of the tax year. Claimants would see their tax credits entitlement reduced in the following year, having become accustomed to the significant income change.

Let us assume that this pay rise of £400 a month means that this household is now taking home as much money as their next-door neighbours, whose circumstances are exactly the same. But the next-door neighbours are not entitled to the same level of tax credits even though they have exactly the same income and circumstances. Under the system set out in the regulations, with an income rise disregard of £2,500, the household with an increased income of £4,800 a year would have their tax credits award adjusted to reflect their increased earnings sooner. Their total income would rise more than the decrease in the tax credits award, providing the buffer zone that the income rise disregard is designed for, and they would also see their award aligned more closely with next year's tax entitlement—the same as the next-door neighbours.

This example shows how reducing the income rise disregard reduces the unfairness in tax credits awards for families in similar circumstances. This is the right thing to do to ensure fairness to all tax credits claimants. This principle is already live in universal credit, where a claimant's award changes each month based on their earnings, and this change brings forward some of these benefits.

HMRC will communicate this change by providing information in tax credits renewals packs, which will highlight the annual income threshold that would need to be exceeded to trigger a change in their tax credit awards, and when they should report changes in income to HMRC.

With the introduction of RTI—as I said, real-time information—employers can now submit employee payroll information in real time. Ninety-nine per cent of employers are covered by the scheme, which means that HMRC is now in a better position proactively to check that it has the correct income details when claimants renew their award at the end of the tax year. It also provides an opportunity to check awards within the year.

From September 2016, HMRC will use this real-time information to conduct automated checks of an individual claimant's monthly income. This means that HMRC is better able to assess claimants' tax credit entitlement in relation to their increased income. Should RTI find that a claimant's entitlement should be reduced by £500 or more, HMRC will send a letter, text message or automated voice message to the claimant, prompting

them to make contact with HMRC within 14 days. If they do not, their income will be automatically amended on the system.

Let me be clear: HMRC will not only tell all claimants up front when they must report changes in their income, it will also, in the majority of cases, prompt claimants to report significant increases in income that HMRC has picked up through the RTI feed. If claimants do not respond to the prompt, the system will automatically make the change and reduce the claimant's tax credits award. This reduces the risk of overpayments while making clear to the claimant their responsibilities.

Finally, the Government are committed to seeing this change implemented correctly, and are taking this considered approach in both the operational IT delivery and in engagement with claimants. This will ensure that we see a reduction in the risk of tax credit overpayments and, therefore, a reduction in claimants falling into debt.

In conclusion, the disregard reduction will affect only those claimants whose income increases in-year by more than £2,500. Let me repeat that there will be no cash losers. This change will make tax credits more responsive to income changes; will reduce the overinflated rise and subsequent fall that follows an income rise; and will reduce the inequality of very different awards to families in similar circumstances and with similar incomes. It returns the disregard to its original design and purpose, and now is the right time to do this because the tax credits system is now much more able to deal with income changes. I beg to move.

4.15 pm

Amendment to the Motion

Moved by Baroness Manzoor

At the end to insert “but that this House regrets that the draft Regulations reduce incentives for low-income working people to increase their salaries, will lead to an increase in overpayments of tax credits, and could place families in additional hardship at the end of the financial year”.

Baroness Manzoor (LD): My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord O'Neill, for that overview of the income disregard level applied to working people on tax credits. As I have said previously, I was delighted when the Chancellor decided not to move forward with his proposed cuts to tax credits; however, despite the perception that changes to tax credits were stopped entirely, the reality is somewhat different.

We all know that the cuts to universal credit, while they mirror precisely the tax credit cuts and matter more in the long run, will go ahead, despite the efforts of those on these Benches to stop them. They will, in the long term, affect millions of the low-income working people the Chancellor claims to support. There is also another hangover from the plan to cut tax credits—the change in the income disregard obliquely referred to in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement. These regulations will reduce the additional amount a person can earn while claiming tax credits in any given year from £5,000 to £2,500, as we have just heard. That means

that if a person's salary exceeds their expectations by more than £2,500 they will face an overpayment at the end of the year.

Overpayments can cause real hardship for those on low incomes, who get what amounts to a bill at the end of the tax year. For those living week to week, this can prove catastrophic, forcing them into rent arrears or limiting their ability to put food on the table. So, the level of the disregard matters. If the Government truly cared about making work pay, they would ensure that the level of the disregard allows people to feel confident in taking on additional hours, or taking a promotion, without worrying that they are going to breach the tax credit disregard and face an overpayment charge at the end of the year.

The income disregard is particularly important for those taking on unpredictable work. I want people to take up a job, assuming they are able, regardless of the job. Unlike some, I do not think, for example, that zero-hours contracts are fundamentally wrong. Indeed, for some people they are a useful tool to balance their work and personal lives. While there are concerns about their exploitation in some sectors and by some businesses, ultimately, we want people to feel able to take up a job, even on zero hours, and feel confident that it is the right decision. So, the level of the income disregard matters in giving people confidence to take up work; setting it at a level where it hits only people whose salary increases substantially is important in giving that confidence.

I do not believe that £2,500 is enough of a disregard to prevent significant overpayments. What is the primary reason for that? We have been here before. The Minister is absolutely right that when tax credits were first introduced by the Labour Government in 2003, the disregard was set at £2,500. The result was £2.2 billion of overpayments, which affected 2 million households—a third of all tax credit claimants—who were hit with overpayment debts that year, many of which ran to thousands of pounds. That meant that millions of low-income working families faced unexpected changes that they struggled to pay for. Do we want to return to that state of affairs? The Labour Government, realising this problem, hugely increased the disregard, all the way up to £25,000. Many would see this as a sledgehammer to crack a nut, but it had the desired effect. Overpayments by HMRC fell significantly in the subsequent three years: from £2.2 billion to £1 billion for the years 2006 to 2009. The Government decided to reduce the size of the overpayment buffer zone: first, in 2010, from £25,000 to £10,000; and then to £5,000 from April 2013. Reports by HMRC show that as the income disregard has reduced in value, overpayments by HMRC, unsurprisingly, have increased. By 2013-14, when the disregard had returned to £5,000, the total amount of tax credit overpayments had again reached £1.9 billion—almost back to 2003 figures.

The £2,500 disregard proposed in the regulations would, in real terms, be the lowest threshold ever imposed on tax credits, given the inflationary changes since 2003. There is a risk that it will lead to further significant increases in overpayments and hardship for low-income working families. Yet in making this decision, the Government have offered little evidence as to what

the impact of these changes will be. The original regional impact assessment, which was published alongside all the tax credit cuts, simply scored the savings of the change in disregard, which was mentioned only twice in the entire document. No further impact assessments have been made for these regulations.

In response to the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee, the Government said that they expect that 800,000 people will be affected by this change. However, they seem to offer little explanation of this estimate or of what the average impact on each person will be. We should not allow the Government to make such big decisions, affecting so many people on low incomes, based on so little information. In the Commons, Ministers utterly failed to give further explanation, simply saying that the majority of those hit will be couples, and the majority of those will be male-female couples. That is simply the law of averages, not an adequate explanation of the impact of the Government's policy. I also note, for those on the Labour Benches who are hesitant to support a Lib Dem Motion to Regret, that their own Front Bench in the Commons stated that the Opposition are seriously concerned about the impact of the reduced figure of £2,500 on low-income families, and rightly divided on the issue. It is therefore surely right for the House of Lords Opposition Front Bench to follow their Commons colleagues in voting against these regulations, albeit on a Motion to Regret rather than attempting to stop the Commons having its way.

The Minister was always likely to say that things have changed since 2003, and indeed he did. He said that this change is because of the new real-time information system, which will cut overpayments as RTI uses monthly pay figures to spot an income rise during the year, so that tax credit payments can be adjusted quickly instead of leaving a debt to be paid at the end of the year. However, organisations such as the Child Poverty Action Group say there is no mechanism allowing tax credit awards to react automatically to many of the changes in circumstances that currently affect entitlement to tax credits, such as a change in the presence of a partner, the number of dependent children, spending on formal childcare, or whether parents work more or less than between 16 and 30 hours a week. Entitlements to tax credits change on the day when these changes occur, yet awards cannot be adjusted until families tell HMRC, which recalculates the entitlement. Overpayments often arise during this intervening period but that will not be picked up by real-time information. How do we know that? Because it is not picked up at the moment. If real-time information worked, we would not have seen, as I noted earlier, the increases in overpayments that have occurred since the £5,000 disregard was put in place.

These regulations will have a big impact on families, but do they actually benefit the taxpayer? I suggest that the benefit is likely to be limited. There is real concern that, in the end, it will end up costing HMRC more in trying to claw back the overpayments than it will have saved in lowering the disregard. HMRC figures show that as of June 2014, no less than £5.6 billion in tax credit overpayments was owed by households, £89 million of which was from 2003-04. So these regulations are likely to put a significant financial burden on families and deter people from taking on

[BARONESS MANZOOR]

additional hours of employment, and yet may not in the end result in the overpayments being returned to the Treasury. This is a badly thought through plan that runs counter to the Government's supposed aim of incentivising people to take up work.

We must understand that this is only a short-term fix. Universal credit, as the Minister has said, will replace tax credits in a few years. That is very welcome, since that system will do away with the need for disregard altogether—exactly the right approach to the overpayment problem. As universal credit comes in, the scored savings from the cutting of the disregard reduce significantly, so these regulations are likely to hit millions of people over the next few years to no long-term end. This is bad law, poorly justified by the Government and running counter to their own stated aims. That is the reason for my Motion to Regret. I beg to move.

Lord Kirkwood of Kirkhope (LD): My Lords, I am delighted to be able to follow my noble friend. She has done the House a service this afternoon in raising this very important issue. It is particularly important for the Liberal Democrats because, in our reduced circumstances in the Commons, it was impossible for us as a group to take part in the debate on Thursday 3 March when these draft Tax Credits (Income Thresholds and Determination of Rates) (Amendment) Regulations 2016 were discussed in the Delegated Legislation Committee. Now, we have a straightforward and excellent statement of what the Liberal Democrats in Parliament think about these regulations, and my noble friend did a tremendous job in that regard.

We also owe her a debt because she brings in front of us a Treasury Minister who is a significant figure, not just because he is a Minister in the Treasury but because of his background. I hope that more than anything else this afternoon he will say to us straightforwardly that he is going to take an interest in these regulations. His name is now on them. He is an experienced hand, he understands statistics and he understands how processes of administration work, and I have some questions for him.

4.30 pm

The Minister is at the heart of the policy-making. My noble friend is absolutely correct to say that some of the consequences of these regulations will conflict with the Government's stated intention of trying to progress people within work. Unemployment may be less of a problem going forward in the rest of this Parliament, and it may be that we will be trying to get people to earn more—certainly that is part of the spirit of universal credit—but these regulations are a disincentive for people to go up the career ladder. My American friends keep saying, "It's any job, a better job, then a career". That is the progression that we should be thinking about. I put it to the Minister—and I would be grateful if he would reflect on it—that these regulations contradict that way of thinking.

The second thing that I want to say directly to the noble Lord in his position as a Minister is that the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee had a bit of a job dragging information out of his department.

That is perhaps not unusual, but in future can he use his influence to try to make sure that everything that can be known is put into the public domain in the furtherance of regulations of this kind? That is important in our understanding of what the Government are trying to do.

In that regard, is the Minister really saying to the House today that this new system, which will start to operate in April this year—that is, not months but days away—is being brought forward in a way that will be capable of being discharged properly, professionally and not to the detriment of the people who will be subject to the new constraints of the regulations? I do not have the figures at the front of my head but there will be 4 million families on child tax credit and approximately 2 million families on working tax credit. That is 6 million households that these regulations could potentially affect, and 800,000 households are likely to be affected. I repeat: we are talking about introducing measures that will take effect in days.

Therefore, I want reassurance from the Minister that, while he is monitoring these regulations, he will pay attention to their effect, using the real-time information system that he now has available to him. I understand that that is significantly different from the situation in 2002. Then, I was the chairman of the Select Committee in the other place that oversaw the introduction of these things. My noble friend was absolutely correct to say that all of us who were there at that time bear the scars of the overpayments of tax credits, and I do not want that to come round again.

The Minister says that nobody will be cash losers. I think that technically, over time, that will be correct. However, there will be big disruptions in month-to-month income if the Treasury takes a clawback out of the tax credit payments. In that regard, will he confirm that the Budget decision in 2014 will increase to 50% from 25% the rate at which clawback can happen? That is a significant change that is taking place in a few days' time, and I wonder how many people have been warned about it. I do not have any great confidence that the system is up to that and capable of dealing with it.

I want to say one other thing, and will quote from the Red Book for Budget 2015. We were told in the Explanatory Memorandum that £170 million would be saved by the Government, and that is a significant sum. However, in the summer Budget 2015 Red Book, at page 73, it goes on to say that in the financial year after that, £225 million will be taken out; the year after that, it will be £250 million, and the year after that, it will be £180 million. It is diminishing because, as my noble friend quite rightly said, this is all going eventually into universal credit. My arithmetic takes that to a reduction of £935 million, so this is no insignificant order. It adds up to quite a big row of Treasury beans.

I finish by saying that the main worry I have—I referred to it earlier—revolves around the impetus for this going forward, which my noble friend correctly mentioned. We are trying to encourage people to trade themselves out of debt by getting more hours of work and higher pay, and we understand that the Government are attempting to assist that process. However, reading the *IFS Green Budget 2016* for the upcoming Budget, it is quite clear to me that the people who are going to

suffer most for the rest of this Parliament are the two deciles at the second and third points of the income distribution. That is exactly the 800,000 families that are going to be hit by this and exactly the kind of households and families that this Government want to support. I do not understand why we get this contradiction in policy, except to say that the Government, and, more accurately, the Chancellor, want £935 million as part of their £12,000 million reduction in the welfare budget. I hope that the Minister will go away and reflect carefully on this policy and give us a guarantee that it is not all going to fall over in three weeks' time because the RTI computer process fails to function.

Lord Tunnicliffe (Lab): My Lords, as has been outlined, the regulations before us today would reduce the tax credit income disregard from £5,000 to £2,500. We believe that it is right that we work towards developing a system which ensures that households do not incur tax credit overpayments. However, until such a point when real-time responsiveness can be guaranteed, it is surely justified that there is enough leeway in the system to reduce the shock of these overpayments and give households some time to readjust the family finances.

Thus far, the Government have failed to show that the system is resilient enough to cope with the reduction to the income disregard, having failed to provide your Lordships' House with either an impact assessment or any evidence to support claims that the service mechanisms respond to real-time information. In inviting us to agree this order, surely the Government should have provided this information as a matter of course. In keeping with what I regard as standard practice, I would expect the Government to have produced an impact assessment to accompany these regulations, particularly in the light of public interest and your Lordships' interest in this matter. However, that was not the case, and it was left to the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee, to which we are indebted, to investigate further.

In responding to the committee's questions, the Government admitted that this change will impact on 800,000 households next year—a figure which only adds to my disbelief as to why no assessment was produced. They also go on to say, without supporting evidence, that of the 800,000 people,

“none will be cash losers because their income will have increased”.

In the absence of further detail, the House of Commons Library has analysed the impact that the disregard reduction will have on a family's income, and its findings directly contradict the claims made by the Government. The findings suggest, for example, that for a lone parent with two children the income disregard reduction could hit a household by as much as £1,000. Of course, this is just one scenario, but in the absence of any data to support the claim that there will be “no losers”, it certainly calls the claim into question.

There is also no explanation for why the Government have determined that halving the income disregard is appropriate. Why the £2,500 figure? Is it the average minimum salary increase of tax credit claimants assessed over previous years? Is it an amount that would provide an adequate cost-of-living buffer for those on the lowest salaries within the scheme? I would be very

interested to hear the Government's rationale. I hope that the Minister can give us some indication of why an impact assessment was absent as well as an assurance that, particularly in matters which attract such intense public interest, such documents will accompany future instruments.

I turn to the apparent improvements in tax credit delivery systems which the Government alluded to in their response to the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee. It was suggested that it is now acceptable to return the disregard to the original level of 2003 because,

“the tax credit system is now operationally better able to cope ... now that it has more up to date information on people's earnings ... HMRC are also making it easier to report changes quickly online, so that people will less often receive overpayments”.

Yet this is the third time since 2010 that the Government will have cut the income disregard and in every year since then the amount of overpayments has increased. That does not suggest to me that we have a system which can at present manage people's changes in circumstance on a real-time basis. This cut will serve only to exacerbate such problems. That is not good for households which receive tax credits and nor is it good for our country's public finances as a whole. Surely it would have been more sensible to wait for the introduction of universal credit, test the relevant systems and then explore the capacity of those systems to cope with real-time changes in people's income.

These proposals have been poorly presented. I do not believe that the Government have given sufficient thought to how this reduction will impact on people who receive tax credits or given any consideration to how the mechanisms which process these claims will cope with the added demand. I hope that the Minister will make a serious attempt to address the specific points that I have raised and refrain from parroting the Treasury line that these measures will “make work pay”. As I have made clear, that has not been the focus of our concerns.

The Government must give assurances that a full impact assessment and evidence base will be provided for future instruments. I would be grateful if the Minister could also give a commitment to outline not only the ongoing improvements being made to the operational mechanisms used to calculate tax credits but what HMRC can do to help support those who receive overpayments. For example, where repayments are large, can they be spread over a number of years? Furthermore, can the Minister assure us that no unreasonable penalties will be levied against those who have been overpaid?

Your Lordships' House has played its role in ensuring that full and effective scrutiny can take place, not only through this debate but, crucially, through the work of the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee, which helped inform the discussion in the other place. I assure the Minister that we will watch developments in this area very carefully, as it is vital that we begin to see progress on addressing the overpayment of tax credits. Labour was well represented in the debate in the other place and made its position clear. The matter went to a vote and the Government succeeded. So the Government must now get on with ensuring that the real-time mechanisms live up to their promises.

[LORD TUNNICLIFFE]

In the coming weeks and months, I do not doubt that there will be issues on which we will have to go further than simply indicating our disapproval and will have to test the opinion of the House. However, it is our judgment as Her Majesty's Official Opposition that today is not such an occasion.

4.45 pm

Lord O'Neill of Gatley: My Lords, I thank those who have taken part so far in this debate. Each time that I have had the pleasure of standing here, I have always learned some interesting thoughts on whatever the topic is. I will try to respond to the things that I have heard as part of my closing statement. First, I will reiterate the broad framework.

