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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES  
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HOUSE OF LORDS  
OFFICIAL REPORT

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| <b>Abbreviation</b> | <b>Party/Group</b>           |
|---------------------|------------------------------|
| 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

*Thursday 2 November 2017*

*11 am*

*Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Oxford.*

### Women's Suffrage Centenary Fund *Question*

*11.07 am*

*Asked by Baroness McDonagh*

To ask Her Majesty's Government how the £5 million public fund celebrating the centenary of women acquiring the vote has been allocated.

**The Minister of State, Home Office (Baroness Williams of Trafford) (Con):** My Lords, the Government's programme includes a statue of Millicent Fawcett in Parliament Square, a suite of education projects and a forthcoming small grants scheme. The hope is that the £5 million fund will inspire young people and women to become more involved in democracy.

**Baroness McDonagh (Lab):** I thank the Minister for her Answer. Can I ask a little more about the small grants scheme? It seems that a whole raft of organisations, a number of them charities, are asking for money and have not heard anything. We understand when the centenary is; we understood that 100 years ago. Do the Government have any broader ideas, both here in Parliament and outside, about how they will celebrate the role of women over the last 100 years in public life—perhaps to encourage more to come forward?

**Baroness Williams of Trafford:** On the last point, the Government will certainly think about how they can celebrate the role of women both in Parliament and, more broadly, in public life. On the small grants fund, the noble Baroness is absolutely right that people have not heard yet, but they will do very soon.

**Lord Berkeley of Knighton (CB):** My Lords, given the quite magnificent array of women artists in this country—painters, sculptors, writers and, of course, composers—might it not be appropriate to commission a memorial to Emily Davison, who took her suffragette protest to the Derby and was killed by the King's horse, having hid here the previous night in a cupboard in the undercroft?

**Baroness Williams of Trafford:** The noble Lord is absolutely right that Emily Davison is certainly a woman to be celebrated. However, on the funding of statues of some of the great women who have taken part in women's suffrage over the last 100 years, it should not be a case of either/or. There are too few statues commemorating the women who have helped to shape our nation. We welcome the efforts of all charities and campaigners who are actively involved in this process.

**Lord Lexden (Con):** Will my noble friend agree—I think she will, in view of what she said—that it is entirely appropriate that the projected statue in Parliament Square should be of Dame Millicent Fawcett, leader of the law-abiding suffragists for over 50 years, a Liberal and then a Liberal Unionist, whose work helped to create a Commons majority for women's suffrage in the 1890s?

**Baroness Williams of Trafford:** In view of what I have said, of course I agree with my noble friend. She played such an important part not only in history but in where we are today. When I look across this Chamber and the other place, I know I would not be here had it not been for her.

**Baroness Gale (Lab):** My Lords, I welcome the fund that the Minister mentioned and I hope it will get lots of publicity. She will be aware that since 1918 only 489 women have been elected to the House of Commons. Much more needs to be done to break down the barriers facing women in all walks of life. Does the Minister agree that, in celebrating the centenary, we should look at the next 100 years and do all we can to improve the lives of women by introducing better legislation to combat sexual and domestic abuse, be it in the workplace or in the home, and to change the culture of our society so that women and girls are treated equally? One measure that the Government can take is to accelerate the ratification of the Istanbul convention. That would be a great step forward into the next century for women and girls.

**Baroness Williams of Trafford:** The noble Baroness is absolutely right about the Istanbul convention. As she knows, that process is imminent. She is right to mention the next 100 years. If we do not think about the women in the pipeline in all sorts of ways—in Parliament, in the workplace and in their public and private lives—we will slow down the progress that we have made in the previous 100 years. Therefore, I totally agree that we can never lose sight of where we want to be.

**Baroness Burt of Solihull (LD):** My Lords, I would like to make a suggestion for commemorating that momentous day, and the cost to the state would be negligible. As we know, Nancy Astor was the first female Member of Parliament. A portrait of her introduction to the House of Commons, sponsored by Lloyd George and Arthur James Balfour, used to hang in the Commons before, scandalously, being removed in the male club atmosphere of the time. I am so glad that male MPs display a much more respectful and enlightened attitude towards women today. The portrait is now displayed in Lady Astor's American birthplace. Would it be possible to make representations to see whether we can borrow it back to commemorate this date?

**Baroness Williams of Trafford:** I can certainly take that back but I cannot make any undertakings at the Dispatch Box. However, I totally take the point that the noble Baroness has made.

**Lord Bradley (Lab):** My Lords, I am well aware of the keen interest that the Minister takes in her home-based activities in Manchester. Will she commend the campaign

[LORD BRADLEY]

of Councillor Andrew Simcock of Manchester City Council to erect a statue to Emmeline Pankhurst, the leader of the suffragette movement—the first statue for women in the city—and ensure that Manchester gets a fair share of the fund when the allocation is made, so that the activities around the centenary are properly celebrated in the north of England?

**Baroness Williams of Trafford:** The noble Lord has asked me a question about which I am very enthusiastic. Manchester was not only at the heart of but provided the turning point for women's suffrage. Manchester provides the turning point for many things, as we know. Not only do I applaud the efforts of Manchester but I wish its people well in this process.

**Lord Forsyth of Drumlean (Con):** My Lords, might we take the opportunity of the centenary to reflect on the fact that the then Liberal Government refused to give women the vote because they were worried that they would lose the votes of men?

**Baroness Williams of Trafford:** My noble friend is absolutely correct. In fact, turning to the previous question, I think that Emmeline Pankhurst was thrown out of the Free Trade Hall in Manchester and, in true Mancunian style, decided to hold a meeting in the street.

**Baroness Taylor of Bolton (Lab):** My Lords, will the Minister make sure that working-class women, who played a very large role in this matter, get proper recognition? As a north-west person, is she aware of the campaign in Oldham for a statue for Annie Kenney?

**Baroness Williams of Trafford:** I was not aware of the Oldham campaign but the noble Baroness raises a very important point about working-class women and democracy. Democracy in Parliament and local government should not be the preserve of the elite; it should be open to everybody. I know that parties across the House have made incredible efforts to attract women from all socioeconomic groups to play their part.

## Housing: Rental Market *Question*

11.14 am

*Asked by Baroness Gardner of Parkes*

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they have plans to support the return of residential properties, presently let on a short-term basis, to the long-term housing rental market, particularly in London.

**Baroness Gardner of Parkes (Con):** My Lords, I beg leave to ask the Question standing in my name on the Order Paper and remind the House of my interests as declared in the register.

**Lord Young of Cookham (Con):** My Lords, the Government support the sharing economy. In London, residential premises can now be used for temporary sleeping accommodation without a change of use, as long as the number of nights of use does not exceed

90 in a calendar year. There are no plans to discourage the use of residential properties for both longer-term and short-term letting.

**Baroness Gardner of Parkes:** No doubt the Minister is aware of the recent press reports on the effectiveness of the landlord licensing scheme operated by Newham Council, which has prosecuted 1,215 bad landlords and recovered £2.8 million in council tax. Does he not think it is time that the Government gave all local authorities the right to opt for similar licensing schemes to deal with illegal and often untaxed lettings, which are damaging the long-term housing market?

**Lord Young of Cookham:** I am grateful to my noble friend. In our recent debate on housing the spokesman for the Opposition mentioned the scheme in Newham and invited me to visit Newham to see it in operation. I agree with my noble friend that selective licensing is a useful tool, among other measures, to assist local authorities in addressing serious problems in the private rented sector in specific areas. The department plans to carry out a review of selective licensing shortly, which will apply to properties let under tenancies or licences as people's only or main residence in the private rented sector. Finally, the London Borough of Newham has submitted its proposals for a licensing scheme for all private landlords in the borough, which the department is currently considering. We will certainly take on board my noble friend's commendation in that process.

**Lord Clark of Windermere (Lab):** My Lords, I draw the Minister's attention to the fact that the Question is not only about London. Will he look at the possibility of extending the financial arrangements that now apply to longer-term renting to short-term renting—because otherwise so much damage will be done to rural areas and villages?

**Lord Young of Cookham:** I am grateful to the noble Lord, who raised this issue on a previous occasion. I will look at it. However, it is important to remind the House that many farmers are diversifying into tourism and the short-term letting of accommodation that may be surplus to their requirements is a useful source of income. It is important that rural areas that depend on tourism have a good supply of short-term accommodation for letting in order to support a viable tourist industry.