This measure needs to be considered alongside the broader steps that the Government are taking, with their ambition for a higher-wage, lower-tax and lower-welfare society, which they were successfully elected to deliver in 2015. Under this proposal is the belief that work will always pay. In that regard, these regulations will reduce the degree of unfairness still persistent in the tax credit system. The reduction to the income rise disregard will reduce the instances where one family receives a higher tax credit award than another family with precisely the same income and the same circumstances. As I have already set out, it is also not unimportant to recall that this policy returns the income rise disregard to its original level.

With the introduction of real-time information, which each of the three speakers mentioned, the tax credits IT system is now more responsive and able to adjust to the fluctuations in family incomes in-year. I will return to that but, as the noble Lord, Lord Kirkwood, in particular mentioned, it is of course important that we try our best to monitor how that progresses. In the event that things do not turn out the way we expect, one would hope that a rational response would be to react accordingly. Before I come back to the specifics, it is also important to point out, as the noble Baroness, Lady Manzoor, herself said and other noble Lords touched on, that this is against the background where we are in any case migrating to universal credit. As part of that, a monthly system will be in operation and it is important to bear in mind that we are already in a position of travel. These new regulations reflect—

Lord Tunncliffe: Will the Minister admit that the only possible rational response if the circumstances turn out as he has just described—and he promised a rational response—would be to return the disregard to the £5,000 level?

Lord O'Neill of Gatley: I am not sure that that would be the only rational response, but it would certainly be one of a number of ideas that one should consider in the event of any evidence that would subsequently accumulate as a result of the implementation of this regulation. Other policies could be thought of as well.

Baroness Manzoor: On that, of course there will not be sufficient time to return and up-level the income disregard from £2,500 to £5,000 because obviously universal credit will come into play. We will have all

this upheaval. Bearing in mind what my noble friend Lord Kirkwood has already indicated, we are talking about this being implemented from 6 April. By the time the Government assess their evidence, many people may well find that they are in debt.

While I have the Floor, I must pick up on what the Minister has said twice. This is not a special award for people. People have to pay this money back the following year. Whether it is set at £5,000 or £25,000 is just a matter of accountancy. I do not want noble Lords who may not be familiar with this issue to think that people are getting £5,000 or £25,000 in their pockets without any comeback. It is simply a buffer zone. But it is the impact of those overpayments that causes real problems because they can push quite a number of people into debt. That is the issue here.

Lord O'Neill of Gatley: Let me respond to the two specific points made by the noble Baroness, Lady Manzoor. The first is linked to the question put by the noble Lord, Lord Tunncliffe. As I said, there are a number of ways one could think of to make a rational response, and one of the reasons I hesitated to go down the path that the question sought to take me is that it is important that this be seen in the context of what is happening with universal credit. Rather than prejudging what is implicit in both questions, which is that the real-time information system will not succeed in the way we believe it will, I think we should give it a chance.

In response to the second point made by the noble Baroness, I suspect that a number of noble Lords will not be aware of something that is technically quite complicated; there may not be sufficient awareness of what we are trying to deal with here. The reason why the disregard is being put back to its original level is because there are people who receive a significant increase in their income where there is no consequence without it coming back down. That is why all members of the coalition were perfectly happy to reduce it so significantly at the start of the last Government.

Lord Kirkwood of Kirkhope: I appreciate that the Minister is trying to make progress, but I wonder if I could ask him a brief follow-up question to RTI. Is he confident that the new system which is to take effect in a few days' time will be sufficiently sophisticated to disaggregate the data flows in the new system from the old system? Otherwise the overpayments that are overhanging the data at the moment will make it impossible for any statistical changes to be determined in the new system as opposed to the old, in terms of how successful or otherwise it might be.

Lord O'Neill of Gatley: My Lords, I have not personally studied the RTI system in enormous detail, but I am confident in our officials' advice and guidance that the system has been sufficiently upgraded to enable us happily to undertake this policy initiative.

Baroness Manzoor: My Lords, that may be the case, but we still have £1.9 billion of overpayments being made now—not before, but now—with more than £5 billion in overpayments and £89 million from 2003-04.

Those are the latest figures. There is a real issue around the real-time information processed at the moment, and that is my concern. I do not feel that the Minister is reflecting his confidence that the systems are working as they should. I am married to an IT expert who works around the world on these major systems and he expressed concern when I told him about the scale of the problem that the DWP is trying to deal with. Some reassurance from the Minister would be really helpful because the system is not working now, and I am talking about now.

Lord O'Neill of Gatley: My Lords, I want to answer in part by referring to something that I have touched on already and I shall elaborate further on its purpose. I could bore noble Lords with the detailed estimates of overpayments going back to when tax credits were first introduced. The underlying purpose of this should be looked at in a broader manner. As I said a few moments ago, this is being done within the context of trying to encourage a higher employment, high wage-earning and more gratified society. Trying to undertake this initiative, despite what happened as a result of the remaining part of the original tax credits proposals, is a sign of the belief that this, to some degree, is a technical decision based on the fact that we have been persuaded that the quality of the IT system can improve this dilemma. By definition, narrowing the income increase to a lower level reduces the conceptual scope for the size of aggregates over payments. It is only appropriate, particularly in the circumstances where we are migrating to universal credit, that this proposal be given a chance.

That takes me directly to some of the more specific comments that I have not answered. In particular, the noble Lord, Lord Kirkwood, very thoroughly outlined the other attraction, against the background of what I have just said, as to why this is being pursued in terms of the aggregate savings over the lifetime of the Parliament. Again, I bring it back to the bigger purpose. The noble Lord correctly identified the £935 million in the last Budget proposals against the background where this is positioned. This is about the same amount of money being agreed with a number of cities around the country in devolution deals over 30 years. To answer all the questions implicit from what the noble Lord said, if more places have the ability to use that money and choose initiatives locally to support greater skills and greater training to help even more work, it is a relatively straightforward policy choice, which should not be seen as too similar to some of the issues debated on tax credits. In that sense it seems relatively straightforward.

The noble Baroness, Lady Manzoor, raised an interesting point, suggesting that the Labour Benches were not as supportive as she hoped they might be. She pointed out the irony, given that this was a policy originally brought in by a Labour Government. That might well be among the reasons why that is the case, because it is in the circumstances where we are migrating to universal credit, where assessments will, in any case, be adjusted on a monthly basis. As I said, if it allows some savings so that the Government can then feel more confident allocating to broader and more substantive initiatives to help real pockets of disadvantage to change their supply response to labour market

conditions—which both the initiatives I mentioned, one of which was not tabled here, should be seen as—it seems an extremely logical thing to do and not as contentious as the noble Baroness implied.

I turn to the questions, which I am not surprised have come, about the impact assessment. It is fair to say that, as a result of that remarkable debate and subsequent vote in this House some time ago, the Treasury has provided a lot of information to the various appropriate committees, the exact names and acronyms of which I shall not attempt to repeat, because I am sure I will get them wrong. A lot of information has been provided as part of that process. That is where the figure of approximately 800,000 people comes from. After considerable discussion, it is not clear to me that any further special impact assessment on this technical measure will necessarily help to provide anything of substance beyond what has already been provided.

5 pm

As I said earlier, we have an environment in which the Government are trying to continue to boost employment and productivity, which we hope will lead to even higher incomes than under the specific policies that we have initiated. There will be no income losers with the introduction of this new policy. That is consistent with the policy. As I said, it is important to see this in the context of the consistency of different policies which are all geared along the same lines. It should not in itself be regarded as directly attached to the other parts of the tax credits debate that has taken place previously.

With respect to the inequality debate, as I have also said previously in this Chamber, there are notable differences within certain quartiles and quintiles, as the noble Lord, Lord Kirkwood, touched on. But, again, this should be seen in the context that—contrary to a lot of misconceptions—according to the general in-aggregate measured evidence, a narrowing of inequalities is taking place both pre-tax and after tax. That is the case unless one looks at wealth where, because of the consequences of significant house prices, there are, unfortunately, signs of inequalities changing for the worse. It is important that sufficient thought is given to policies which do more to boost the supply of new housing, and then that inequality would not arise at some point in the future. While the technical specifics of this measure may pass a lot of people by, it is important to consider that it will not result in any cash loser and is being introduced as we migrate to a universal credit system, which, in itself, will allow for monthly analysis, response and change. Therefore, it is a relatively straightforward matter.

Lord Purvis of Tweed (LD): I have listened to the whole debate. I hope the Minister will clarify the matter further as he referred to other areas where the £935 million reduction in expenditure could be implemented—the city deals and employability and housing. However, I was under the impression that this measure aimed to achieve deficit reduction savings. Page 3 of the Red Book states that this is part of deficit reduction savings. So will he be clear: is this for hypothecated other expenditure or is it for deficit reduction?

Lord O'Neill of Gatley: My Lords, I can be very clear: this is being done specifically to achieve deficit reduction. However, the goal and policy on deficit and debt reduction also contain a number of economic policy priorities, which include a very strong commitment to devolution in many parts of the country. I was merely trying to illustrate that the amount we estimate will be saved from this proposal is very similar in size to the sorts of figures that we are successfully negotiating in a number of parts of the UK. We hope to do more of that going forward.

This change aims to reduce the disregard to £2,500 because that is fair to claimants, reduces inequalities in the tax credits system and is fair to the taxpayer, reducing unnecessary costs. As I have said a number of times, there are no cash losers because these are people whose pay will go up by £2,500 or more. This change will reduce the incidence of temporarily inflated awards, because the system will respond sooner and further to people's changes in income in-year. I commend the regulations to this House.

Baroness Manzoor: My Lords, I thank the Minister for summing up. I also thank my noble friend Lord Kirkwood and the noble Lord, Lord Tunnickcliffe, for their support today, although I am very disappointed. I agreed with everything the noble Lord said, up to a point, but when he said that he would not be supporting the Motion to Regret my heart fell.

I have listened very carefully to what the Minister has said. He has said a number of times that there are no cash losers. We have to disagree on that, because it depends on how you classify cash losers. It is really important to say that this is not a pay rise by any means. This £2,500 is actually recouped back from the tax claimant. It is not a pay rise but can cause great difficulties because of the fluctuations for people who are working on low incomes.

I will not go over the debate again. The House has been very patient and I thank noble Lords for listening. I feel very strongly about this issue and wish to test the opinion of the House.

5.07 pm

Division on Baroness Manzoor's Motion

Contents 104; Not-Contents 206.

Baroness Manzoor's Motion disagreed.

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House of Commons Members’ Fund Bill

First Reading

5.19 pm

The Bill was brought from the Commons, read a first time and ordered to be printed.

Driving Instructors (Registration) Bill

First Reading

5.20 pm

The Bill was brought from the Commons, read a first time and ordered to be printed.

Women: Representation and Empowerment

Motion to Take Note

5.20 pm

Moved by Baroness Williams of Trafford

That this House takes note of the progress made in the United Kingdom in the areas of women’s representation and empowerment 150 years after the 1866 petition to the House of Commons for women’s suffrage.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Communities and Local Government (Baroness Williams of Trafford) (Con): My Lords, it gives me great pleasure to open this debate to mark International Women’s Day, our annual opportunity to pause, to take stock and to reflect on how far women have come in social, economic, cultural and political life, and how far we still have to go.

In 1866, a group of women from the Kensington Society organised a petition demanding the same political rights as men. They found 1,499 brave signatories, and their petition was presented to the MPs John Stuart Mill and Henry Fawcett, who supported universal suffrage. Mill agreed to present the petition, and on 7 June it was presented to Parliament. Elizabeth Garrett, one of the delegation, arrived early in the Great Hall, clutching a large roll of parchment. Feeling conspicuous, she found the only woman there who seemed to belong—the apple seller—and asked her whether she could store the scroll underneath her stand. The apple woman agreed but insisted that she wanted to sign it too.

Mill then added an amendment to the Reform Act, asking for women’s political equality. His amendment fell by 196 votes to 73, but the ladies of the Kensington Society were not crushed, and set up the London Society for Women’s Suffrage. Similar groups sprang up across the country, and in 1887 they joined together to form the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies.

I must mention Manchester. At the turn of the 19th century, Manchester was a hotbed of radical thinking—social, cultural, political and economic. It was there that the suffragettes Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney were thrown out of a meeting at the Free Trade Hall for daring to ask a question about votes for women. They reacted with typical resilience and held a meeting outside in the street. This led to

Motion agreed.

[BARONESS WILLIAMS OF TRAFFORD]

them being arrested, and was the beginning of the militant campaign for the vote for women. The fight for gender equality was on, and it continues still.

The world is a different place 150 years on, and I think the Kensington Society would have been amazed and thrilled at how far we have come. They would see girls outperforming boys at school, outnumbering boys at university and dominating admissions for medicine. They would be amazed to see women in the boardroom, women in the Armed Forces, women heads of state and women in space. None of these advances fell into our laps of course. Women, and male allies, have worked doggedly every step of the way, and their work is not over. Tempting though it is to look to the past and pat ourselves on the back, I prefer to use the lessons of history as a spur to action. I am awed at the courage, the vision and the spirit of those who dared to demand the right to be full, equal citizens. The real value of history lies in how it illuminates our path to the future, and International Women's Day is an opportunity for us all to reflect on the future that we are seeking to achieve.

What is our vision for that future? Of course, women across the world face different struggles and have different priorities. Women in the UK are not homogenous. We start from different places and our journeys are not all the same, but we cross the same terrain, and Governments of all stripes and in all places can help to make our passage easier and safer. They can do this by offering us equal opportunity to fulfil our potential, acting to equalise our life chances, ensuring that women are able to lead and influence, and maximising our safety and freedom from harm.

It all begins, of course, with education. It is hard to believe that in past generations people genuinely thought that women's brain power was inferior to men's. There are surely very few people who would argue that now. In education, the concern is how we can support boys to keep up with the girls. Our concern for girls has shifted from how well they do in school to why their outstripping of boys does not translate into later-life career success.

Part of the reason—I emphasise “part”, as these are multi-faceted problems—is the limits placed by traditional gender roles, so that men and women, boys and girls, feel pressure to conform to restricted choices and aspirations. This International Women's Day, let us celebrate those women who have blazed a trail into traditionally male spaces—such as Roma Agrawal, the structural engineer who worked on the Shard, or space scientist Maggie Aderin-Pocock. They should not be as remarkable as they are.

The Government are working to broaden girls' career choices by encouraging more of them to consider careers in STEM sectors. These are the skills our economy needs, the career choices that will narrow the gender pay gap. The STEM workforce is vital to growth and the economy, and our research bases miss out when we are not drawing scientists and engineers from the widest possible pool of talent.

We are funding programmes such as the Stimulating Physics Network and the Further Maths Support Programme, which support schools and colleges to

increase take-up of maths and physics, with a particular focus on engaging more girls. The Government also support the Your Life campaign, which aims to transform perceptions of science and maths. Provisional results for 2015 show that the number of girls taking maths A-level has increased by 13% over five years, and the number taking physics rose by 16% over the same period.

Some believe that there is nothing wrong with men and women occupying separate spheres, that that is normal and natural and that we should leave well alone, but that is to ignore the very great benefits of encouraging girls at least to consider a wider range of life choices. As well as the benefits to the economy and the simple human justice of allowing people to follow their own talents, there is the fact that what we used to call women's jobs by and large pay significantly less than jobs considered the natural territory of men. This is one of the causes of the gender pay gap.

We are proud that the gender pay gap is narrower than it has ever been before, but it still stands at just over 19%, and the Prime Minister has set out this Government's ambition to eliminate it in a generation. It is an ambitious aim, but one that is essential for empowering women and improving the UK economy. There are of course many reasons why there may be a gender pay gap, and the way forward lies in greater transparency so that employers can identify what is going on, employees can ask questions and consumers can make their own choices. We have published regulations which will increase transparency about the gender pay gap, and we expect employers to start publishing the required information from April 2017. We will be providing a package of support to help businesses to calculate, understand and address their gender pay gaps.

Perhaps I may say at this point how great it is to be here today, among so many women of distinction. This is still a place dominated by men, but we have the highest ever number of women Peers at 210, which is more than one in four of all Peers. In the other place, there are 191 women MPs, nearly 30% of the total.

It is important that women continue to gain positions of leadership and influence. This is not just about parity, but about creating change. Varied life experience makes for richer and more informed decision-making, and greater creativity and innovation.

We are pleased that the target of the noble Lord, Lord Davies, of 25% of women on the boards of FTSE 100 companies has been met and exceeded. Across the whole FTSE 350, the proportion of women is more than double what it was in 2011. There are no more all-male boards in the FTSE 100 and fewer than 20 left in the FTSE 250. This demonstrates the success of a business-led approach, backed by Government, without the need for legislation or quotas. The work is not over: we will promote the business-led 33% target for FTSE 350 boards by 2020 recommended by the noble Lord, Lord Davies, in his October 2015 report. We are pleased that Sir Philip Hampton, chairman of GlaxoSmithKline, will be chairing a new review, ably supported by his deputy, Dame Helen Alexander.

I turn finally to the difficult and emotive subject of violence against women and girls. We will not achieve equality for women while two are being killed by their

partners every week; while they are experiencing sexual harassment on the streets, in schools, in workplaces and online; and while they are enduring forced marriage and FGM. It is not just the individual victims who are affected, numerous and important as they are; the climate of fear that is created for all women and girls affects our everyday interactions, our choices and our freedoms.

Protecting women and girls from violence and supporting victims are key priorities for this Government. We will soon publish a refreshed national strategy on violence against women and girls, which will set out a comprehensive plan of action covering prevention, provision of appropriate services, partnerships to ensure improved multi-agency working and pursuing perpetrators through the criminal justice system. Noble Lords may have seen our new “Disrespect NoBody” TV ad; this is part of a comprehensive teen relationship abuse campaign that will be launched this month. This follows on from the acclaimed “This Is Abuse” campaign, which since 2010 has encouraged teens to rethink their views on violence, consent and controlling behaviour.

We have also made domestic abuse, forced marriage and revenge porn criminal offences, signalling that society is no longer prepared to tolerate these kinds of abuse. We have introduced new stalking laws, rolled out domestic violence protection orders, strengthened the law on FGM and set up the revenge porn helpline, which took more than 3,000 calls in its first year. I am pleased to note that the Chancellor announced £40 million in the spending review for domestic abuse services between 2016 and 2020 and a £2 million grant to Women’s Aid and SafeLives, to support a new domestic abuse early intervention project.

We have been busy, but the work is not over. It will never be over as long as women are restricted from contributing their full potential or punished for daring to follow their own path and live life to the full. There is much to do but I draw heart from the distance we have come. Let us never forget that 150 years ago it was brave and unusual for women even to dare to ask for the vote. Now, as I stand here, I am confident that the vast majority of my peers are firmly in favour of women’s equality in all spheres of life. The hearts and minds of the British people have, largely, been won in favour of fairness and justice, and that is something to celebrate.