**Lord Tope (LD):** My Lords, is the Minister aware of the research done for the Residential Landlords Association which showed, among other things, a 75% increase in a year in London in the number of multi-listings on the Airbnb website, despite the company's announced crackdown? Does he agree that this suggests that a growing number of landlords are switching away from long-term letting—which, frankly, London desperately needs—because of the greater financial incentives for short-term lettings? What consideration are the Government giving to offering incentives to landlords to provide more longer-term tenancies?

**Lord Young of Cookham:** I am grateful to the noble Lord. It is not possible for landlords in London to switch rented accommodation wholly over to short-term letting because of the restriction that I mentioned

earlier: short-term lettings can only be for up to 90 days. Therefore, it would not be possible legally for a landlord to let his property on a short-term basis throughout the year. One has to get a balance. London has to compete with other tourist destinations and tourists expect to find a range of accommodation through organisations such as the one the noble Lord mentioned. Many London boroughs do not have an adequate supply of hotels, and therefore one needs a supply of short-term letting accommodation. Also, many Londoners, in their efforts to make ends meet, like to rent out their home on a short-term basis when they are not using it themselves.

**Lord Campbell-Savours (Lab):** My Lords, is not the Minister wrong in his calculations? You can get more money out of a 90-day B&B than you can get out of a 365-day let.

**Lord Young of Cookham:** I am not sure that I would sign up for a short-term letting on those sorts of terms, which sound penal. Many landlords would rather have their property occupied throughout the year rather than for up to 90 days and then not used for the rest of the year. The balance we have tried to get in London is to safeguard the stock of long-term accommodation for rent by Londoners with the freedom for Londoners, when they are not using their home themselves, to let it out to other people who want to rent it.

**Lord Best (CB):** My Lords, does the Minister agree that the real deterrent for landlords letting on the open market to people on lower incomes is the policies of the Department for Work and Pensions, which mean that, if the tenant is on universal credit, the landlord will not get any money for six weeks and will then not get the full market rent and therefore is having to make a sacrifice? With those deterrents from the welfare system, is it not likely that homelessness will rise as private landlords increasingly will not accept anybody who is on a low income?

**Lord Young of Cookham:** The noble Lord is right to raise the issue of universal credit. It is one of the issues that is now being looked at as we run up to the Budget later this month. We will also have a debate on universal credit later this month, before the Budget, when he can make the point again. However, in certain circumstances the rent can be paid direct to the landlord in order to provide the security of income that the landlord may need.

**Lord Beecham (Lab):** My Lords, given the depth of the housing crisis, is it not time to review the application of planning laws and the planning system to this and related issues, which simply make it more difficult for people to find a permanent home?

**Lord Young of Cookham:** As I said a moment ago, outside London there is no restriction on what home owners can do with their homes. They can let them on a series of short-term lets. Precisely to protect the stock in London we have a 90-day rule to prevent the leakage of rented accommodation for Londoners wholly into the tourism market. We will look at the issue

again, if the noble Lord insists—but, as a former MP for a London seat, I will need some convincing that we have not got the balance about right at the moment.

**Lord Palmer of Childs Hill (LD):** Can I try to convince the Minister with the statistic that longer than 90-day lettings in London have increased by 23%? Given this, the Government must increase the funding for local authorities in order to enforce the rule. We may have a 90-day rule in London but there has been a vast increase in people advertising lettings of over 90 days, and trading standards are no good at enforcing the rule in all but one or two London boroughs.

**Lord Young of Cookham:** It would be for planning departments rather than trading standards to enforce the rule. The Government have recently announced that planning authorities can increase their fees by up to 20% precisely to give them the resources they need, among other things, to enforce planning legislation.

## Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013

### *Question*

11.22 am

*Asked by Lord Faulkner of Worcester*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the effectiveness and enforcement of the Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013.

**The Minister of State, Home Office (Baroness Williams of Trafford) (Con):** The Government have conducted a review of the Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013 to assess whether it has met its intended objectives and whether it should be retained or repealed. A report of the findings of this review will be published later this year.

**Lord Faulkner of Worcester (Lab):** I am grateful to the Minister for that reply. Only organised criminal gangs would like to see the Act repealed. It was immensely successful initially thanks to rigorous enforcement, led by the British Transport Police, and the work of the scrap metal task force. Is she aware that in the past two years, from the second half of 2016 and through this year, the incidence of theft has been growing again, particularly of high-value items, through the work of organised gangs? The increase is due also to the rise in the value of scrap metal—for example, copper is now worth more than £5,000 per tonne. Should not the Act be strengthened and the task force reconstituted?

**Baroness Williams of Trafford:** My Lords, in terms of thefts going up, as the noble Lord has said, between 2012-13 and 2015-16 we saw a decrease of something like 74%, which is very pleasing. We will not know the latest figures for a while, but the Government will certainly be looking at them. He is absolutely right about high-value incidents. We recognise the impact that they have, particularly on heritage assets. On enforcement, obviously the police and local authorities deploy their resources as they see fit, but certainly this type of theft has a broader impact on society, not only on those from whom the material has been stolen.



**The Earl of Clancarty (CB):** My Lords, how often are chemical markers such as SmartWater being used on public sculptures and memorials? Are scrap metal dealers being encouraged to check for such markers?

**Baroness Williams of Trafford:** I am afraid I cannot tell the noble Earl how often chemical markers have been used, particularly on heritage assets. However, I can write to him about it.

**The Lord Bishop of Oxford:** My Lords, the Minister will be aware of the impact on churches of such theft, particularly from roofs. It has a devastating effect on church communities and knock-on effects for important local amenities. Can she clarify what the Home Office can do to encourage enforcement of the need to register scrap metal dealers with local authorities, as well as not selling on scrap for cash?

**Baroness Williams of Trafford:** My Lords, buying scrap metal for cash is now an offence. I declare an interest in that I was chairman of the Heritage Lottery Fund for the north-west, so I recognise the totally disproportionate impact that these crimes have on communities and on heritage. The Sentencing Council has published guidelines relating to offences of theft which specifically recognise that where an offence involves the theft of historic objects or a loss of the nation's heritage, these are to be considered aggravating factors when sentencing. This can include damage to heritage sites or theft from the interior or exterior of listed churches.

**Baroness Whitaker (Lab):** My Lords, what discussions have the Government had with Gypsy and Traveller traders about the Act as currently implemented? It has caused them considerable difficulties, almost amounting to restraint of trade.

**Baroness Williams of Trafford:** I am just turning to my noble friend Lord Henley, who was involved in the Act, as was my noble friend Lord Taylor of Holbeach. I understand that during the passage of the Bill and prior to that, the Gypsy and Traveller community made representations. However, there is an overriding point here, which is that the trade in scrap metal must be lawful, and therefore the full force of the law should come down on people who steal metal and attempt to sell it.

**Lord Greaves (LD):** My Lords, noble Lords have spoken about the top level of illegal trade and theft. What tends to happen in towns in the north of England is that people drive up and down the backstreets in unregistered vans or trucks with no identification on them. They pick up and take away anything that is left on the street. They also look into backyards and if no one is living in the house, they might take material away. If there is someone in the house, they will offer them a couple of quid. But even if these people are not paying money for the scrap, they need waste carrier licences. Much of this is going on at a low level that is just below the radar. What will the police do to stop it?

**Baroness Williams of Trafford:** My Lords, the noble Lord mentions a number of different events, which may or may not be theft. Some people might be quite

grateful to have scrap metal that has been lying in their backyards for years picked up. Going back to the Scrap Metal Dealers Act, it is now unlawful for someone to buy scrap metal for cash, and therefore there is now a better audit trail of where scrap metal is going.

**Earl Attlee (Con):** My Lords, the legislation is clearly desirable and has been successful, but we have not totally eliminated the theft of metal, so it must be getting into the scrap metal industry. Can the Minister tell us anything about prosecutions of scrap metal dealers?

**Baroness Williams of Trafford:** I can tell my noble friend that there were 62,000 offences in 2012-13, which came down to 16,000 in 2015-16. That huge decline in the number of offences tells me that there has been a huge decline in the number of thefts.

## Manufacturing: Digital Technology Question

11.29 am

Asked by **Lord Haskel**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what is their response to the *Made Smarter Review* on the benefits of applying digital technology to the manufacturing industry, published on 30 October.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Lord Henley) (Con):** My Lords, Her Majesty's Government welcome the *Made Smarter* report and thank Juergen Maier and the industry team for their work in outlining the huge potential that digitalisation offers to United Kingdom manufacturing. We look forward to working closely with industry to ensure that the United Kingdom can capitalise on the massive benefits of digital technology, which this report makes so clear, and realise its potential to be a global leader in the industrial digital technology revolution.