5.34 pm

Baroness Drake (Lab): My Lords, John Stuart Mill in response to the petition became the first MP to speak in favour of women’s suffrage in 1867, but the stereotypes and attitudes he identified as holding back equality still prevail today. He challenged those men who believed that politics are not women’s business and would distract them from their proper duties. He asserted:

“The ordinary occupations of most women are, and are likely to remain, principally domestic; but the notion that these occupations are incompatible with the keenest interest in national affairs ... is as utterly futile as the apprehension, once sincerely entertained, that artisans would desert their workshops ... if they were taught to read”.—[*Official Report*, Commons, 20/5/1867; col. 820.]

But even in that radical assertion he acknowledged the persistence of women’s proper duties: domestic responsibilities and caring for children.

Labour’s introduction of the welfare state and the social security system improved the lives of millions, but it was supported by an assumption that the man was the bread winner and the role of married women in work was secondary to their domestic responsibilities. This principle was enunciated by Beveridge in his 1942 report, which stated:

“The attitude of the housewife to gainful employment outside the home ... should not be the same as that of a single woman. She has other duties ... Taken as a whole, the Plan for Social Security puts a premium on marriage, in place of penalising it ... In the next thirty years housewives as mothers have vital work to do in ensuring the adequate continuance of the British race and of British ideals in the world”.

There was a harmony of view across male-dominated organisations. The TUC General Council commented in 1948:

“The home is one of the most important spheres for a woman worker ... It would be doing a great injury to the life of the nation if women were persuaded or forced to neglect their domestic duties in order to enter industry”.

Closing his speech, Stuart Mill stated:

“Sir, before it is affirmed that women do not suffer in their interests, as women, by the denial of a vote, it should be considered whether women have no grievances; whether the laws, and those practices which laws can reach, are in every way as favourable to women as to men”.—[*Official Report*, Commons, 20/5/1867; col. 826.]

It is to that theme that I turn and, in particular, to whether private pension policy is as favourable to women as to men. Because all the inequalities that many women face—in lower pay, occupational segregation, the carer’s penalty and more—are writ large when they come to retire and are too old to mitigate the effects.

The state pension was originally designed to provide for women through their husband’s entitlement. It did not cater for women’s lives as lower earners and carers. In the mid-1990s many thousands of women were living in pensioner poverty. It is still the case that two-thirds of pensioners living in relative poverty are women. The reforms to the state pension system introduced by the Labour Government in 2007 and accelerated by the coalition are designed to provide women, at last, with a pension in their own right, but there are still inefficiencies. Changes in the labour market mean that more women are in mini-jobs, zero and minimum guaranteed hours contracts and other casualised forms of employment, resulting in significant numbers being excluded from building up a state pension.

At the heart of the 2010 consensus on private pension reform was the principle that it must work for women, but recent private pension changes appear to have been, at best, gender-blind and, at worst, to discriminate against women. The coalition’s decision to raise the earnings trigger for auto-enrolment into a pension means that many more women are excluded. Of the 10 million workers eligible for automatic enrolment, 38% are women compared to 62% who are men; that is fewer than two in five. That reality made the Government freeze the earnings trigger until 2017, but hundreds of thousands of women remain excluded.

Government policy is focused on incentivising individual saving, but bread winner attitudes still influence women’s behaviour. The pay gap may have narrowed, but women are saving less into their pension pots than men across the income spectrum. Flat-rating the state

[BARONESS DRAKE]

pension increases the importance of the private pension pillar. Whereas the state pension can be adapted, in part to reflect carers' needs and in part to reflect national insurance contributions, private pensions, with their closer link between contributions and entitlements, may magnify employment inequalities.

Caring is recognised as contributing to the overall economy and so is credited with pension entitlement in the state pension system, but not in the private system. The government consultation on pension tax relief has generated much heat, but any suggestion of a policy to provide carer credit into private pension pots for periods of family caring, most of which is done by women, attracts no consideration.

The Pensions Advisory Service—I declare an interest as a member of its board—gets nearly 190,000 contacts a year. It observes that in particular women face emotional and physical barriers that make it difficult for them to feel empowered to make informed choices and so achieve a good retirement income. What TPAS observed will be confirmed by a new survey, to be published tomorrow by the Fawcett Society, which will show the true impact of having children on the way women and men are treated at work. Many employers still believe that women become less committed to their job when they have children. Maternity discrimination has increased. The continuing motherhood penalty drives inequality and pushes many women and men into traditional male bread winner and female carer roles. The theme of International Women's Day is the "pledge for parity" but without a greater shift in attitudes and more equal sharing of care we will not achieve equality at work or in retirement.

Finally, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Williams of Trafford, for enabling what I believe will be a very rich debate.

5.41 pm

Baroness Northover (LD): My Lords, I, too, thank the noble Baroness, Lady Williams, for introducing what has now become an annual debate in the Lords to mark International Women's Day.

Clearly, huge progress has been made in the United Kingdom since the mid-19th century. Indeed the franchise is equal, which those in 1866 sought. Legislation is in place to seek to guarantee equal rights. Education, that vital foundation for equality, is as open to girls as to boys—and yet.

It is extraordinarily appropriate that the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Gloucester, who has broken through the church's glass ceiling, has chosen to give her maiden speech in this debate. We now have two women on the Bishops' Benches, but let us not forget that we have 23 men.

There is not one country in the world where there is yet full gender equality between men and women. I regret that as we mark International Women's Day in this debate we are not being international. That said, we have of course just agreed the sustainable development goals with the rest of the world, in September last year in New York. The key thing about the SDGs is that they apply to every country, not just the poorest—and that includes our own.

The SDGs seek to ensure that "no one is left behind" as we seek to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030. There follows, of course, a particular emphasis on women and girls. That means that this Government, for example, like others, must now analyse the impact of policies on both men and women. It has to be part of data analysis. So can the noble Baroness, Lady Evans, tell me when she replies which Minister in which department is overseeing the implementation across Whitehall of the SDGs in the UK? Is the Treasury now readier than it was when I was a Minister to analyse any differential impact of its policies on women? I also urge that we continue the coalition's focus on women and girls overseas, on education, rights—including reproductive rights—healthcare and jobs, because what we do there will help to transform lives and economies for the benefit of us all, including here.

Clearly, when it comes to our own situation, we can see the progress we have made. My daughter never doubted that she had as great a chance of going to university as did her brothers, but I do not need to go far back in my own family's history to see the divergence between girls and boys. But even if at the age of 22 my daughter stands possessed of her university degree, her future may yet still be different from that of her brothers.

In the UK one of the biggest barriers to equality is that women are still expected to take the largest share of caring, as the noble Baroness, Lady Drake, pointed out. I was hugely struck when I was a Minister that the vast majority of my male colleagues had partners and children. The vast majority of my female ministerial colleagues had neither. That is not equality. When we were in government, recognising these challenges, we built on what Labour had done to improve childcare. My Lib Dem colleague Jo Swinson introduced shared parental leave. Recognising that caring not only for children but also for elderly parents or partners falls disproportionately on women, we also sought to improve the position of carers. We are the sandwich generation, as the noble Baroness, Lady Pitkeathley, so rightly emphasises. With huge effort we brought forward the Dilnot report and then agreed to cap the costs of social care. This Government have put that on ice. Are they aware that caring costs and responsibilities fall disproportionately on women?

It is through economic independence that women's lives are most likely to be transformed. We still see the gender pay gap, as the Minister mentioned, often largely because women work in lower-paid areas or work part time because they also care for others. As the EHRC points out, more than four decades after the Equal Pay Act, women are still paid almost 20% less than their male co-workers.

We need women at every level of the economy and society, which is why we put such effort into supporting the Davies commission on women on boards. I am very glad that we are now at 25%, with the threat of quotas underpinning the action taken. But we also need to see this extended and replicated in companies outside this group, as well as, most significantly, among chief executives and those lower down the ranks. We also need to see women treated fairly whatever their level in society. As the Minister mentioned, that includes recognising and tackling violence against women.

Those women fighting for the vote in 1866 were also fighting for women to take their rightful place in Parliament, and we need to do still more to ensure that our Parliament is more gender-balanced. At this point, I put up my hands. My party in the Lords has the largest proportion of women, but that is not so for my party in the Commons. When the tide went out for us we lost so many good MPs, but I am especially saddened that we lost our women MPs—although I am very glad to see that one of my colleagues from the Commons is still active in Parliament. Noble Lords can be sure that we are working tirelessly to address this. If their parties can lend us a few safe constituencies, we might find this a little easier.

This is an important point in the year, when we take stock of where we are as a society. I look forward to the rest of the debate and especially to the maiden speeches.

5.48 pm

Baroness Jenkin of Kennington (Con): My Lords, it is an annual pleasure for me to participate in the International Women's Day debate, and particularly this year to come relatively early in the debate when all the points have not yet been made. I thank the Minister for her upbeat opening remarks—and there is indeed much to celebrate. She modestly failed to mention that she missed becoming an MP in 2010 by a mere 92 votes. The House of Commons' loss is definitely the House of Lords' gain.

I look forward to the maiden speeches today. One is by my noble friend Lady Mone, who I know is an inspiration to so many women and girls with her own story of success, her encouragement for others and her autobiography and her motivational speaking. How lucky we are in this Chamber to be able to hear her at first hand. I congratulate her on her recent report on entrepreneurship and disadvantaged communities, *Be the Boss*, and look forward to her contribution to this House and in this Chamber in the years ahead.

The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Gloucester follows me in this debate, and what a great pleasure it is for us all to welcome her here. I talked this morning to my mother, now 91, who was married in 1952 by one of the right reverend Prelate's predecessors, CS Woodward. I suspect that he would have been astonished to see her sitting here, but I hope that he would have been pleased. We very much look forward to hearing her voice today and in future.

I made my maiden speech in this same debate five years ago, and I make no apology for similar contributions and regular updates in debates since then. When Theresa May and I launched the Women2Win campaign in November 2005, the Conservative Party was at a pretty low ebb. For the second election running the percentage of women in the party had stuck at 9%—a miserable 17 women MPs. I am happy to say that things have improved over those 10 years, both within my own party and in Parliament as a whole.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to all those who have campaigned over the years, including men, especially my own great-grandfather, Sir Willoughby Dickinson, MP for St Pancras North and an assiduous

supporter of women's suffrage, who promoted a number of measures in Parliament, including his own Women's Suffrage Bill in 1907. He was motivated by the fact that his sister, a doctor, did not have the vote, a situation that was incomprehensible to him. Watching the film "Suffragette" last year, I imagined him present in that memorable scene when the suffragettes gave evidence in a Committee Room in the other place. I am extremely proud of the part he played in the early days of the campaign, which was not at all a popular position at the time. Imagine how proud he must have felt when his daughter, my grandmother, was elected in 1937. One of a total of nine women MPs at that time, and then the only Conservative woman MP elected in the 1945 general election, she joined this House as one of a tiny number of women Peers in 1962. But enough of ancient history and my personal history.

On behalf of all those who believe that this is an important agenda, I thank all the other pioneers who have supported women candidates in the past, including, from my own party, my noble friend Lady Seccombe; even today I meet women who were encouraged by her in the past, and I look forward to the day when her own granddaughter becomes an MP. My noble friend Lady Morris of Bolton played a significant role for the following generation, as did my noble friend Lady Chisholm, who did so much to ensure the election of a record number of Conservative women MPs last May. I hope that the missing links, our lamented former colleagues, Baroness Miller of Hendon and Baroness Ritchie of Brompton, are looking down at us with smiles of pride on their faces. The Labour Party contributed a seismic shift in this debate with their all-women shortlists. It too has its own heroes, including Harriet Harman, who deserves considerable credit for her tenacity, the noble Baroness, Lady Hollis, and of course the noble Baroness, Lady Gale, from whom we will be hearing later.

In last year's debate I felt rather gloomy. I was even fearful that we Conservatives might not improve our female representation. In the event, though, the general election was to lead to an unexpectedly high number of women MPs, up across the board to a record 29% of the current House of Commons. This was thanks in part to the Scottish National Party's high percentage of successful women candidates, one of whom was standing at the Bar just now. I am afraid—following as I am the noble Baroness, Lady Northover—that we Conservatives gained, I think, 10 women MPs at the cost of Lib Dem MPs, both male and female.

I pay tribute to all candidates from all parties who are prepared to step up to the plate; it is not an easy option. Today we have 68 Conservative women MPs, over 20%, a significant improvement on the figure I gave earlier of 17 only 10 years ago. Indeed, if we had not achieved that improvement I would today be campaigning within my own party for some form of affirmative action. Even with that improvement, though, 20% is not enough. We all need to keep our feet firmly on the accelerator. I for one will continue to encourage my party to pledge that no woman MP in my party will be left behind as a result of the forthcoming boundary review.

[BARONESS JENKIN OF KENNINGTON]

In the past couple of years new players have joined the field, and I welcome their voices in the debate. Hats off to Frances Scott for her passion for equality and for setting up the 50:50 Parliament campaign. It has highlighted the fact that there are still today in the House of Commons more men than have ever been women MPs. Its petition has been signed by some 50,000 people and its pressure on keeping the topic on the agenda is welcome. Similarly, I personally welcome the arrival of the Women's Equality Party.

Even today, some people ask me, "So why does it matter? Why does it matter whether it is 9% or 20% of Conservative women MPs, or whether it is 29% or less in the House of Commons?". In the end, it is quite simple: it matters because women's life experiences are different from men's. They are neither inferior nor superior, just different, and it is that difference that needs to be better reflected across both Houses of Parliament in future.

5.55 pm

The Lord Bishop of Gloucester (Maiden Speech):
My Lords,

"This is a maiden speech, my Lords, and I would crave your indulgence".

So began the maiden speech in November 1958 of Baroness Elliot of Harwood, the first female Peer to speak in this House. She went on to say,

"except for Her Majesty's gracious Opening of Parliament, probably this is the first occasion in 900 years that the voice of a woman has been heard in the deliberations of this House".—[*Official Report*, 4/11/1958; col. 161.]

I cannot make that claim but it certainly feels poignant to be participating in this particular debate as the first female bishop to be introduced as a Lord Spiritual. It is on that note that I thank noble Lords for the overwhelming warmth of their welcome, and for the most practical support that I have received from officers and staff.

I began my professional life in the NHS as a speech and language therapist. I am mindful that as soon as I started work, that profession was in the spotlight in the context of the Equal Pay Act. The legal claim was that speech and language therapists, who were predominantly women, were doing work of equal value to that of male clinical psychologists. That action was eventually settled successfully in the European Court of Justice. My work with children and families as a speech and language therapist fuelled my interest in communication, relationship and connectedness. Together these are a powerful key to understanding and interpreting what it means to be human and made in the image of God.

My call to ordination was not something I welcomed, but I knew that as a follower of Jesus Christ this was about saying yes to an ongoing journey of becoming the woman I was called to be. In the early 1990s women could not be priests in the Church of England, and so when I went to theological college in Oxford I never imagined that one day I might be called to be a bishop. While there, it became possible for women to be priested. When the very first women were ordained as priests here in England in 1994, I was abroad on a

placement in South Africa, just as that country was leading up to its first post-apartheid elections. This was another pivotal time in my desire for all people, irrespective of colour or gender, to flourish fully. All this is connected to my abiding interest in conflict resolution and how people stand together in places of difference. In a world of diversity, including gender, conflict will always be part of everyday life, and we need to learn to live it well. What we see across our world is that people are threatened by "the other".

Over the years, I added my voice to the debate to enable the consecration of women to the episcopate, and my starting point was always the firm conviction that all people are created equal in the image of God and called to use their gifts to the glory of God and for the flourishing of all people.

I am conscious that part of my responsibility in this maiden speech is to give your Lordships a snapshot of the diocese in which I serve. Prior to becoming a bishop, I had spent my entire ministry in London, latterly in the wonderful boroughs of Hackney, Islington and Tower Hamlets. It was therefore a great surprise, and somewhat daunting, to be appointed Bishop of Gloucester last year, and extremely humbling to become the first female diocesan bishop.

The diocese reaches into counties around Gloucestershire—from Warwickshire in the north, down to Chipping Sodbury in south Gloucestershire. The Forest of Dean forms the western part of the diocese, and to the east the Cotswolds deanery runs into Oxfordshire. In my first six months I have discovered what a wonderfully diverse diocese it is: urban areas, market towns, rural villages, areas of outstanding natural beauty and areas crying out for regeneration. There is great affluence and significant poverty. The diocese has a glorious cathedral and almost 400 churches. We have chaplains serving in schools, prisons and hospitals, and many clergy and lay people working together in both traditional and pioneering ways to share the transforming hope and love of Jesus Christ among an ever-growing population. It is predicted that by 2031 there will be over 30,000 new houses in the diocese.

It is in that context of the old and the new that the church is seeking to connect with people's hopes and needs across the diverse range of communities, working alongside other Christian denominations, people of no faith and people of faiths other than Christian. There are food banks, debt advice centres, work with children and families, youth projects, lunch and breakfast clubs, work with refugees and asylum seekers, and lots of connection with art, music and sport in a part of England which hosts numerous festivals, shows and sporting events.

I am particularly excited by the huge contribution made to human flourishing through the work of 116 church schools, which are there for everyone. I also want to mention those within the diocese who serve the common good in ways to keep us safe—among them NATO's Allied Rapid Reaction Corps, and GCHQ in Cheltenham, whose work began at Bletchley Park, where of course 75% of the code-breaking workforce during World War II were women.

While most of the famous filming in the diocese has revolved around male characters, including Sherlock Holmes, Father Brown and Harry Potter, I realise that I live in the only county where the lord lieutenant, high sheriff, bishop and chief constable will soon all be women—something that perhaps seemed impossible in 1866.

However, International Women's Day is about not gender competition but gender parity: women and men, and girls and boys, being of equal value and enabled to fulfil their potential. It is for this very reason that I have chosen to spend much of Holy Week in Eastwood Park women's prison, and it is the reason why I am committed to supporting the work and campaigns of those who seek to engage with the unequal treatment of women across the world. The Gloucestershire online pupil survey has enabled us to listen to the voice of young people. It is concerning that over the past 10 years more young people report not feeling confident about the future, with girls feeling less confident than boys. Such findings are reflected in other national reports, such as those of the Children's Society. International Women's Day reminds us that we have much yet to do together to work for the flourishing and valuing of women worldwide as well as in the UK.

Lady Elliot said in her maiden speech that she would,

"try to set a precedent and be short and to the point"—[*Official Report*, 4/11/1958; col. 161.]

In this I fear I may have failed, but I hope that my words may have enabled us further to take note of the progress made in the UK in women's representation and empowerment. I thank noble Lords once again for their very warm welcome.