**Lord Haskel (Lab):** My Lords, I am pleased that the Government welcome the report, as I do. As the report says, digitalisation can deliver a much-needed boost to our productivity. However, the report also points out that it is a disruptive technology for jobs and businesses. In implementing the report, what arrangements will the Government make for those who are displaced? Will there be a safety net? What procedures will the Government implement to ensure that people are not damaged by this?

**Lord Henley:** As the noble Lord will be aware, the report is quite big—246 pages. It was published on Monday. I arrived in the department on Monday, so I cannot claim to have read it from cover to cover at this point. No doubt he will criticise me for that, but I will start on it over the weekend. We recognise that this technology presents great challenges, including for raising productivity. The noble Lord is right to talk about the challenges of the fact that, in creating new, higher-paid and higher-skilled jobs, it creates a threat to other jobs—something we went through in the first Industrial Revolution when the spinning jenny and

other things came in. It also creates opportunities for new jobs, which is what we want. I think he will accept that at this stage, with a 246-page report having been published only on Monday, it is a bit early for the Government to make any pronouncements on it.

**Baroness Smith of Basildon (Lab):** My Lords, while the Government may not want to make pronouncements, I hope that the Minister will take the opportunity for a quiet weekend, and perhaps to snuggle up with a cup of cocoa and read the report. He mentioned the Industrial Revolution; he will be aware of the huge social unrest that followed it. While the report states the number of new jobs—a net gain of 175,000—jobs will change. Some people will lose their jobs; some will work shorter hours. The technology has to benefit those who are working, and not cause an increase in unemployment and reduce incomes. While I do not expect him to have read the report, will the Minister give some thought to how we ensure both that those people whose jobs change get the adequate training and support they need, and that those who lose employment get alternative employment so that we do not lose the income of those currently in work?

**Lord Henley:** I can only agree with everything the noble Baroness said, other than her comments on cocoa. I will read the report over the weekend. It is too early to say, but she will be aware that we have the industrial strategy coming out later this month. If she is a little patient, she will hear more from the department and my right honourable friend about what we plan to do, particularly on the challenges that these changes present to the United Kingdom and the Government—challenges that both she and her noble friend Lord Haskel have highlighted.

**Lord Palmer of Childs Hill (LD):** The Minister talks about challenges. He has not had a chance to read the report, but does he agree that its proposals will be relevant only if manufacturing has access to a high-quality digital network, and that this will be even more critical when—if—Brexit happens? When will we have a meaningful and effective universal internet service? Without that service being universally available in the whole UK, we will not be able to compete internationally. Does the Minister agree?

**Lord Henley:** My Lords, again, I can only agree with the noble Lord. We are doing well. There is more to be done and he will hear more in due course. Again, if he is patient he will see the industrial strategy later this month.

**Lord West of Spithead (Lab):** My Lords, there are huge benefits in digital technology, but I skimmed the review wearing the old hat I used to have on security. Sadly, this marvellous digital revolution opens up vulnerabilities. I could not see anything mentioning any concerns on that. We need to be very wary because it will often open up people to losing their identities and all sorts of things. We need to be very aware that, as well as all the benefits we get from digitalisation, there are some real risks. We need always to bear those in mind.

**Lord Henley:** Again, I can only agree with the noble Lord. I have not even got as far as skimming the report. I intend to take the advice of the noble Baroness and read it over the weekend. Any big changes that come to us can obviously be big threats to other fields. That is why my right honourable friend originally commissioned this report, welcomed it and thanked Professor Juergen Maier for producing it. We want to make the right response—not just of the Government, but of United Kingdom industry and the whole of the United Kingdom—in due course.

**Lord Broers (CB):** My Lords, I am sure the Minister realises that, on the positive side, this will grow exports. If we do not have our products adequately defined in digital terms we will not compete internationally. It is essential that we drive this forward.

**Lord Henley:** My Lords, I can only say how much I agree with the noble Lord. We have to look at what digitalisation offers to us while also bearing in mind what the noble Lord, Lord West, said about threats. That is why we want to make the right response. I note what has been said.