6.04 pm

Lord Kakkar (CB): My Lords, it is a distinct pleasure and privilege to follow the maiden speech of the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Gloucester. It was historic and excellent in every way. I was struck by her career prior to ordination and the fact that she had worked in the National Health Service as a speech and language therapist—a vital role. I understand that during that period of her life she developed a concern for and deep commitment to ensuring that people's voices were heard. I have no doubt, following her remarkable maiden speech, that in the years to come the people of Gloucester and, more broadly, our fellow citizens in this great country will have their voices heard very well and effectively through the contributions of the right reverend Prelate in your Lordships' House.

I also congratulate the Minister on having secured this important debate. I will confine my contribution to the transformation of the healthcare workforce and the vital role played in it by women, both in our own country and globally. In so doing, I declare my interest as chairman of University College London Partners, as well as my other interests in the register, and my fellowships of the Royal College of Surgeons and the Royal College of Physicians.

There can be no doubt that one of the greatest achievements of society in the last 150 years is the convergence of men and women in the workplace, and

there can be no more important and dramatic demonstration of that convergence than in the area of healthcare. If we look back to 1866, the then two senior royal colleges—the Royal College of Surgeons and the Royal College of Physicians—were some four decades away from admitting women members. Today, the president of the Royal College of Surgeons, Clare Marx, and the president of the Royal College of Physicians, Jane Dacre, are women at the pinnacle of the medical establishment.

However, it is not only the senior leadership of the profession that reflects greater gender diversity: since the 1990s some 50% to 60% of those entering medical school have been women, and in 2014 the number of female general practitioners on the medical register overtook male GPs for the first time. That is vital because general practice—family community care—is the very foundation of the delivery of healthcare through the NHS. These are important advances.

Globally, some 75% of the entire healthcare workforce is made up of women. Governments both here and abroad have to understand how most effectively to engage with that diverse workforce if we are to meet the challenges of increasing demand for health and social care. What assessment have Her Majesty's Government made of the changing global and national demographic in terms of driving increased demand, changes in the composition of the workforce, and how a workforce that delivers healthcare effectively can be achieved?

Beyond looking at workforce composition in terms of the skills of healthcare professionals, labour economists also identify more broadly a very important difference in the priorities and preferences of men and women in the workforce. A Harvard economist, Claudia Goldin, has looked at pharmacists in this context. In 1970, some 10% of US pharmacists were women, who earned only 60% of the earnings of their male counterparts. As a result of the reorganisation of this very important area of healthcare delivery, some 60% of US pharmacists are now women and they earn approximately 92% of the earnings of their male counterparts.

This transformation has been achieved by consolidation but also by the application of information technology to ensure broader participation by different elements of the pharmacy workforce, allowing continuity of care and not focusing on long hours and the stress associated with certain roles, but ensuring that teams can come together using technology to allow the different elements that wish to make different contributions to work effectively for patient safety. What assessment have Her Majesty's Government made of the future adoption of information and digital technology in the provision of healthcare to ensure that both male and female members of the healthcare workforce can be most effectively engaged to deliver effective and safe care in our NHS?

Finally, a very interesting report published in 2015 by the Center for Talent Innovation, entitled *Harnessing the Power of the Purse*, identified that in many communities and societies 59% of women make healthcare decisions for other people. That is not only mothers, because 43% are working women without children. It is a striking statistic that women have such a profound

[LORD KAKKAR]

impact on taking decisions such as the vaccination of members of their families and communities, undergoing preventive screening and attending medical clinics for health advice. However, only 38% of the women who admitted to having the role of taking healthcare decisions for others felt that they were sufficiently informed and educated to take those decisions in a meaningful way. Clearly, there is a greater need to ensure education for the whole population and—in a context where women might be considered the chief health officer in their families and communities—that the information is provided in a meaningful and effective way to allow them to take these decisions.

Given the increasing need in the NHS to look at public health and preventive medicine strategies, what assessment have Her Majesty's Government made of the opportunity to target women undertaking the role of chief health officer in their own families and communities, so that they can be better informed and educated to achieve our national goal?

6.12 pm

Baroness Corston (Lab): My Lords, I first spoke in a debate on International Women's Day in 1993 in the other place. I want to place on record my pride in the fact that today's debate is supported on all sides of the House; 23 years ago, it was greeted with derision from some Benches, so at least we have made some progress. I also want to congratulate the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Gloucester on her splendid maiden speech. I am one of the few Members of your Lordships' House who lives in her diocese, and I am proud of that fact.

In the brief time available to me today in this welcome debate, I want to talk about a group of women who are rarely mentioned in this or any other debate: women in our prisons and, in particular, those held in Holloway prison. The prison was built in 1985, so it is certainly not one of the Victorian prisons that Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Justice, has earmarked as unsuitable for modern times. However, it is most certainly the preferred option for London's sentenced women.

In October 2013, the findings of the *Women's Custodial Estate Review* showed that, despite there having been some criticism of the physical design of the prison, "Holloway must remain an integral part of the women's estate". It is in a key location to serve courts in London and the south-east. Women held there spoke in positive terms about their closeness to family and the ability of their visitors to travel to the prison, which maximises their visits and supports family ties. These conclusions were endorsed by the recent inspection of Holloway by the chief inspector, which found that, "the central location of the prison facilitated women's contact with their family, friends and community", and commented that an impressive range of partner organisations was involved in delivering the reducing reoffending pathways.

It is important to remember that, each year, about 17,000 children are affected by their mother's imprisonment. The costs to the public purse in care provision, adoption and fostering, because many of

these women do not get their children back, are huge. I first visited Holloway in 1993, and I have never forgotten the first time that I saw a baby in prison. Her mother had committed an offence for which prison was entirely disproportionate—a common phenomenon in women's prisons.

I made it clear in my report on the vulnerabilities of women in the criminal justice system, *The Corston Report*, published almost exactly nine years ago, that we needed very few prisons for women but that we needed a network of women's centres across the country to help these women turn their lives around, become responsible citizens and become people of whom their children could be proud. I pay tribute to the last Labour Government and, in particular, the then Home Secretary, Jack Straw, for providing £15 million to help with the establishment of women's centres, which now number about 50, although one, alas—Alana House in Reading—closed recently because a community rehabilitation company withdrew funding. This goes to the heart of the fact that the women's prison population has gone down from about 4,500 in 2006 to around 3,900 now. However, the number of women held in prison for the whole of 2014 was 9,041.

A team from the Inspectorate of Prisons carried out a full inspection of Holloway from 28 September to 8 October last year. Obviously, a huge amount of work was done by prison staff, as well as in the impressive array of voluntary projects which work alongside staff. The resultant positive debriefing paper left staff feeling upbeat and proud of their endeavours. I was therefore staggered to receive a letter dated 25 November 2015 from Caroline Dinéage, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women, Equalities and Family Justice, announcing that the Government propose to close Holloway and relocate the women on remand—45% of whom do not get a custodial sentence—to HMP Bronzefield, situated near Ashford in Surrey, while sentenced women will be held at Downview prison near Sutton, also in Surrey. Women were moved out of Downview a few years ago to improve security and make it safer for men.

The Minister told me that the Holloway site is to be sold for housing. It is important to remember that, in 2010, the National Offender Management Service looked at the potential to close Holloway and sell the site for £40 million-plus—no doubt it is worth a lot more now—but rejected that because of the impact on families trekking long distances across London to outer locations. No one argued then that sending women to much more inaccessible sites in Surrey was remotely sensible or practical, and the idea was shelved.

Then there are the voluntary partner organisations. They are London-based and the chief inspector commented on them in glowing terms. They can and do respond regularly to calls for aid at short notice. The Griffins Society has been working in Holloway for years, and Women in Prison, of which I am the patron, sends in staff regularly to work with inmates in a range of activities. Hibiscus Initiatives works with foreign national women. These women are often those unfortunates referred to as drug mules, but now there are also women who have been trafficked. Hibiscus can assist with foreign language translation and advocacy,

possible in a multicultural conurbation such as London but there will not be too much of that in Surrey. These women appreciate the diversity among staff in Holloway, which also reflects the location of the prison. Foreign national women who were held in Downview some years ago hated it. These organisations also do valuable work with the nearly 75% of women in our prisons who have mental health problems, many of which are severe.

The last time I was in Holloway, a Chinese woman there was hysterical and could not stop screaming. She spoke only Mandarin, and Hibiscus found a woman in London who spoke Mandarin. It turned out that the woman being held in Holloway thought she was going to be summarily shot. She had been trafficked to this country to sell pirate CDs and DVDs. It was possible, given the location of the prison, to set her mind at rest.

Holloway now is nothing like the prison from which the noble Lord, Lord Ramsbotham, stormed out in disgust when he was chief inspector, and the National Offender Management Service should know better than this. If the Government had announced that Holloway was to close and the site be used for social housing, but not before a small women's prison and, preferably, two women's centres were opened in different parts of London, I would hang out the flags. In the absence of such a commitment, I remain implacably opposed to this wrong-headed policy.

6.19 pm

Baroness Mone (Con) (Maiden Speech): My Lords, as a wee girl, I grew up in a tenement flat in the east end of Glasgow with no bath or shower and only a cupboard for a bedroom. So I cannot begin to explain what an honour it is to make my maiden speech in your Lordships' House today. It is an honour to be making my speech alongside the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Gloucester and I congratulate her on a brilliant and historic maiden speech.

I wondered whether I would fit in here, but I should not have worried. I am endlessly grateful for the guidance and support from all the officers and everyone who works in this wonderful House, and for the kindness and warmth of welcome from Members on all sides. I thank in particular my two sponsors, my noble friends Lord Freud and Lady Morris of Bolton. To my noble friend Lady Morris I say a huge thank you for being the best mentor I could ever have wished for, gently correcting me when I get things wrong. I also thank the noble Baroness, Lady Williams, and the Chief Whip for finding the time for this important debate.

I am dyslexic, and this speech is harder than any business I have ever started—and I started my first business when I was 10 years old. I had a paper round and, by the time I was 11, I had 17 teenagers working for me. Then, at the age of 12, I got a job in the local fruit and veg shop, but I was soon headhunted by the sweetie shop across the road, which paid me 15p more an hour. So I can tell your Lordships that I was off like a shot.

My parents did not have an easy life. My brother died when he was a baby and my dad was confined to a wheelchair at the age of 38. So, at the age of 15, I decided to leave school and go to work. I had nothing

except passion, determination and a can-do attitude. I did not realise it at the time, but those are the basic ingredients required to be an entrepreneur.

At the age of 24, after years of working for others, getting married and having children, I decided to go it alone. I went to see the incredible Prince's Trust, which gave me the help I needed to start up my business. I started it in my bedroom and, against all the odds, turned it into a successful global brand.

Innovation was always crucial to its success, and I sold the company last year to spread my wings and satisfy my entrepreneurial spirit. So I was honoured and truly touched when the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Iain Duncan Smith, asked me to head a review on a subject close to my heart: boosting start-up businesses in deprived areas. My team and I travelled across the country, from John o'Groats to Land's End, speaking to hundreds of people and more than 70 organisations. I found that the greatest barriers for start-ups are not just a lack of capital or expertise but loneliness, lack of confidence and poor access to support networks. These barriers are experienced mostly by women. Although I feel that the situation is the best it has ever been since I started my business, we still have a long way to go. Just 20% of SMEs are led by women and, as a working mum of three, I know how hard it can be. Being an entrepreneur can be the loneliest job in the world, and that is why being part of a network, support and mentoring are vital.

I was lucky that my mum and dad taught me that dreams can come true if you work hard, are honest and never, ever give up. They worked around the clock to give us a better life. My fantastic kids, Rebecca, Declan and Bethany, have put up with an entrepreneurial mum, but they support and encourage me every day. I thank them all for the part they have played in my success. Many people are not so fortunate.

Today is 140 years to the day since another Scot, Alexander Graham Bell, patented a device that revolutionised the way in which we communicate, the like of which the world had never seen before. We need to think big, just like Graham Bell did, and find new ways to improve communication and networking for those who need it most.

If we were to utilise the skills of all the women currently out of work in the UK, it is predicted that we would see economic benefits of between £15 billion and £21 billion per year. That is more than the total value of all UK exports to China.

The first part of my report was published last week and I am delighted to say we are already seeing progress, with one of the world's leading banks, HSBC, committing to provide hubs to support start-ups in deprived areas. I will be looking to the Government to make progress on implementing my other recommendations for the good of start-up businesses in this country.

This country is a fantastic place to start a business. However, far too often, we focus on the doom and gloom, when a positive mental attitude is needed for success. I want to see a future where women and girls, as well as men and boys, from even the most deprived areas dream of starting their own business. I am committed to ensuring that each and every one of

[BARONESS MONE]

them has an equal chance to succeed. I want them to believe that it does not matter where you are from: if you have a dream, determination, a can-do attitude and access to support, you will succeed.

The greatest gift we can offer is inspiration. I love music and I would like to share with you the words of a song by the late, great Whitney Houston, which inspired me when I was growing up. I normally sing this at karaoke, but on the advice of our wonderful doorkeepers, I thought I would spare your Lordships' ears:

"I believe the children are our future
Teach them well and let them lead the way".

I am devoted to helping achieve our goals for the people of this country. I look forward to playing a full and active role in your Lordships' House and to joining Members on all sides to inspire and support the next generation of entrepreneurs, to promote the role and importance of women, and to ensure that every single young person in the United Kingdom has the opportunity, support, pride and belief they need to succeed, wherever they are from and whatever their circumstances.

6.28 pm

Lord Fowler (Con): My Lords, it is such a pity that the noble Baroness did not burst into song, but there we are. It is a great pleasure to follow her and to congratulate her on her maiden speech, which was by any standards quite outstanding—I say that quite sincerely. Looking the noble Baroness up on Google, I noticed that she had already had a notable political success: it was a beaming picture of her between Iain Duncan Smith and George Osborne. It was a picture of happy unity; she had brought them together. There are not many who can say that just now. Her next challenge is a photograph with Boris and David Cameron.

More seriously, the noble Baroness made an admirable speech based on her own experience and struggles, and on entrepreneurship, which seems to have gone back an incredibly long way into her childhood. If I may say so, it stands as an encouragement for so many young people in this country. As far as this House is concerned, we all very much look forward to her next contributions. I also congratulate the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Gloucester on her outstanding speech—the first woman bishop to speak in this House. My noble friend has already paid her tribute and my only question, having listened to her, would be: why has it taken so long for a woman bishop to get here?

This debate has ranged wide and, quite rightly, much has concentrated on those things that have been achieved. In so many ways, the position of women has been transformed. But I want to make a brief plea for one group of women—and it will come as no surprise to the noble Lord, Lord Cashman—who have not been empowered and even less have political influence. That is women with HIV. It is one of the strange features of the debate on HIV and AIDS that so often—I would say almost always—the discussion is in terms of men, men having sex with men and the rights of gay men. Of course, that is vastly important. Around the world, gay men are discriminated against

and are often the subject of violence and contempt. But in our concern for them, we should not forget the equally real plight of women.

We should remember that over half of those living with HIV around the world today are women. That means that globally there are around 17 million to 18 million women living with HIV and over the last 10 years we have had something like 4 million AIDS-related deaths. We should remember the impact that that has had on the hundreds of thousands of children who inherit the virus. Half the children living with HIV will die before their second birthday if they do not receive treatment and, disgracefully, only a third of children receive such treatment.

We should also remember that, although the position is undeniably worse in many countries overseas, notably in sub-Saharan Africa, that does not mean that in some strange way Britain is exempt. Here, over 35,000 women are living with HIV. In particular, there is a major problem among the black African community. Of course, that is not remotely a general problem, but we cannot evade the truth that women in the black African population pose a particular challenge, not least because of their fear that if their position becomes known they will be subject to discrimination.

The truth is that, irrespective of country, the public attitude to women with HIV is often very similar. They encounter stigma and violence wherever they turn, and not just in Africa. I remember being in India looking at the position there. Women were blamed when it was quite clear that the infection had been transmitted by the man. That did not prevent women being ostracised, being forced to leave their homes and to live lonely lives as widows in big cities, all because they had contracted a virus which was not infectious and could easily be treated.

Nor should we believe that in Britain the same stigma does not apply. A study at Homerton University Hospital in east London showed that almost half of the women with HIV had suffered some form of violence, predominantly from a partner, and Professor Jane Anderson, who does such enormously good work in this area, says that stigma is quite simply a huge issue. I was encouraged by what my noble friend Lady Williams of Trafford said about violence, and I hope that women with HIV will be included in any proposals that come forward. This wall of stigma has one overwhelming impact. It means that many women are reluctant to come forward for testing, fearing that the result could publicly leak into their community. When eventually they do come forward, it is either late, making treatment more difficult, or too late. That is the bleak and largely hidden problem that we face.

What can we do in this country to tackle these issues? The position of women with HIV has to rise further up the agenda. It means people in this country trying to take a lead even when we are not directly affected. For example, all efforts should be directed at ending the criminalisation of homosexuality because it has a direct read-across on the position of women generally, not just gay women. Where Governments have such laws, they make an explicit statement that prejudice, discrimination and stigma are all to be

tolerated. I was encouraged to hear the right reverend Prelate's comments on that and I hope that the churches will take a leading role.

What can we do directly in this country? Ever since I entered this field 30 years ago this year, my hope has been that Britain would lead the world. For a time, I think that we did, but it would be a brave man who said that we were doing so today. Where we could make a distinctive contribution is in prevention, a point that has already been made—preventing women becoming infected in the first place. HIV is a virus and it should be treated like any other ailment or disease. If we are to have good public health policies, we need to have resources to go behind them.

I make one last point. We have talked today about the discrimination that for so long prevented women having even basic rights. As we celebrate the advances that have been made, we should remember that discrimination does not fit into neat and totally separate boxes. The boxes connect, as our experience with HIV shows, where discrimination against men directly affects the position of women. In a debate such as this, we should remember also the mountains still to climb and that women's empowerment still has a very long way to go.

6.36 pm

Lord Cashman (Lab): My Lords, it is always an honour and a pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Fowler, when he eloquently, once again, gives a voice to the voiceless and an image to those who otherwise would remain invisible. I also congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Mone, on her excellent maiden speech, and the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Gloucester on hers. Interestingly, we share something in common. The noble Baroness, Lady Mone, was born in the east end of Glasgow and I was born in the East End of London, where my first job was working in a shop at the age of seven, standing on a beer crate so that I could see the customers on the other side. Unlike the noble Baroness, I did not work my way up in the business field. Of course, the right reverend Prelate also worked in and saw the beauty of the East End and its amazing people. I congratulate them both on their maiden speeches, and the noble Baroness, Lady Williams of Trafford, on once again securing this debate and opening it with her usual brilliance and commitment to equality. It is always wonderful to see the noble Baroness at the Dispatch Box defending equality across the board, brooking no prejudice.

Today, I want to widen the debate slightly further. For me, the national is international and the international is national. Therefore, in the context of today's debate, I want to refer to the World Economic Forum *Global Gender Gap Report 2015*. It has many echoes for us here in the United Kingdom and represents the barriers to representation and the empowerment of women. Its main findings with regard to the gender gap between men and women internationally are:

"Despite an additional quarter of a billion women entering the global workforce since 2006, wage inequality persists, with women only now earning what men did a decade ago ... The global gender gap across health, education, economic opportunity and politics has closed by only 4% in the past 10 years ... Is education failing women?"

I would say that it is. The report continues:

"The gap has widened in 22% of surveyed countries since 2006 and, while more women"—

as we have heard from the Minister—

"than men are enrolling at university in 97 countries, women make up the majority of skilled workers in only 68 countries and the majority of leaders in only four".

Political empowerment is the fourth pillar measured by the index and it is the widest. Worldwide, only 23% of the gender gap has been closed. Although this area has seen the most improvement—up by 9% from 14% in 2006—sadly only two countries have reached parity in Parliament and only four have reached parity on ministerial roles. I turn to the United Kingdom. The figures set out in the Library document are interesting indeed. We have heard that now 29% of MPs are women—the highest proportion, but nowhere near the 50% parity that we need to achieve. In local government, 32% of local authority councillors are women, which again is not enough.

So we are doing well but it is clear that we need to do more. Central to empowerment and greater representation is education and tackling the issues that prevent or dissuade women, in particular raising levels of aspiration and addressing the key issues of lifelong learning and key role models. This applies especially across different age groups and different educational levels. Not all of us reached where we are today by following the same educational route. It is about reinforcing the ability, talent and aspiration that are common and unique to us all, as well as a sense of purpose and duty.

Yet despite some progress, far too many women are trapped in low-paid work or are not in employment at all. Often by virtue of birth—to whom they are born and where they are born—they are actively dissuaded from breaking out of the stereotype imposed on them. I look at my own mother who, because she was a woman, had to follow her mother, who had been an office cleaner. If my mother had had daughters instead of sons, they would have gone into factories like her and her sisters, or into office cleaning. I watched my mother do all-night office cleaning, then early-morning cleaning. She would come home to get her children off to school, rest, do the housework, and then go off to more office cleaning. I would look at her rounded and hunched shoulders as the result of years of carrying heavy shopping. Never once was it thought, because of where she was born and to whom she was born, that she could have had a different life.

I therefore want to pay tribute to the trade union movement which was pivotal in championing the rights and empowerment of women, and is still doing so today. Each day as I walk through St Stephen's Hall I look at the statue of the first Viscount Falkland, and I see a physical reminder of the fight for women's universal suffrage: the repaired sword and the broken spur where in 1909 Margery Humes chained herself in the fight for votes for women—for universal suffrage.

Women are also empowered when they feel safe. Much vital work is being done in this regard by the Safe Gigs for Women campaign. It sounds like a joke but it is not. It seeks to make venues and festivals safe for women, which others so often take for granted. The HeForShe campaign is today being rolled out

[LORD CASHMAN]

internationally by Barclays, which brings men into the campaign for equality, remembering that only together can we all advance. As the noble Lord, Lord Fowler, said, we must recognise that there are still barriers to women achieving. They are based on a multiplicity of discrimination, with each ground of discrimination compounding the other: discrimination on the grounds of race, ethnicity, religion, belief, age, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity. Trans women face almost insurmountable barriers and discrimination across the spectrum. The noble Lord, Lord Fowler, also pointed out that women living with HIV must never be forgotten.

The situation internationally, as I said earlier, affects us here, too. Women refugees are the mothers of refugees and are driven almost insane by the need to protect their families. I see them crammed into boats or their faces pressed against razor-wire fences in the western Balkans. I see them queuing for food, water and medicine. I look at the human race and what we have become, and I hang my head in shame. We must never barter away the rights of another in order to protect our own, because as soon as we do, we diminish our own rights and gain nothing. We can look up and say that we have done well for women and girls in our society and in some other parts of the world, but we cannot yet hold our heads high when we see civilisation behaving in such a self-obsessed and protectionist way. So much has proudly been done, but there is so much more to do.

6.45 pm

Baroness Barker (LD): My Lords, it is an absolute pleasure to take part in today's debate and to have listened to the excellent maiden speeches of the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Gloucester and the noble Baroness, Lady Mone. I, too, have things in common with them. I was raised in a religious household, albeit of a different variety from that of the right reverend Prelate, and I worked in a greengrocer's when I was at school. Indeed, there was a time when I could weigh perfectly a pound of vegetables in my hand. Like them, I never thought that I would end up as a Member of your Lordships' House. That I did is owed in part to visionary people like John Stuart Mill and William Beveridge who believed in women's place in society and did what they could to encourage our involvement in it. I look forward very much to working with the right reverend Prelate and the noble Baroness to make sure that, now that we are here, lots of other women benefit as we did from such efforts.

The noble Baroness, Lady Williams, started in 1866. I have to go one better than that and say that in 1865 Elizabeth Garrett Anderson qualified as the first female doctor in this country after some considerable application to do so. In 1872 she managed to open the first hospital for women and children. Let us flip forward to December 2015 when the Chief Medical Officer issued her report, *The Health of the 51%: Women*. I want to talk about a group of people who get only one mention in that report, and that is LGBT women. As I say, we got only one mention and that was in relation to violence. Domestic violence is an issue in our community—let us not run away from that; and I thank the Government for their recent financial support

for Broken Rainbow UK, the charity which deals with these issues—but is it our biggest presenting issue to the National Health Service? No, not by any stretch of the imagination.

Many large-scale studies show that lesbian, bisexual and trans women are much more likely to have long-standing health conditions and that we are particularly at risk of known public health risk factors such as smoking and drinking. We have a significant percentage of women who have sex with women and contract STIs, but very little information is made available to women on how to protect themselves. We even have health practitioners who wrongly think that lesbians are not entitled to some of the screening that other women receive, and that is dangerous. We also know in our community that there is very little information at all for us on matters to do with cancer. Why should we be considered to be different from other women when it is as big an issue for us as it is for anyone else? Finally, as lesbians grow older they are much more likely to be alone. In 2004 the Stonewall report *Unhealthy Attitudes* explained a bit why this happens. It surveyed 3,000 health and social care staff. Some 24% of staff had heard colleagues make negative remarks, while 57% of NHS staff did not think that a person's sexuality had any bearing on their health whatever, and 72% of patient-facing staff had not been given any training at all.

I am happy to share a little of my personal experience. When you call in for a routine screening, the person who engages with you says, "Well, what about contraception?". You think, "I don't need it". They then say, "Well, at your age you might think you don't, but perhaps you do". When you sit there and say, "No, I really, really don't need this", the dynamic and the trust disappear completely. It is a terrible situation in which women go to their health providers and just feel that they do not have any confidence that they will be treated correctly and with respect.

The noble Lord, Lord Cashman, referred to the ground-breaking report of the Women and Equalities Committee from earlier this year, which talked about trans women's health. We know that there is a particular problem in that we do not have enough surgeons to meet the demand from women who need to have surgery, and who do not have support for their mental health, quite apart from the physical health. More than that, we do not have staff at primary care level who have been through the training and can deal with those women as they would other people. It was interesting to sit and listen to people giving evidence to the committee about how they had gone in with common health complaints and had been referred to the gender identity clinic—as if those in the gender identity service knew what to do about respiratory illness or whatever. It is completely and utterly inappropriate. The National Health Service is a great institution and I do not want to run it down, but those of us who are taxpayers and LGBT women have a right to deserve better—just to get what everybody else does.

Following the publication of a number of these reports, including *Unhealthy Attitudes*, NHS England ran some round tables and acknowledged that, in particular, patients and the workforce should be monitored

to ensure that much greater attention is paid to the health and social care needs of LGBT women, not least under the Equality Act's public sector equality duty. I ask the Minister: what steps has the NHS taken to implement the recommendations in the LGBT action plan and what is its plans for next year? How will it ensure that we are included in that? In the light of the findings of the Women and Equalities Committee's transgender report, what are the Department of Health and NHS England going to do about the admittedly dire situation of provision for those women?

Medical pioneers such as Elizabeth Garrett Anderson realised something important: it is only when we live in communities that understand our needs as individuals, and when we have institutions that bring us together on the basis of our similarity and not trading on our differences, that we become a successful economy and society. In the spirit of International Women's Day, I ask the Minister to consider my questions and give us some answers.

6.52 pm

Lord Patel (CB): My Lords, I, too, congratulate the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Gloucester and the noble Baroness, Lady Mone, on their brilliant speeches. They are obviously women of ability and talent, and are great communicators. I look forward to hearing them more.

On the last occasion I spoke in this debate, I started by saying that I was going to tell a story of HeLa cells, which are cancer cells. After I had gone along this line for about two minutes, I was getting looks of amazement. Clearly the noble Baronesses in particular were feeling that I had lost the plot. I intend to continue in the same vein today, for I begin by telling the story of photograph 51. Photograph 51 is an X-ray diffraction image of DNA, which contributed to the discovery of DNA and the now-famous double helix model created by Watson and Crick, and for which Watson, Crick and Wilkins were awarded the Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine in 1962. I can see the same look coming on noble Lords' faces now, so I had better come clean.

In her introduction, the noble Baroness, Lady Williams, mentioned the contributions that women make to social, economic, cultural and political life at the highest level. I add to that the contribution that women make to science. This will be the century of science. We will see more discoveries in all fields of science, which will contribute to our wealth and well-being. Photograph 51 was taken by Rosalind Franklin, a chemist who graduated from Newnham College, Cambridge, and who gained a PhD in 1945. In 1951 she used X-ray crystallography to develop the molecular structure of DNA as a research associate at King's College London, under the supervision of Maurice Wilkins, who was considered rather a disagreeable man. Two years later she would leave King's College, because of her disagreements, to work at Birkbeck College, where she did research on viruses, including tobacco mosaic viruses. One of her team members was Aaron Klug, who was later awarded a Nobel Prize for his work on viruses in 1982.

Rosalind Franklin died in 1958 at the age of 37 of ovarian cancer—still a very nasty disease. Controversy has always surrounded not only her contribution to the discovery of DNA, but why she was not awarded a Nobel Prize together with Watson, Crick and Wilkins. She may also have got a second Nobel Prize—and hence joined the only woman, Marie Curie, to have been awarded two Nobel Prizes—jointly with Sir Aaron Klug, but she did not live long enough and Nobel Prizes are not awarded posthumously. Surprisingly, she also worked with Ronald Norrish, who was awarded a Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1967. Apparently, that relationship was not happy either.

In the United Kingdom, only four women since 1901 have been awarded Nobel Prizes. Two, Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan, were awarded the Peace Prize for initiating peace in Northern Ireland in 1976. A Nobel Prize was awarded in 2007 to Doris Lessing at the age of 88 years and 58 days—the oldest person to be awarded a Nobel Prize. Her novels are very commonly known, in particular *The Grass is Singing*. She wrote 50 other novels. She was followed by MI5 and MI6 because of her communist leanings. She fought for equality and against apartheid, which she had seen in Southern Rhodesia, as it then was. Her Nobel oration, entitled *On Not Winning the Nobel Prize*, was later produced in a limited-edition manuscript to support children with HIV and AIDS.

The fourth Nobel Prize awarded to a woman in the United Kingdom, and the only one in science so far, was awarded in 1964 to Dorothy Crowfoot Hodgkin, known commonly as Dorothy Hodgkin. At the age of 10 she was interested in chemistry and crystals. She gained first-class honours—then only the third woman to do so—at Somerville College, Oxford. Using crystallography and X-ray crystallography she discovered the structure of vitamin B12, insulin and penicillin. Crippled from the early age of 24, she worked and researched all her years in a wheelchair. In 1965 she was only the second woman to be awarded the Order of Merit, the first being Florence Nightingale.

The fact that very few women in science are recognised at the highest level has to be a concern, for we have some of the most brilliant women scientists. Even today, the first woman president, appointed last year, of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, of which I am a fellow—a society that was founded in 1783—is Jocelyn Bell Burnell. She read physics in Glasgow and got her PhD at Cambridge. At a young age she was interested in astronomy. As a postgraduate student, she contributed to and operated an 81.5 megahertz radio telescope. In 1969, analysing miles of printouts of data from radio telescopes, she noted a few unusual signals. She later determined that these signals emerged from super-dense, rapidly spinning collapsed stars, now known as pulsars. Her supervisor, Antony Hewish, and Martin Ryle were awarded a Nobel Prize in physics in 1974, but Jocelyn Burnell was not, despite the fact that she was the second author on the paper.

Of course it is not good if top women scientists do not get the recognition they deserve, but things are changing. The Royal Society, founded in 1660, has yet to have a woman president, but last year it elected 11 women as part of the 58 new fellows. In 2015,

[LORD PATEL]

35% of the new fellows of the Academy of Medical Sciences were women. For the economic success and welfare of our country, we need people to study STEM subjects. Only 12.8% of the STEM workforce are women, despite the fact that women get top grades at school. Unfortunately, most of them go into medicine, but they might choose other subjects and enter other professions if they are given the chance to do so. Only 17% of STEM professors are women. We need to promote having more women studying STEM subjects and a greater recognition of women in science. The pledge on parity should apply equally to women in science.

7 pm

Baroness Morris of Bolton (Con): My Lords, I congratulate the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Gloucester on her excellent maiden speech. How good it sounds to say “her” maiden speech. I also offer huge congratulations to my noble friend Lady Mone on a maiden speech that encapsulated her warmth, sense of humour and no-nonsense, down-to-earth attitude. She was enormously kind about me but I have to tell your Lordships that the pleasure is all mine, although I take some pride in the fact that my noble friend now calls the Royal Gallery by its real name and not “that big cold room”. She is a breath of fresh air and an asset to these Benches and your Lordships’ House.

Women have always worked for the well-being of their families, and so contributed enormously to the economy, but I was surprised to find that women’s employment rates were as high in 1851 as they were in 1971—roughly 43%—a fact that I came across thanks to Noor Abdel-Haq from Oxford Spires Academy, who spent last week with me on work experience and thoroughly enjoyed her time looking up statistics for this debate. However, while the numbers of women working might have been similar for much of the past 150 years, the difference in the quality of employment, the status of women in the workplace and women’s representation are light years ahead. I, too, thank my noble friend the Minister for giving us the chance to reflect and note these significant changes.

Later this year, it will be 15 years since my right honourable friend Iain Duncan Smith asked me to become vice-chairman of the party with responsibility for candidates. I worked closely with my noble friends Lady Shephard of Northwold and Lord Taylor of Holbeach, and we were charged with making the Conservative Party look more like the country it aspired to represent; and that meant we needed more women because, whatever your views on all-women shortlists, the 101 Labour women MPs elected at the 1997 general election literally changed the face of British politics for ever. We were enormously successful in finding talented women candidates; we just were not as successful at winning the 2005 general election; and all our efforts yielded only 17 women MPs. Most went on to be elected in 2010 and 2015, many now serving as Ministers and in the Cabinet, and others—I look at our Front Bench—have come to your Lordships’ House and serve as Ministers.

However, it takes a long game to change a culture and it takes endless patience, preparation and, above all, support. I pay enormous tribute to my noble

friend Lady Jenkin of Kennington, whose unstinting work with Women2Win, the organisation set up in 2005 by her, my right honourable friend Theresa May and by men and women to encourage more women to get involved in politics, saw the number of Conservative women MPs increase in 10 years from 17 to 68, as we have heard. That is not just good for the Conservative Party; it is good for Great Britain.

The progress of women in the United Kingdom cannot be debated in isolation. It is a big world out there and we have much to learn from one another. So although today’s debate concentrates on the United Kingdom, I am sure that my noble friend the Minister will not mind if, on the eve of International Women’s Day, I mention my beloved Middle East. I had to be the first to break rank and go international. I declare my interests as set out in the register.

There are a lot of misconceptions about the role of women in the Middle East, and, sadly, we heard some of them voiced in your Lordships’ House a couple of weeks ago. It is far too easy to trot out the stereotypes when the truth is somewhat different. Women’s suffrage has varied in the Middle East and north Africa. It began in mandated British Palestine in 1946, and now across the region women can vote and stand for office. Last month, the United Arab Emirates announced the appointment of eight women Ministers, and women sit in the Shura Council in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

In a report in 2012 on women’s empowerment in the region, the George W Bush Presidential Center confirmed that the Middle East is crowded with highly accomplished, strong and determined women. We see this in the wonderful women ambassadors who serve in the UK—currently from Morocco and Lebanon and previously from Bahrain, Jordan and Tunisia—and in inspiring businesswomen such as Rasha Al Roumi, who runs Kuwait Airways, and Randa Ayoubi from Jordan, the founder of Rubicon, an Amman-based entertainment company, who was recently named one of the 25 most influential women in global television. In Kuwait, there are now more women than men graduating in science and engineering. Sciences Po in France is currently conducting research into why that might be. Perhaps we could learn something from that research. These women, and countless more like them, live in countries where society is often more conservative than the leadership, and which, relatively speaking, are still at the beginning of their journey towards the full empowerment of women. We must do all that we can, whenever we can, to support and acknowledge their achievements, because they will be the role models and the drivers of change in the future.

7.06 pm

Baroness Healy of Primrose Hill (Lab): My Lords, I, too, offer congratulations to the right reverend Prelate and the noble Baroness, Lady Mone, on their excellent and inspiring speeches.

I welcome this debate on women’s representation and empowerment as it allows me to raise the plight of women who are homeless and sleeping rough, and therefore far from being empowered. Homelessness for both men and women is a growing national problem. The Government recently released figures showing

that 3,569 people slept rough on any one night across England in 2015—an increase of 30% from 2,744 in 2014, and a wholly unacceptable increase of 102% between 2010 and 2015.

Homeless women are at increased risk of attack and exploitation. St Mungo's, the homeless charity, which I thank for briefing me, says that 28% of its clients are women, of whom 78% have a mental health need, 52% have a substance-use problem of drugs or alcohol, four out of 10 have an offending history, and 24% have been in prison. Nearly half have slept rough and half have experienced domestic violence, 30% of whom say this fact contributed to their homelessness; and one in five experienced childhood violence or abuse.

The Combined Homelessness and Information Network recorded 1,094 women sleeping rough in London in 2014-15. Although information about the gender of people sleeping rough is not publicly available outside London, 30% of people using homeless accommodation services in England are women, according to Homeless Link. These figures are likely to be an underestimate as women say that they take care to hide themselves when sleeping rough, so are difficult to find for official counts. Many more women will be "hidden homeless", living outside mainstream homelessness accommodation. Instead, they may be "sofa surfing", staying with family or friends, or trapped in abusive relationships because they have nowhere else to go. Others, according to St Mungo's, will be squatting or living in crack houses, or engaged in prostitution. Better data collection is needed to help plan appropriate gender-sensitive accommodation and services. National and local government should in future collect and report data on gender as part of annual street counts. Of particular concern is the number of women rough sleepers with mental health problems. In London, the figure is thought to be 60%.