**Lord Berkeley (Lab):** My Lords, one of the real benefits of digitalisation is on the railways. As the Secretary of State recently said, we can get many more trains on the line more safely with digital signalling. The Minister's predecessor will have recently received a report from the railways on digitalisation. Will he say something about how the finances for the railways will change so that there is enough investment in both the tracks and the cabs and locomotives, including freight, to make sure this happens quickly and safely? I declare an interest as chairman of the Rail Freight Group.

**Lord Henley:** I am grateful to the noble Lord for mentioning the railways. I will be heading back north again on the west coast main line. I know quite how good that is at the moment, but I have also been told just how much it could be improved with digitalisation of the signalling and what improvements we can see on that front. I look forward to improvements there over coming years. The noble Lord asked about finances for the railways. He would not expect me to make any response at this stage. I hope he will be patient and wait for what comes out of the industrial strategy later this month.

## Brexit: Sectoral Impact Assessments

### *Private Notice Question*

11.37 am

*Asked by Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town*

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they will disclose the Government's Brexit sectoral impact assessments to the House of Lords European Union Select Committee.

**Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town (Lab):** My Lords, I beg leave to ask a Question of which I have given private notice.

**The Minister of State, Department for Exiting the European Union (Lord Callanan) (Con):** My Lords, the Government have to reflect on the implications of yesterday's Motion and how best we can meet the requirements set out from the House, bearing in mind that the documents requested do not exist in the form suggested in the Motion.

**Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town:** I welcome the noble Lord the Minister—the third Brexit Minister I have faced—to his first outing in this role. I apologise that I had to bring him to the Dispatch Box early today, but from what I understand he is well up to the challenge of these small inconveniences. However, I am sorry that his Answer does not answer the Question I raised. We know that the Ministers in the other place are already discussing with my right honourable friend the chair of the Commons Brexit committee the handing over of the documents. I ask the Minister to undertake to have similar discussions with the chair of our EU committee about its access to these documents. They are essential for the work it is doing on our behalf.

**Lord Callanan:** I thank the noble Baroness for her welcome. I have watched her as an extremely able and effective performer in this House and look forward to working closely with her, as far as we are able, in the difficult task ahead. The Motion in question was about sharing documentation with the Select Committee on Exiting the EU. As the Secretary of State for Exiting the EU has said in the other place this morning, he has already spoken to the chair of that committee. Further conversations will take place about how we handle the confidentiality of the documents that we hand over. Of course, I will be very happy to have similar discussions with the committees of this House.

**Lord Newby (LD):** My Lords, the basis of the Government's case for not publishing the documents is that they would prejudice the Brexit negotiations. If the documents are factual assessments of the consequences of leaving the EU, how can that conceivably undermine the negotiations? Surely it just helps the whole country to understand the consequences of the course that the Government are now set on.

**Lord Callanan:** My Lords, we have been very clear that we will be as open as possible and share as much information with both Houses as possible. The Secretary of State and other Ministers have made a substantial number of appearances in front of various committees of both Houses. We want to be as open as possible, but we must be careful not to prejudice our negotiating position. The noble Lord will be aware that the EU, on the other side of the negotiations, has not released similar assessments.

**Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall (Lab):** My Lords, I think that the whole House will have been intrigued by the Minister's—to whom I also offer a welcome—observation, if I have understood him rightly, that the documents do not exist in the form in which they have been requested. Is he saying that there are no such documents? In which case, what is being discussed? If there are such documents, in what form do they exist?

**Lord Callanan:** My Lords, they are not “impact assessments”, as was referred to in the Motion; they are a series of sectoral analyses of different sectors of the economy.

**Noble Lords:** Oh!

**Lord Callanan:** There is a big difference, my Lords, between the two things.

**Lord Lawson of Blaby (Con):** My Lords, I welcome my noble friend to his new responsibilities, which he is particularly well equipped to perform. I look forward to hearing a lot more from him in the weeks and months to come. Is not this all a lot of nonsense? We all know from the Treasury's forecasts of the short-term impact of the Brexit decision that it does not have a clue—to put it politely. The longer-term impacts will depend overwhelmingly on what policies we put in place post Brexit when we are free to do so. That is true not only of the agricultural sector, for example, but of the whole of the rest of the economy. Since these policies have not yet been decided, is it not the case that this is a complete farce and that the Opposition are simply seeking to embarrass the Government—which is what Oppositions do—in the face of an international negotiation?