Women are more likely to sleep rough as a result of traumatic experiences, including violence and abuse, and those with mental health problems spend longer sleeping rough, which in turn makes it harder to access mental health services. They struggle to escape the street because mental health problems make it harder for them to engage with homelessness services. Professional outreach workers also suggest that depression and post-traumatic stress disorder can contribute to a lack of motivation and sense of hopelessness, which prevent women tackling their situation, unable to persist with appointments and paperwork. Stigma plays a part, together with a lack of services that will work with people facing multiple problems, including drug and alcohol use; difficulties getting an assessment or referral to secondary care without being registered with a GP; and trouble making and keeping appointments while sleeping on the street.

In London, the number of people recorded as sleeping rough with an identified mental health support need has more than tripled over the last five years. Patients discharged from mental health hospitals should not be left to fend for themselves on the streets with nowhere to sleep. Too often, vulnerable women are released from prison with no accommodation to go to. I acknowledge that this Government have provided

£6.5 billion to help vulnerable people through housing-related support and given over £500 million since 2010 to local authorities and the voluntary sector to prevent and tackle homelessness and rough sleeping. However, more needs to be done.

St Mungo's is calling on the Government to publish a new, ambitious national rough-sleeping strategy. This should include an investment in specialist homelessness mental health services. The new strategy should deliver mental health assessments and professional support to people on the street, specialist supported housing to help with their recovery, and the right support on discharge so people do not end up sleeping rough after leaving mental health hospitals. Supported housing must include women-only hostels and refuges, which can provide the holistic, gender-sensitive support that allows women to move out of homelessness. Significant cuts to local authority spending on housing-related support have resulted in a reduction in such services.

St Mungo's believes that the future of supported housing for vulnerable groups is increasingly uncertain and, although it welcomes the decision to suspend the rent reduction for supported housing for one year while the review into this specialist type of housing is completed, it remains concerned. The government proposal to cap housing benefit at the local housing allowance rate, now also suspended by a year, is still due to apply to tenancies from 2017, and this will leave St Mungo's facing an enormous shortfall in income for specialist housing, leading to possible closure of this support. It is essential that accommodation and support are available for homeless women with substance-use and mental health issues and those involved in prostitution, who are less able to access traditional refuge services.

Early intervention is vital, as so many problems that lead to women's homelessness have been found to begin in childhood. The troubled families programme must identify girls and women who are at risk and need support to avoid homelessness. A St Mungo's report, *Rebuilding Shattered Lives*, found that women's homelessness often occurred after prolonged experience of trauma, including physical, sexual and emotional abuse, frequently within the home. This led to a cycle of mental ill health and substance use, and myriad other interrelated challenges to overcome, including their children being taken into care. To empower these vulnerable women, the Government must take further action in partnership with local government and the voluntary sector to end rough sleeping.

7.13 pm

Lord Loomba (LD): My Lords, I start by congratulating the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Gloucester, the first female Bishop in this House, and the noble Baroness, Lady Mone, on their brilliant and interesting speeches. I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Williams of Trafford, for securing this important debate to assess the progress made since the petition of 1866 to increase women's representation and empowerment.

It is common knowledge that progress has been slow, as for almost 100 years we did not see any female political leaders anywhere, including the United Kingdom. It was in 1960 that Sri Lanka elected the first female prime minister of its Government. Even today, although

[LORD LOOMBA]

the Lord Speaker, Leader of the House, and Leader of the Opposition are all women, we still do not have gender parity in either House. Only 25% of Members of this House are women and less than one-third of Members in the other place are. We have some remarkable women in this House and in the other place, showing what can be achieved. However, it is a sorry state of affairs that, although women make up nearly half of the population, they are underrepresented where decisions that affect their lives and the lives of their families are made. This underrepresentation leads to bad policies and bad law that take years to unravel and right the wrong.

Statistics for the UK show that, in some areas, gender parity has moved very little or even stalled completely. We are a long way from anything near equality in many areas. Although trends show that more women than ever are participating in education, research shows that this does not directly translate into higher-paid work or leadership roles. Women are held back at every stage of their lives by outdated mindsets, entrenched and biased attitudes and, sometimes, the sheer practicalities of combining work and family life.

Since the United Nations was formed in 1947, it has made huge efforts to increase the representation of women in politics and all walks of life, and to empower them. Progress has been slow, in spite of the fact that it has championed International Women's Day every year and established the millennium development goals at the turn of the 21st century, which has been declared by the UN as the century of women and girls. Fifteen years later, with the millennium development goals not fully achieved, one of the gifts in our hands, to make even more of a difference and to move things at a greater speed, is the sustainable development goals. These have been drafted to build on the success of the millennium development goals, while ensuring that no one is left behind. But who do we mean when we say that no one should be left behind? Surely, when we look at how gender parity has stalled, we must be thinking of women and girls who are being held back in so many areas of their lives, unable to contribute in any meaningful way to their immediate communities and wider society.

I declare an interest as a long-standing advocate of gender parity as founder and chairman of the Loomba Foundation, which is fighting a hard battle to achieve gender parity and empowerment for women and girls—including widows—around the world. I am convinced that empowering women and increasing their representation, both politically and economically, will benefit the world in a big way. There will be less conflict, less violence and less discrimination against women and girls. Women and girls will become more capable of fending for themselves and participate on equal terms with their male counterparts.

In conclusion, I have no doubt that, through the sustainable development goals and the recent UN Women's HeForShe campaign, which calls on all men to participate to help women, we can see the potential for huge progress to increase the representation and empowerment of women and girls, including widows, in the United Kingdom and around the world by 2030.

7.20 pm

Baroness Tonge (Ind LD): My Lords, I add my congratulations to the right reverend Prelate and the noble Baroness, Lady Mone, although they are not in their places, on two sparkling speeches—not just sparkling but interesting and fascinating. I admired them very much.

One thing that has not been much mentioned—I think the noble Baroness, Lady Morris, mentioned it—is that we hear a lot, we women politicians, about training and mentoring women candidates. I want to put it on record that nothing irritates me more than hearing about training and mentoring of women candidates. Having spent two Parliaments in the House of Commons, I think it is the men and the male candidates who need the training and mentoring. Why do we women think we need training and mentoring, for goodness' sake? We are the people who tell children what to do, we tell our partners what to do, we organise our homes, we sort out differences of opinion, we settle squabbles—and someone tells me I have to have some training and mentoring? No, I am sorry, I think it is a nonsense. We have to look for other reasons why more women do not come into politics, which was the initial purpose of this debate.

The noble Lord, Lord Cashman, who is not in his place, mentioned that other phrase that really makes me see red—although that is unfair on the Labour Party, really, because they have more women than anyone—which is the empowerment of women. People say, “We must have the empowerment of women”, as though if women were empowered everything would be all right. But how can women be empowered here or in developing countries if they do not first have power over their own bodies? There are hundreds of millions of women all over the world who do not have power over their own bodies. They cannot control the number of children they have and if you cannot control the number of children you have, you can say goodbye to any sort of career outside the home. That is why I am always pushing the need for family planning provision worldwide—thank goodness this Government see the need and are helping to provide it—and good maternal care. This applies also to this country because our family planning services are not what they were. We must also remember childcare because if anything stops women doing anything, once again, it is those years that we have to take out to look after little children—unless we can have affordable childcare, and we still have not got there yet. Other European countries are much better off than we are and I appeal to the Government to remember that.

Just briefly, and this is very self-indulgent, I thought, “Why me? Why am I here now? Why was I in the House of Commons? Why was I a local councillor in Richmond for many years? Why did I do it?”. I did not come from a deprived background, I am afraid. I did not have to struggle at all. I was the precious only daughter in a family of boys so I was spoiled—they said. If I ever said, “It's not fair” or “I can't do it” or “The boys are all right but not me”, my mother would say, quoting Shakespeare from “Julius Caesar”—I think it is Cassius who says:

“The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings”.

My mother would shake her finger and say, “Go and do your homework. Clear off!”, and my father would back her up.

So what did I do? I had to prove myself somehow so I thought I would do medicine. I went off to UCL and did medicine. But that does not explain why I did politics—why on earth, with a very satisfying career in medicine, did I think of going into politics? The reason has always been quite clear to me and I was reminded of it last weekend when I went to an old girls’ reunion of my old school. Sorry to the boys who are still here but I am going to talk about my girls’ school in the West Midlands—I have always wanted to put this into *Hansard* and now it is my chance—Dudley Girls’ High School, an ordinary girls’ grammar school. My mother had gone there on a scholarship and I went there on a scholarship.

In that school since the 1920s we had had a form of school government. I do not mean a pupils’ parliament or a talking shop; I mean school government. We were not allowed to touch the curriculum but apart from that we made the school rules. We had a constitution. I know that constitution very well because I rewrote it when I was school secretary in the sixth form. We had this government: every form elected its own president, vice-president and secretary, who then represented it at school council; and one period at the end of every Monday, every week, was devoted to either form council or school council. Our prefects were democratically elected as well, as were the head girl, deputy head girl and school secretary. Everything was done properly and democratically. I remember an 11 year-old in the first form carrying on about wearing hats out of school, which was a rule at the time, and I said, “Look, all you have to do is get support from someone to second you in your form council. If you can get it through your form council, take it up to school council. Get it through school council and you can change the rule. Do it”, and she did it.

That is putting politics into practice from the very lowest level. It proved to me that there was a system whereby we could do things and change things. I bring this up in this House because I have never come across it since. Certainly none of my children had the privilege of that sort of education, to be able to elect everyone who represented them and change rules if they wanted to. It is very sad that schools talk about having lessons in politics and civics and having pupil parliaments and debating societies, but they never prove to children that they can actually change the world if they want to, and that is the way to do it.

7.27 pm

Baroness Secombe (Con): My Lords, as usual, this annual debate draws men and women to share their views on the role of women. As each year passes, I see more women in elected roles, many in leadership positions. I am happy to see this—not to balance the numbers but because they are making such a positive contribution. It is also pleasing that the number of women in employment is at record levels. There are always some women who, for various reasons, are unable to share in everyday life. In this country we have a commitment to support wholeheartedly those in need, so I feel that, compared with the lives of our forebears, life is good.

There is always more to do and I am in no way complacent, but we should take the time to mark good progress.

On this important day each year, many issues spring to mind but this year I want to use my time to highlight a few important points relating to domestic violence. Nearly 50 years ago, when I joined the Bench as a magistrate, I remember being told by a colleague that cases dealing with violence within a marriage were only domestic matters and were too difficult. I was not only horrified and ashamed but it opened my eyes to society’s attitude: people were not willing to delve into what happened within a marriage behind closed doors, even when it was well known that offences were being committed. This resulted in many women suffering horrific injuries and being trapped in loveless and beleaguered marriages. We will never know exact numbers because instead of seeing these demoralised women as victims of cruelty, society closed its eyes and ears to them. The police took the attitude that you never know what goes on in the privacy of the home and it would be impossible to prove anyway.

Women covered up any ill-treatment and pretended to the outside world that nothing had happened. Many felt that it was their fault and that they had failed to be a good wife. Those were the days when men were almost always the sole earner and controlled the family income. Women stayed at home with their children. Part-time jobs were rare and anything that a wife earned was added to the husband’s income. He paid the tax on it and most seemed to think that he should have the right to decide on its disposal. Thank goodness that over the years, attitudes have changed completely. Modern sensibilities that we all enjoy, such as equality and transparency, ensure that all such cases are rightly considered the most serious in the list of violent offences.

On International Women’s Day, it is important not only to think back to the role of women 50 or 100 years ago but to use the opportunity to look ahead. I am not only delighted but proud that this Government have seen the need to take radical action to eliminate domestic violence, particularly within marriage. No one—man or woman—should have to live with the constant threat of violence from the person with whom they live. This is a government priority. The Government have invested a further £10 million in a network of refuges, and long-term funding for these safe houses is secured until 2020.

The introduction of the domestic violence protection orders will help victims through new powers that stop the offenders returning home or contacting a victim for 28 days. This cooling-off period can assist both parties, giving them time to consider their actions. A new offence of coercive and controlling behaviour has been introduced, for which an offender can be sentenced to up to five years’ imprisonment if they are guilty of an offence which amounts to extreme psychological or emotional abuse but does not include physical violence. Sadly, in this more enlightened day and age, both men and women can be subjected to persistent torment, so I am glad there will be funding of £40 million to support victims to get the help they need, and which is so necessary in finding their way to the right person.

[BARONESS SECCOMBE]

This year, I believe that we should concentrate on ensuring that these measures on domestic violence are fully understood. Those who practise bullying and shameful acts will be punished and exposed as the criminals they are. We should encourage those who suffer to report this cruelty and get the support they deserve. If we succeed, we will be not only righting a wrong that has been a stain on our history, but sending a strong message to countries where abuse of this nature is tolerated.

7.33 pm

Baroness Uddin (Non-Aff): My Lords, 150 years are three or four generations of women's lives. We can list with pride the many achievements of women in civic and public life, not only in the UK but globally. I will refrain—or try to refrain—from referring to anything abroad today. I am really pleased that the noble Baroness, Lady Morris, highlighted many of the achievements that I would have taken on board in anything that I said.

I add my warmest regards to the right reverend Prelate and the noble Baroness, Lady Mone, on their remarkable contributions. The noble Baroness will be pleased that only last week I was with about 50 to 70 women entrepreneurs—I was not counting—in the East End. They were from the British Bangladesh Chamber of Women Entrepreneurs and I hope that the noble Baroness will lend that organisation her expertise at some point. I will be happy to put them in touch with her, as they could benefit from her wisdom.

It is a privilege to thank the noble Baroness, Lady Williams, for her commitment to all women. It is always a great privilege to take part in debates with her. In taking part in this debate, I reflect on the first-ever such debate I took part in, which was secured on International Women's Day on 8 March 1999 and when the noble Lord, Lord Patel, who is not in his place, made his maiden speech. There were in fact quite a number of noble Lords who shared. These discussions have always been mixed and all sides of the House have readily contributed, so it is always good to have them.

Increasing women's political participation remains a matter of political will and opportunities. When the political leadership decides to act and to empower women's entry into Parliament or public positions in general, whether by introducing electoral gender quotas, nominating more women candidates and placing them in favourable positions or by adopting electoral systems, this inevitably leads to more candidates being elected in constituencies. The results are evident in increasing women's participation. I know that the noble Baroness, Lady Jenkin, and others have mentioned that.

Opportunity seems to be one of the major barriers for many women. While we continue to operate a party mechanism of control that manipulates how our candidates are selected, many will reject such truths, which lie just beneath our consciousness where prejudice and opportunities interplay and intersect. This was reinforced by what young women said at an event in which I participated this morning. It was held to celebrate International Women's Day and organised by Canary Wharf Group and Tower Hamlets councillor

Rabina Khan, and it concerned widening participation. The point made earlier by the noble Baroness, Lady Jenkin, that today there are more men in the Commons than there have ever been women since women's membership of Parliament began does not come as news even to those young people, who are clearly much more savvy. One of them said this morning that those who select do so only in their own reflection, whether for managers and CEOs in Canary Wharf or for potential MPs, Peers or MEPs. Hence we have the kind of Parliament which speaks volumes about sexism, racism and Islamophobia and lacks diversity.

It is difficult to counter these deeply-held opinions when the figures speak for themselves and do not provide much confidence. Since 1866, there has been no substantial difference in voting behaviour between men and women. The lack of voter turnout among women is particularly significant, with more than 9.1 million women failing to vote in the last general election, in comparison to 8 million men. When I speak to young women, they often casually mention that there is no one to vote for, suggesting that they cannot and do not relate to the candidates seeking their support. This is very worrying.

The decision by political parties in some countries to field higher numbers of women candidates or to place them in winnable positions demonstrates how significant political direction, will and leadership are to bringing about the required positive changes, as my party has unfailingly proved with its positive enforcement of women-only shortlists and other initiatives. The 2015 parliamentary election resulted in 191 women MPs, a mere 29%. That number was swollen largely due to the Labour Party's consistent commitment to increasing the number of women, showing once again that quotas and positive actions work in getting more women into Parliament. There is more than enough research available to explain that where there is no incentive in the party mechanism, the number of women selected and elected remains unacceptably poor. BME numbers remain disproportionately low, as do the numbers of women in general.

A recent IPU report also highlighted the need to tackle impediments to women running for office, such as the lack of adequate finance for their campaigns, and reiterated the critical role of political parties in changing the status quo. In a recent discussion with another large group of Muslim women, I heard the same as I heard between 2008 and 2010, when I went around the country for the Government and spoke to BME women. They repeated that women are ever-ready to participate in the democratic structures of our country, as many thousands are helping to shape their communities—if only support were available to them in their battles to overcome prejudice and sexism.

Many also say that politicians do not reflect their class, background or aspirations. BME women in particular do not share the belief that reaching the corridors of office and power is within their means. It will be not come as a surprise that when they were asked how long they thought it would take before the UK had a black or another ethnic minority woman as Prime Minister, a small number—around 20%—said that it would take about 20 years. Some said 50 years,

with the majority saying maybe 100 years. A large majority of women said that, without a doubt, it would never happen.

Does it matter whether ethnic minority women participate and are included in politics? Does it matter whether men are in politics? Women in general are part of our political structures. The answer is the same as the one given earlier in the discussion. The last Parliament saw 41 MPs from BME backgrounds elected, 20 of whom were women—almost parity. It is a national disgrace that black and ethnic minorities make up only 6% of Parliament. It is totally unacceptable, given the history of our country, that there are so few women of colour in Parliament. If Parliament was as reflective as it should be, we would have 50% women and 13% BME MPs, Peers, MEPs and so forth—genuinely reflecting our society.

In many parts of our world, women's suffrage movements have made a massive difference, but gender gaps in most sectors of our society remain stark and fundamentally unequal. The plight of gender parity in the UK must not be isolated from the plight of the representation of BME women in achievement. The 1866 petition was made to the House of Commons—arguably, for a good period of time, the least diverse institution. Membership of the whole House remains unrepresentative of the country, and the House of Lords is no different. Although there are slightly more BME Members of the House of Lords, with 47 Peers, this is only 6.3% of the total membership of 847 Peers, of whom only 17 are women. So even the appointed House has been unable to address the gender gap.

The visible gender gap is a significant factor in reinforcing the problems for BME women and girls, who are burdened by being both gendered and racialised at the same time, making gender parity even more difficult to achieve. It is also unfortunate to have to stand here today and discuss the progress of women's representation and empowerment when both Houses of Parliament are unable to sustain their own reputations and while deep-rooted inequalities remain permeating throughout so many parts of our institutions.

It is always a privilege to speak in this annual debate and I look forward to working together with the Minister and the whole House to eradicate any restrictive obstacles and dismantle any of the walls of inequality—a process that was so ably kick-started by the earliest suffragette movements here in the UK and in the world.

7.43 pm

Baroness Dean of Thornton-le-Fylde (Lab): My Lords, it is always a pleasure to take part in what has become an annual debate to celebrate International Women's Day. We have had an enormous line of progress as regards women, but this also gives us an opportunity to pause and remind ourselves how much further we have to go. One or two people have said to me, "Brenda, isn't it becoming a mechanical thing, having this every year around 8 March?". I do not accept that. It is just one day in the year when we remind people just how important this topic is, that we have made progress and that we can celebrate much, but also that we need to continue working to develop that progress.

This year's debate was made all the more rich by the two maiden speeches. The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Gloucester made a wonderful speech, not just in terms of its content but through her compassion and conviction, which are so important in this Chamber. I look forward very much to her future contributions, but would just ask people to reflect on why the dickens it took us so long. The contribution from the noble Baroness, Lady Mone, was wonderful, full of energy and vitality. I just hope that the House has the sense to approach her to take part in the outreach programme, which goes into schools and talks to sixth forms, because she will be such an inspiration to them. I hope she enjoys her time in the House.

The scene for the debate is always set by the Minister at the Dispatch Box. I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Williams, on the way in which she introduced the debate and the breadth of her introduction. She covered so much and mentioned Manchester, my home city, from which a lot of social progress has emanated—not least the suffragettes, but also the Trades Union Congress, which was founded in Manchester. It is a great city with a great history, and I thank the noble Baroness for mentioning it.

During her very interesting presentation, the noble Baroness mentioned violence against women, which is the area I would like to touch on. It was very interesting to hear the observations of the noble Baroness, Lady Seccombe—I nearly said "my noble friend", because we have known each other for so many years—whose contribution was very important as well. She talked about violence in marriage, but I would like to take a different aspect of it.

The Armed Forces Bill is going through the House at the moment. Normally I would take part in such a Bill because of my interest in defence matters, particularly personnel, but was not able to as I was involved in a Select Committee on another Bill going through the House, although I have read the debates. Normally a Minister is asked to answer questions at the end of a debate, but I do not think many questions have been posed in this debate, so I will pose one. It may be a very difficult one for the noble Baroness, but I would like her to respond if she is able, and would like to try to engineer it so that the noble Baronesses on the Benches opposite lend support on the issue.

During the debate on the Armed Forces Bill last week in Grand Committee, there was an amendment down that would have made it a legal requirement to publish allegations of sexual violence in the services. We are talking predominantly, but not totally, about women—the Army is a reflection of society. During that discussion, the admirable work started by Sir Nick Carter, the Chief of the General Staff, was mentioned. Eight months ago, he said that the Army has,

"an overly sexualised culture in which inappropriate behaviour is deemed acceptable".

If anyone knows that, he does as the Chief of the General Staff, but of course anyone who has been close to the services knows that as well. Major strides have been made to change that, and the campaign that Sir Nick Carter has been running is welcome and admirable.

[BARONESS DEAN OF THORNTON-LE-FYLDE]

However, unfortunately, there is no requirement to print the figures for allegations of rape in the services. I was astonished to read in the debate a statement that some 20 members of the Army are on the sex offender register. They are still in the Army and have been disbursed when those offences were known. Two years ago, when the information was sought, there were 200 allegations of rape and other sexual offences. To deal with a problem, we need to know the facts. I know that the Minister—the noble Earl, Lord Howe—said that the details will go on the website. But of course we need the Government themselves to give a lead. It is much more powerful to lead by example than to tell people what to do.

I am not suggesting that the noble Baroness can give the answer in full when she replies, but this really is an important area. I do not disbelieve that the Government mean what they say—I certainly believe what the noble Baroness, Lady Williams, said in opening the debate. They are going to have initiatives and policies on violence, which I welcome very much. This is not a party political criticism. International Women's Day and the issues that have been raised are not partisanship—they are about women in our society. The women—and the men—in our Armed Forces who are subject to sexual abuse deserve our support, but that can be dealt with properly only if the facts are known. I plead with the Minister to go back to try to persuade her colleagues that to have a legal requirement simply to publish the figures would be great progress.

7.49 pm

Baroness Newlove (Con): My Lords, I am privileged to speak in this debate today. I congratulate the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Gloucester and my noble friend Lady Mone, with whom I totally agree that my noble friend Lady Morris is a wonderful mentor and a dear friend. I am speaker number 21 out of 25, and a lot has been covered, but they are the only statistics I shall cite in my speech, so I will not take too long.

I start with a quotation. As Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "A woman is like a teabag: you can't tell how strong she is until you put her in hot water". I totally agree. We know that women are capable of many amazing things. They run businesses, homes and families. Not only have we had a female Prime Minister in the UK, there may be a female President of the United States of America during my lifetime. There has undoubtedly been progress regarding the empowerment and emancipation of women in the past 150 years. I congratulate the Minister on starting this debate, not just because of who she is, but because she is a Mancunian, like me.

Nevertheless, what concerns me is that too many women do not have a voice or have been excluded from much of what is good in our country simply because they have been a victim of crime, which has been covered a lot in the debate. I speak in my role as Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales, where I have met many women who have been trafficked into this country to work as sexual and domestic slaves. With the dedicated support of the Salvation Army, I

was humbled to see how some of these women had turned their lives around. Once they realised that they could open a door to step out, it was truly remarkable, because they had somewhere safe to stay and were able to walk down the street without being recaptured or beaten. These women threw themselves into education and training on offer to them. They wanted nothing more than to earn their own salary, to be safe and to support their families. They just wanted to be loved and respected.

I know that women do not lack skills and abilities, but many lack opportunities. The opportunity to participate in employment, voluntary work, education or some other goal in life is important to help many victims rebuild their lives after experiencing devastating harm and loss. I would include myself in this. Following the murder of my late husband Garry in 2007, and the ordeal of watching my three young daughters appear as witnesses at their father's trial, I thought that I would never be able to get through another day. We had no income and, at one point, no home and almost no hope, but I had to think about my three daughters and their futures as young women. I had to find a way to provide for them financially, and I was so determined that they would grow up as happy, healthy young women, as their father wanted them to. So, as they say, you gain strength, courage and confidence by experience in which you really stop to stare straight in the face of fear.

In October 2010, I became the Government's Champion for Active, Safer Communities. Anti-social behaviour has 2.3 million victims. It is a horrendous crime, and we should respect and support victims who go through it in their communities. I was then further honoured to work on a £1 million alcohol fund project to help 20 communities to tackle alcohol-fuelled anti-social behaviour successfully. In 2012, I became the Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales.

I know that I was more fortunate than many other victims of crime. I have the support of my family, friends and of strangers, but I also suffered—and, sadly, still suffer today—criticism and abuse. If an ordinary woman like me, who is not from a privileged background or an academic genius can make a useful contribution to society, just think what other potential is being missed in those women and girls who do not have such an opportunity. It is one of the saddest parts of my job to see how the skills and abilities of women who have been victims of crime are so often underdeveloped or ignored, or usurped by the crime that they have suffered.

We know nowadays that many women—and men—have suffered years of physical, sexual and emotional abuse by those who should have protected them. I have met some of these victims, many of whom dropped out of school, entered into abusive relationships, turn to drugs and alcohol and, sadly, ended up in prison. They had a complex array of problems, and the services that they needed either were not there for them, could not cope with their sometimes challenging behaviour, or were available to them for only a relatively short time. We are learning so much about the nature and prevalence of child abuse, and the independent inquiry conducted by Justice Goddard is likely to give voice to even more.

What seems to be lacking, certainly for the women that I have met, is a long-term, suitably co-ordinated package of support. That means with employment, finances and accommodation as well as help to deal with the psychological, physical and emotional impact of a crime—it never leaves you, but you try to cope the best you can. Unless this support package can be put in place, women may have won the vote, but they will have lost their voice and the opportunity. Although I welcome International Women's Day as a chance to celebrate the economic, cultural and political achievement of every woman in the world, I want us to ensure that we help all women to achieve their potential. So much has been achieved, but we must never allow ourselves to become complacent.

Suffrage for women in the UK was achieved a long time ago. Suffering, for women who are victims of crime, sadly, continues.

7.57 pm

Baroness Nye (Lab): My Lords, I join other noble Lords in thanking the Minister for securing this debate. As other noble Lords have said, we should celebrate the achievements that women have made in the 150 years since the first petition for women's suffrage was presented to Parliament. I share my noble friend's pride in what my party has achieved, especially things such as the first national childcare strategy in 1998, but also recognition that so much more needs to be done to increase women's representation at every level in our party: senior staff, officials, local government and, I am sorry to say, shadow Cabinet portfolios. Although for this side of the House there is little to celebrate in last year's election result, we have 99 brilliant women representing Labour in the Commons after the highest number and percentage of women candidates on record.

I share the sentiments of the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, and because it is International Women's Day, I want briefly to mention two other elections that happened last year. Our sisters in Saudi Arabia took part in the first municipal council elections in which women were allowed to vote, the first in which they were allowed to run for office and the first in which they could be elected as politicians. However, instead of being able to participate on an equal basis, as we are this evening, mandatory sex segregation has been imposed, and those elected women can contribute only by video link from an adjoining room.

In Burma, the National League for Democracy won a resounding victory, but the military still has a veto over constitutional change which will deny Aung San Suu Kyi the opportunity to stand for President. That same constitution also gives the Burmese army impunity for military perpetrators of rape and sexual violence. I hope that the Minister will agree that the British Government should give support to the Women's League of Burma to help its work in documenting cases of rape and providing support for victims of sexual violence.

With gender parity being the theme of this International Women's Day, I turn to the issue of women and apprenticeships. It is right to say that young women appear to be achieving better educational outcomes at all levels and that women have increasing

labour market opportunities. On the surface, the growth in female apprentices seems to support this trend, as there are now more women than men starting apprenticeships, but behind those figures lies another story.

Next Monday, the Young Women's Trust, of which I declare I am a trustee, will launch a report, *Making Apprenticeships Work for Young Women*, which will show that young women apprentices are missing out on the benefits that apprenticeships can bring. Women apprentices get paid an average of £2,000 less per year, are twice as likely to receive no training and are almost three times more likely to be unemployed at the end of their apprenticeship than their male counterparts. A key reason for these differences is the continued occupational segregation by gender which persists at apprenticeship level. For example, 94% of childcare apprentices are women, but women make up only 4% in engineering, and there are 74 men for every woman apprentice in plumbing. But while women's progress in male-dominated sectors has stalled, men are now moving into the more female-dominated sectors. There are 10 times more male apprentices in health and social care than there were in 2002.

Employers need to take a more proactive approach to increasing the representation of women in sectors such as engineering, IT and construction. More needs to be done to make apprenticeships more flexible and to ensure that young women can afford to do an apprenticeship, by increasing pay and offering support with costs such as travel or childcare. I believe that if the Government are to meet their laudable target of 3 million apprenticeships by 2020 urgent action is required. That is why I propose that the Government set up a review to look at what action needs to be taken to increase diversity in apprenticeships in the public and private sectors.

The Davies review, led by my noble friend Lord Davies of Abersoch into the obstacles facing women becoming directors of listed companies, could be replicated to look into the obstacles facing women getting into apprenticeships and make proposals to improve the position. It should look at the sectors where the number of female apprenticeships is disproportionately low; could set targets—I dare not say quotas; and could look at different ways of attracting women, especially young women, for example by outreach programmes. It could also look at whether the careers service as provided by schools is providing the right information on apprenticeships to young girls.

The Education Select Committee has said of the careers service that,

“the interests of schools and young people are not aligned”,

and that,

“‘trusting schools’ does not work”.

Sir Michael Wilshaw has described the careers service as “a disaster area”. It will therefore be important to include the careers service in the review. There is also a fear that the annual progress report proposed on the apprenticeship target will just record the numbers passing through the system. If it worked in conjunction with the review, it could look at the quality of the apprenticeships by, for instance, gathering destination data. University education has long been assessed this

[BARONESS NYE]

way and this would give parity of esteem. However, perhaps not all aspects of the Davies review should be replicated, as it would be so much better for a woman to lead it. Does the Minister think that having only one woman on the Government's apprenticeship delivery board compared to five men is setting a good example of the Government's commitment to gender parity?

I have listened to many great speeches in this House, including the excellent maiden speeches we have just heard. Among them, a speech by my noble friend Lady Prosser has remained with me. I paraphrase, but my noble friend quoted a trade unionist who pointed out that while a lot of attention is given to breaking the glass ceiling, it is important to remember the women, especially young women, who do not feel they have made it past the skirting board.

8.03 pm

Baroness Hussein-Ece (LD): My Lords, it has been a pleasure to take part in this annual debate and to hear so many excellent, outstanding contributions from all sides of the House. I thank the Minister for securing the debate and for her comprehensive introduction, which set the scene of where we are today. I join others in praising the excellent maiden speech of the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Gloucester. I had not realised that we have something in common: we may have grown up in very different religious backgrounds but I, too, cut my political teeth in community work in Hackney and Islington. Indeed, I went to school in Hackney and grew up there so our paths may have crossed. It was very interesting to hear about her life experience and the journey that brought her here. I look forward to more contributions from her.

I also praise the excellent maiden speech from the noble Baroness, Lady Mone. It was inspirational and interesting to hear about her background as well. I cannot say that we share a lot, given that I am a Londoner, but we do share something: there may be a bit of a theme going on in the Chamber today in that I, too, had to work after school, but it was in my parents' grocery shop. I really resented, from about the age of 12, having to stack shelves and help customers with their shopping. I was taught that one had to work: the work ethic was very important and we all had to work very hard. I look forward to future contributions from the noble Baroness, as well.

We have heard the theme of the pledge for parity. I saw a quotation from the World Economic Forum predicting, in 2014, that it would take until 2095 to achieve global gender parity. A year later it estimated that things had slowed down and that the gender gap would not now be closed entirely until 2133. So we may be making progress but there is still a long way to go and we cannot rest on our laurels.

I want to touch on domestic violence, as other noble Lords have done, including the noble Baronesses, Lady Secombe and Lady Dean. I declare an interest as a member of the Select Committee on Sexual Violence in Conflict. We have done a lot in this country and come a long way. Sexual violence in conflict is a much wider, really serious global issue. It all comes back to the status of women. Our report will be

presented to your Lordships' House soon, but a common theme runs through it. Sadly, until the status of women is further enhanced and accelerated, violence will continually be used as a tool to keep women in their place. The situation is much worse globally; we have had some appalling evidence of how women's status is a direct result of the violence they face.

We in this country are leaders in this field and have done so much internationally, but we also need to lead by example. The issue of women in detention was touched on by the noble Baroness, Lady Corston, and other noble Lords, and we still need to lead on this. Every year, 2,000 women who are seeking asylum in the UK are locked up. Most of them are held in Yarl's Wood detention centre, many indefinitely, only to be released into the community later on. For women who have fled rape, trafficking, imprisonment and torture, detention can be a devastating way to be treated, and many self-harm or attempt suicide. We need to get a grip on the Yarl's Wood situation and, frankly, shut it down—it is a disgrace. We can do much better. It is not a good example for us to set when we are trying to fight violence against women globally. The noble Lord, Lord Cashman, talked about refugee women and the double disadvantages they often face, looking after their children and fleeing violence.

My noble friend Lady Northover spoke about the importance of the Government's analysing the impact of the SDGs in the UK, and how domestically we need to consider what would make life better for women, such as shared parental leave and care costs—all the things that make women's lives easier and help them to participate, particularly in Parliament and in public life. I pay tribute to the noble Baroness, Lady Jenkin of Kennington, for her ground-breaking work in her own party and the affirmative action she supports to bring about greater representation in her own party; many in my own party aspire to do as well as she has done in that regard. I also pay tribute to the noble Lord, Lord Fowler, for the work he has done on HIV/AIDS. I was privileged to be on the committee he chaired some years ago that looked into this in more depth. He reminded us of the plight of women across the world who are still discriminated against because they have that virus. I also pay tribute to my noble friend Lady Barker, who highlighted LGBT women's health—a much-neglected area that we need to focus on a bit more.

I was pleased that the noble Baroness, Lady Morris of Bolton, raised the issue of the challenges that Muslim women face, particularly in the Middle East. To bring it back to the present day, women in this country from migrant or immigrant backgrounds, particularly those who are Muslim, are under an increasing spotlight to do far more. There is a lot of Islamophobia, as we know, but on top of that they are held responsible for radicalisation, so they are under the spotlight more than ever. Many face disadvantage within their own communities, and it is unfair that they are being put under the spotlight in this way—they need far more support.

As ever, my noble friend Lord Loomba brought his international expertise to this debate. I pay tribute to the way in which his foundation and all the work he

has done has touched so many women around the world. The noble Baroness, Lady Tonge, spoke about training and mentoring. I absolutely agree with her: that is like a red rag to a bull for me—whenever I hear that women need mentoring and training I think, “Of course they do, but so do men”. It is unfair to think that women’s participation is somehow lacking unless they are given training in all aspects of public life. Of course, as the noble Baroness, Lady Uddin, said, we also need more ethnic minority women, in order better to represent the society in which we live.

If we have more active participation of women at every level, both in this country and around the world, it will strengthen the women’s movement, make lives better and lead to stronger communities and healthier societies, because women are at the forefront in all these issues. I was very moved by what the noble Baroness, Lady Newlove, said, about women having a voice. All too often, we complain that women’s voices are not heard at peace conferences and the various high-level summits. They are usually there, but they never participate equally with men. Women’s voices should be heard, and we should lead on this issue by insisting that they be heard. A woman with a voice is, by definition, a strong woman. We need to make sure that more women have a voice and are listened to.

8.12 pm

Baroness Gale (Lab): My Lords, this has been a great debate this evening in celebration of International Women’s Day. I thank the Minister, the noble Baroness, Lady Williams, for bringing this debate before us today. As others have said, it is like an annual event when we can take an audit of where we are as regards women’s equality.

It has been so good to have our two excellent maiden speeches, which made me think back to the case of Viscountess Rhondda. She inherited her title from her father, Viscount Rhondda; as she was the only child she was given special permission to inherit her title. She wanted to take her seat in the House of Lords but was denied the opportunity following a famous test case before the House of Lords Committee of Privileges in 1922.