**Lord Callanan:** I thank the noble Lord for his questions and observations. I am not sure that I would use the word farce to describe appropriate parliamentary procedures—of course, the Opposition are quite entitled to ask any questions and request any documents they wish. As I said, we will concentrate on getting the best deal for the UK in these negotiations. We will be as open and as transparent as possible as far as that objective is concerned. I also thank the noble Lord for his welcome.

**Lord Harris of Haringey (Lab):** Will the Minister explain precisely what the difference is between a sector analysis and an impact assessment? Does a sector analysis not include any assessment of impact, or is it really just playing with words to try to avoid the obligation that, if the Government are keen on transparency, they should put these documents in the public domain? If they are simply analyses of sectors, why would they prejudice our negotiating position?

**Lord Callanan:** I understand that several noble Lords will be looking forward to the publication of sections of these documents in some sort of macabre sense, thinking that they will somehow provide succour to their view, but they may be disappointed when they see them. As I said, they are a whole series of long and complicated documents—I have read a number of them. It is exactly as I have said: they are sectoral analyses of different sectors of the economy and the effect it might have on our negotiations with our EU partners.

**Lord Tugendhat (Con):** My Lords, it is of course encouraging that the Government have undertaken these assessments and I am sure we all look forward to seeing them. But can the Minister tell me whether the Government have undertaken similar assessments of



the impact of Brexit on different countries, regions, industries and economic sectors in the EU 27? That, too, is highly relevant to the outcome of these negotiations.

**Lord Callanan:** My Lords, there is a huge amount of work going on across government on all these matters to inform our negotiating position. As I said earlier, it is interesting that the EU negotiators have decided not to publish similar documents on their side. I assume that they have done similar work to inform their negotiating position.

**Lord Elystan-Morgan (CB):** The Minister is no doubt aware that over the past weeks Members of both Houses have felt frustrated that they have been unable to discover what advice the Government have received as to whether or not they would be entitled to withdraw the notice under Article 50. I will ask a question which I think is within the bounds of correctitude: do the Government consider that they have an option to withdraw lawfully should they wish to take that course?

**Lord Callanan:** I am not going to comment on any legal advice we may have received. We had a referendum on this subject. People voted to leave the European Union. We are going to leave and we are not going to withdraw the notification issued under Article 50, which was approved by both Houses.

**Lord Campbell-Savours (Lab):** My Lords, are cross-border transport arrangements the subject of sectoral analysis? If they are, does that mean there has been an examination of problems that might arise in Dover, with huge backlogs of trucks trying to enter the United Kingdom and, indeed, going abroad?

**Lord Callanan:** My previous role—sadly brief—was at the Department for Transport. Of course all these contingencies are being looked at. We will need to consider the full implications of the decision to leave and the negotiations that we are pursuing. Of course that will be one of the pertinent factors.

**Lord Shipley (LD):** My Lords, the Minister knows the north-east of England extremely well. Have these assessments included an impact assessment for the economy of the north-east of England as a consequence of Brexit? If there is not one, why not? If there is, will he publish it?

**Lord Callanan:** I thank the noble Lord for his question. I have been in the department since Monday. There are hundreds and hundreds of pages of these assessments. I have read some of them. I do not know whether there is a specific reference to the north-east, or indeed any other regions, in the documents. If there is, I have not seen one yet.

**The Earl of Kinnoull (CB):** My Lords, David Davis has appeared before the European Union Select Committee three times since the Brexit vote, and on more than one occasion he has promised parity of information for us and the committee in the House of Commons. We have now published 20 sectoral reports, and there are more in the pipeline. Therefore, we are in a very high state of knowledge about sectoral issues.

Will the Minister go further than saying that he will have a discussion with our chairman about things and actually undertake that we will receive the same information as the equivalent committee in the House of Commons?

**Lord Callanan:** As I said, we still need to have further discussions with the chairman of the Brexit Select Committee in another place. Of course, following those discussions we will reflect further on what information we will want to provide to comply with the Motion, and I have undertaken to have a similar discussion with the chairman of the committee in this place. I do not want to go any further than that at the moment.

## Business of the House

### *Timing of Debates*

11.48 am

*Tabled by Baroness Evans of Bowes Park*

That the debate on the motion in the name of the Earl of Lindsay set down for today shall be limited to 3 hours and that in the name of Lord Farmer to 2 hours.