Viscountess Rhondda was a suffragette, a feminist, a magazine owner, a successful businesswoman and the first and only female president of the Institute of Directors, but still was not allowed to take a seat in the Lords because she was a woman.

Baroness Barker: And a Liberal.

Baroness Gale: Maybe she was, but if you know her full story you will know that she went to the right in the end.

Some 32 years later, on 4 November 1958, history was made when Baroness Elliot of Harwood became the first woman Peer to speak in the House of Lords, as the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Gloucester mentioned in her maiden speech. I raise this because in her maiden speech Baroness Elliott said she was very conscious that,

“except for Her Majesty’s gracious Opening of Parliament, probably this is the first occasion in 900 years that the voice of a woman has been heard in the deliberations of this House”.—[*Official Report*, 4/11/1958; col. 161.]

So how appropriate it is that tonight, 58 years after the first woman Peer to speak in your Lordships’ house, we have witnessed another historic event, as this is the first time that we have heard a woman’s voice speaking from the Bishops’ Bench. I congratulate the right reverend Prelate on making history tonight by making her maiden speech. It is a privilege to have been here and participated in such a great occasion, and to have listened to what she had to say. We are looking forward to many more contributions from her.

Our other maiden speech today from the noble Baroness, Lady Mone, was very interesting. She spoke of her experience in building up her own business from the start—I believe that she was 15 or even 10 years of age when she started her first business—and making it such a success. I believe that she is a great role model who shows what a determined woman can achieve, and I look forward to hearing further contributions from the noble Baroness. I think that she is very much like Viscountess Rhondda, who was a very successful businesswoman when very few women at that time were in the business world. They have something in common there.

While we celebrate International Women’s Day, the United Nations has designated the theme for 2016 as Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step It Up for Gender Equality. That is a great theme to have, and so appropriate at a time when much more action is required to bring about equality for women. Can this be achieved, I wonder? Can we have “Planet 50-50 by 2030”? I believe that we can if the will and determination are there.

If we look around our elected institutions, we see that women are in a minority. In the House of Commons there are now 191 women MPs, the highest number ever. I am proud to say that 99 of them are Labour women—it is true that in 1997 we had 101 women, but we had a lot more MPs then than we do at the moment—making up 43% of the Labour group. There are 68 Conservative women MPs, a big increase as far as Conservative women are concerned, and I know that the noble Baronesses, Lady Jenkin and Lady Morris, have played a big part in making sure that that happened. There are also 20 Scottish Nationalist Party women MPs.

At the last election there were 1,033 women candidates, the largest number ever, making up 26% of all candidates. It shows that there is no shortage of women wanting to stand for Parliament if in 2015 1,033 women wanted to become MPs. Considering that women have been able to stand for Parliament since 1918, though, that is not really a very good story. On one day in May last year, 459 men were elected to the House of Commons. That is nine more than the 450 women ever elected since 1918, so it has taken 97 years to get 450 women MPs. Only 39 women have ever been in the Cabinet, and only one woman has ever been Prime Minister. Again, I pay tribute to the Conservative Party for electing the first and only woman leader so far, who of course became Prime Minister.

But if we look at the new institutions, the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, we can see that women have fared much better. In 2003 Wales became a world leader as the first democratically elected institution to have 50% women. People have said today that that

[BARONESS GALE]

has not been achieved, but it has been achieved in Wales. Not long after that, because of a by-election, there were 31 women and 29 men. So we are making progress in the new institutions. My party fielded an equal number of men and women at the first elections in 1999. That made a huge difference but it was not easy. It is never easy when you try to make a breakthrough for women. There was a very hard battle in my party but we achieved it. Despite that, we see that in political and public life generally women are in a minority. We know that women in the workplace earn less than men. The pay gap is taking a long time to close, despite the fact that we have had an Equal Pay Act since 1970.

How can there be equality when, as many noble Lords have mentioned, the level of domestic abuse is so high? In its 2014 report, the Office for National Statistics estimated that in England and Wales 1.4 million women suffer domestic abuse and two women are killed every week by a current or former partner. Approximately 85,000 women are raped each year. This is a very high level of violence against women. There are laws to protect women and many police forces deal with domestic abuse in a much better way than previously owing to better understanding and training. In many cases, the law now brings perpetrators to justice. That is all to the good, but how to change the culture of a society that allows such violence is yet to be resolved.

Is progress being made for women and how can this be achieved by 2030? Can the UN Pledge for Parity be achieved? Should we have more laws that would change the culture? The Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 allowed all-women shortlists for political parties that wished to use them, and that has helped to deal with the underrepresentation of women.

We see very few women at the top table in the business world. In recent years this has been recognised and much more effort has been made to get more women on boards. My noble friend Lord Davies of Abersoch has produced his report on behalf of the Government on gender diversity in boardrooms. It shows that there has been an increase, with the percentage of women now standing at 26.1%. He made a number of recommendations to improve gender balance by 2020. So intervention can work in line with the recommendations of my noble friend Lord Davies.

Time is getting on and I am getting some looks. I am grateful for the hint and will come to a close. I end by asking whether the Minister will agree to join me in taking the Pledge for Parity in order to achieve the UN objective of Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step It Up for Gender Equality. Perhaps we could start in your Lordships' House. We could work together to make this a gender-balanced House and a more women-friendly place by asking the party leaders to ensure that there was a 50:50 gender split on all new lists of Peers. We could certainly have a discussion about that and see whether each party leader would commit to it.

Another thing that we could do would be to ensure that all legislation was written in non-sexist language rather than, as at present, always being in the male gender. There are many things that we could do and

we could make a start in our own House. If we work together on that and accept the challenge from the United Nations, I believe that it can be done. I look forward to the Minister's response to the invitation that I am handing her tonight.

8.24 pm

Baroness Evans of Bowes Park (Con): My Lords, the debates for International Women's Day are always outstanding, and this has been no exception. It has been a privilege to listen to a debate that has, as usual, encapsulated a huge range of topics and themes. I particularly congratulate the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Gloucester and my noble friend Lady Mone on their excellent maiden speeches. They both highlighted the wealth of experience that women in your Lordships' House bring to our debates. Their personal experiences are inspiring and, like other noble Lords, I look forward to their future contributions. I would also like to thank our five male contributors this evening. Following a quick bit of maths—to show that women can do it—I see that they made up 20% of speakers this evening, which was perhaps something of a role reversal for many of them in your Lordships' House.

Although there has been an upbeat tone to many contributions, it is fair to say that noble Lords have acknowledged that inequalities persist. As we have heard, women are less likely to be in the House of Commons or the House of Lords. However, I believe that when I entered the House not long ago, there were more female entrants in my group than men, and I am pleased with that. Women are less likely to be on boards, at the top of companies, in our Supreme Court, among our judges or editors of newspapers. Progress has been made as, today, our daughters and granddaughters live in a world that is fairer and more equal—a world where more doors are open to them than ever before. But sometimes progress does seem slow. The challenge for us is to overcome the barriers that still exist and to ensure that all women and girls have the opportunity to meet their full potential.

It will be impossible to provide a response that does justice to all the contributions we have heard today, but I will try to cover most of the themes that noble Lords have raised. We are committed to continuously improving the public appointments process and have set the aspiration that 50% of new appointments should go to women. In 2014-15, women made up 42% of public appointments and reappointments. That is up from 39% last year and is the highest figure since data began in 2010.

Although we still have a long way to go, as highlighted by the noble Baroness, Lady Uddin, and the noble Lord, Lord Loomba, this is the most gender-diverse Parliament in British history. We now have more female MPs than ever before, and one-third of our Cabinet is made up of women. Women now make up just under one-third of MPs, which is a significant increase of 23% since 2010. As we have heard, that is thanks to the work of Members of this House, including my noble friends Lady Jenkin and Lady Morris, and the noble Baroness, Lady Gale, to name but a few, who have helped make sure that we have had the progress that we have. It is great to see not just more female MPs but an increase in those from minority backgrounds, such

as Cabinet Minister Priti Patel. As a country, we cannot afford to waste the talents of half our population. That is why we must continue to ensure that women are better represented across all walks of life.

Traditional stereotypes do not just hold back our young people; they can also hold back women aiming to achieve leading roles in UK business. However, again, we are beginning to see progress. As the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, highlighted, the percentage of women on FTSE 100 boards has climbed steadily since the publication in 2011 of the report by the noble Lord, Lord Davies. Women now account for around 26% of directors in the FTSE 100 and there are no all-male boards any more in the FTSE 100. The number of all-male boards in the FTSE 250 is now down to 17, but we need to make sure that that figure decreases to zero. This Government support the business-led 33% target for FTSE 350 boards by 2020, as recommended by the noble Lord, Lord Davies. If business maintains its momentum, this target can be achieved, and we will support business in its efforts to do so.

It is not only in the corporate world that women are making progress. There are now more women-led businesses than ever before, and we heard the story of one of those this evening from my noble friend Lady Mone. Of small and medium-sized enterprises, 20% are run either by women or by a team that is over 50% female. That is an increase of 140,000 since 2010. These women contribute around £85 billion to the UK economy.

Many women want to set up their own business, but need the right support to get started. Natasha graduated in 2010 with a degree in psychotherapy. She was signing on at her jobcentre when her adviser told her about the New Enterprise Allowance. Natasha said: "I already had the idea of setting up a counselling business, even before I graduated. I'd seen a survey that highlighted the need for more independent counselling services in primary care. But I needed help to make my dreams a reality". NEA provider Ixion took over, giving Natasha support in the early stages of setting up her business. She was given one-to-one advice from a business mentor, a £1,000 government loan to finance the rented premises, and a laptop.

Emma from London started her business, SilkFred, with the help of a £10,000 start-up loan and raised £180,000 via crowdfunding. Her online business now provides designers with tools and resources independently to retail their collections and grow their businesses, connecting designers with online shoppers. As a Government, we are committed to ensuring that female entrepreneurs get the support and encouragement they need.

In the wider areas of work and employment, we are also addressing the issues that we know are most pertinent to women. From the introduction of the right to request flexible working, the extension of the childcare offer—as mentioned by the noble Baroness, Lady Tonge—to shared parental leave, we are helping women to achieve a better balance between work and motherhood.

Britain's flexible working schemes are vital to a modern, flourishing economy and have contributed to a record number of women in employment. Female employment has increased faster in the UK than in

any other G7 country, and the female participation rate has increased by more since 2010 than during the three previous Parliaments combined.

Women play a vital role in our economy as both workers and consumers. Our important public services are powered by women. There are more women teachers than men, who inspire our children. If you need to use health services, women will play a key role in looking after you or members of your family.

The noble Baroness, Lady Barker, and the noble Lord, Lord Kakkar, both raised important issues about women's health needs and the users of health services. Reducing health inequalities is central to our work, and we want everybody to have the opportunity to have long and healthy lives. We have introduced legal duties to make sure that health inequalities are taken into account when planning services, and health inequalities are also considered in local activity to improve local health. The NHS will receive £10 billion more in real terms by 2020-21 than in 2014-15, and we have introduced transparent measures to reduce inequalities in life expectancy in the public health outcomes framework and the NHS framework.

As a number of noble Lords referred to, there is a continuing gender pay gap which we must continue to tackle. As my noble friend Lady Williams said, the latest ONS statistics show that the gap remains at 19.2%. This is too large, which is why the Prime Minister has set out this Government's ambition to eliminate the gender pay gap in a generation. The Government have recently published draft regulations which will increase transparency around the gender pay gap, and we expect employers to start publishing the required information from April 2017. We will provide a £0.5 million package of support to help business calculate, understand and address their gender pay gaps.

The Government are looking at ways to tackle the challenges facing older women in work. We are committed to unlocking the skills, talents and experience of all women and supporting them to meet their full economic potential. The Women's Business Council has established a working group on older workers and will consider what business can do to support older workers, particularly around the greater use of flexible working, and provide practical support. We are taking a collaborative approach to addressing the menopause, one of the last taboo subjects. We will raise awareness and improve understanding through an expert group and new research with the aim of improving workplace equality for women experiencing the menopause.

The noble Baroness, Lady Drake, raised the important issue of pensions. We think that women will benefit from the Government's pension reforms. More than 3 million women will receive an average of £11 more per week by 2030, helping to address some of the points that the noble Baroness raised, and the new state pension will start at £155.60 per week.

I turn from older women to girls. As we have heard, girls are outperforming boys at school, but too many feel that their career options are limited because of stereotypes about some jobs being more suitable for girls or others being more suitable for boys. By investing in education, expanding our apprenticeship programme

[BARONESS EVANS OF BOWES PARK]

and improving careers advice, we can help young women to open their eyes to opportunities that they may have believed were unobtainable.

We have a programme of work to raise girls' aspirations, especially encouraging them to study STEM subjects and pursue careers in science and engineering, an issue so well highlighted by the noble Lord, Lord Patel. Again, we are making progress. Compared with 2010, the provisional 2015 results show that the number of girls taking maths A-level has increased by 13% and those taking physics A-level has increased by 16% since 2010. But as the noble Lord said, there is still much to do, which is why this is a personal priority of the current Secretary of State for Education and why the Government are funding a number of programmes to help encourage more girls to continue to take up physics and maths. I also agree with the noble Baroness, Lady Nye, that we need to encourage more women into engineering and STEM-based apprenticeships. Again, that is the focus for the Government. It is our ambition that by 2020, at least 20% of new entrants to engineering and technical apprenticeships will be women.

The Government are not just working to ensure women are empowered economically; we are also working hard both internationally and at home to keep women safe. Protecting women and girls from violence and supporting victims is a key priority for this Government, as set out by my noble friend Lady Secombe. Domestic violence occurs across all groups in society, regardless of age, gender, race, religion, sexuality, wealth or geography. The majority of victims are women and children. Research has shown that approximately one in four women has experienced or currently experience domestic violence. Shockingly, 1.4 million women were victims of domestic abuse in 2014, and it is estimated that between 60,000 and 85,000 women are raped every year. The cost to the economy has been estimated at £15.7 billion annually, so it is essential that the safety of women is a priority.

The effects of domestic violence are wide ranging and will differ for all victims. In some cases, the impact of domestic violence is fatal. Leaving an abusive relationship is a very long and difficult process. Society has a responsibility to support women who make that difficult decision to leave. All agencies can play a role in providing support during the help-seeking process of a woman and children. An initial positive response is crucial. Women and children need to be believed, supported and encouraged to take positive steps for their own safety and well-being.

This Government have ensured that criminal and civil law offers important protections for individuals experiencing domestic violence. In 2010, the coalition Government published a cross-government strategy, *A Call to End Violence against Women and Girls*, and in March 2015 we published a report detailing progress in tackling this over the last Parliament. The achievements included providing better protection for victims, such as rolling out domestic violence protection orders and the domestic violence disclosure scheme nationally; and strengthening the law, such as criminalising forced marriage and introducing new civil orders to manage sex offenders.

We are currently developing a refreshed strategy on violence against women and girls, which will set out a comprehensive plan of action covering prevention, provision of appropriate services, partnerships to ensure improved multi-agency working, and pursuing perpetrators through the criminal justice system. The noble Baroness, Lady Corston, specifically raised the issue of the needs of women offenders and we have just awarded a £200,000 grant to fund four local area pilots that aim to bring together services to support women offenders. The noble Baroness also raised the closure of HMP Holloway. We believe that that will enable investment in a high-quality modern prison estate, and we want to ensure that all women's prisons become resettlement prisons with a focus on close ties with families and rehabilitation back into the community.

The noble Baroness, Lady Healy, raised the important issue of women and homelessness. The Government are committed to tackling that issue and have increased investment in homelessness programmes to £139 million over the spending review period. We have protected homelessness prevention funding for local authorities totalling £350 million by 2019-20 and are looking at other options, including whether we need legislation to further prevent homelessness.

We need to ensure that what we do is inclusive of all groups, whatever their religion, race and background. BME women are disproportionately impacted by specific forms of violence against women and girls, such as forced marriage and honour-based violence. Data released by the police in July 2015 show that more than 11,000 honour crimes were recorded between 2010 and 2015. NHS data released in December revealed 1,385 newly identified cases of FGM within the NHS between July and September 2015. In 2014, the Forced Marriage Unit gave advice or support related to a possible forced marriage in 1,267 cases. Being from a migrant BME background may also mean that people have not secured legal status in this country and are dependent on others, particularly the perpetrator, for their stay in the UK. It can also mean they lack knowledge about UK systems and laws, which adds to the abuser's control over them. Victims are often enslaved in their own homes as a result of an inability to voice their experiences. They do not always speak English and are not allowed to make friends. But the young generation is leading the fightback, with inspirational women such as the Nobel Prize-winning activist Malala Yousafzai helping to highlight the problems faced by young BME people all over the world.

The noble Baronesses, Lady Northover and Lady Hussein-Ece, asked about the sustainable development goals. The Government are taking a co-ordinated approach to these. Last July, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster wrote to departments asking them how they would implement the new goals. The Minister for Women and Equalities will have a strong interest in ensuring their implementation. We are still in the process of confirming the key indicators, but the Office for National Statistics has been leading the Government's efforts to ensure that the new goals are supported by high-quality data and meaningful statistics. These will ensure that data are gender-disaggregated to track progress adequately.

The noble Lord, Lord Loomba, raised the important issue of education and the fact that educating women can help to reduce conflict, and we certainly believe that promoting women's participation in peace processes is vital. We are increasing our financial support for women, peace and security activities through the new Conflict, Stability and Security Fund. In terms of education, the noble Lord is absolutely right. We are increasing educational opportunities for girls through, for instance, the girls' education fund in Somalia. The fund provides scholarships for vulnerable and marginalised girls, and by March 2015 it had reached 26,000 girls through school enrolment, fee waivers and uniforms, and we are supporting similar programmes in Burma.

Finally, the noble Baroness, Lady Dean, asked about sexual violence in the Army and the possible publication of statistics. I know that General Sir Nick Carter is committed to changing the culture of the Armed Forces and wants to increase the number of women. I am happy to raise the issues she discussed in her speech with relevant colleagues in the Ministry of Defence.

This has been a wide-ranging and informative debate. It has also been as constructive and thought provoking as ever. Women's representation and empowerment is important. As a report by the Women's Business Council published last year estimated, raising the level of women's employment to the same as men's could lift GDP by 10% by 2030, and boosting female entrepreneurship could deliver approximately £60 billion extra to the UK economy. This has been a great opportunity to celebrate the important contribution women make to our society and economy, and to highlight the further work that still needs to be done. I hope that I have made clear to noble Lords the Government's determination to do everything in our power to support and transform the opportunities available to women and girls. I thank all noble Lords who have contributed to the debate. It shows that we are all committed to the same goal: to work towards full empowerment and fair representation for all women.

Motion agreed.

House adjourned at 8.43 pm.

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