**Lord Taylor of Holbeach (Con):** My Lords, in the absence of my noble friend the Leader of the House, I beg to move the Motion standing in her name on the Order Paper. In doing so, I draw the attention of the House to the timing of the Statement, which will be after the debate in the name of the noble Earl, Lord Lindsay, which immediately follows.

*Motion agreed.*

## Agriculture, Fisheries and the Rural Environment

*Motion to Take Note*

11.49 am

*Moved by The Earl of Lindsay*

That this House takes note of new opportunities and challenges for agriculture, fisheries, and the rural economy in the United Kingdom.

**The Earl of Lindsay (Con):** My Lords, before I introduce the debate, I should first pay tribute to my noble friend Lord Plumb, who will make his valedictory speech today. In the words of the NFU, my noble friend has been,

“a tireless and vocal champion for British farming ... For many, there will be nobody to equal the contribution to British agriculture that Lord Plumb has made”.

That contribution reached the first of its many high points in the 1970s. My noble friend was president of the National Farmers' Union during the British accession to the EEC and successfully negotiated greater support for British agriculture from the common agriculture policy. Thereafter, while he was an MEP between 1979 and 1999, he served as President of the European Parliament from 1987 to 1989—the first and only Briton to hold that post. My noble friend became a Member of this House in 1987, since when he has given us 30 years of wisdom in the Chamber and as a

[THE EARL OF LINDSAY]

member of many of our Committees. His wisdom and experience will be long remembered and much missed by this House but his contribution to the industry goes on thanks to the Henry Plumb Foundation, which he has set up.

Moving on to the debate, I declare an interest as a farmer in Fife and chairman of Scotland's Moorland Forum, a body that brings together all the organisations with an interest in the Scottish uplands. The title for today's debate is deliberately broad for three reasons. First, agriculture and food is a vital sector throughout the UK and is likely to form a central strand in today's debate. However, we should not forget that other key sectors make up our rural economy—from forestry, fishing and aquaculture to renewable energy, ecosystem services and tourism. Secondly, this debate is deliberately UK-wide; I for one intend to refer to the Scottish perspective. Finally, while the immediate consequences of Brexit raise serious concerns, many of which have been the subject of a recent and very thorough debate in this Chamber, we also need to focus on the significant opportunities that lie beyond Brexit.

A number of organisations with a stake in agriculture, land and the environment are already doing some bold and visionary thinking about the future. They all recognise that the Brexit legacy will give us the first opportunity in at least 40 years to establish a new framework for farming, food, forestry and environmental policies. Some would go further than that 40 years, as in the words of one industry commentator:

"Brexit offers the greatest opportunity to determine agricultural policy since 1947, providing the chance to improve the sector that provides much of our food, environment and landscape—such a chance to shape our own destiny may not come again".

Many industry and environmental organisations agree on not only the scale of this opportunity but the broad shape that it should take in new policy and support frameworks. All agree that greater integration is the answer. All see a golden opportunity for a new policy framework that combines support for economic resilience with rewards for the delivery of wider public benefits. All see the delivery of environmental and animal welfare standards as objectives.

However, most agree that maximising the benefits of this once-in-a-generation opportunity requires the key challenges arising from Brexit to be successfully resolved. These are: the need for frictionless access to existing and new export markets; for continued access to a skilled and competent workforce; for a domestic market that is a level playing field and is not suddenly exposed to cut-price imports, with inferior environmental and animal welfare standards; and for a targeted support system with, importantly, the UK and the devolved Administrations working together in a creative and constructive manner.

Targeted support will be vital. Most commentators are mindful of the wider truth behind the old adage that farming cannot be green if it is in the red; nor, if in the red, can farming deliver the same high-quality produce that underpins our food industry, nor support the livelihood of so many local communities and the services on which they depend. The Government's undertaking, as I understand it, to match the £3 billion that farmers currently receive in support from the

CAP until 2022 is therefore welcome, as is the pledge to continue supporting farmers thereafter where the wider public benefits of that spending are clear. The design and delivery of that future financial support, as well as the policy framework in which it sits, are going to be key at both UK and devolved levels.

Resolving the Brexit challenges and seizing the post-Brexit opportunities for agriculture and other rural industries, such as fishing and aquaculture, will underpin a much bigger win. These industries are the bedrock of the wider UK food sector, which employs 3.8 million people and contributes more than £100 billion per annum to the UK economy. Last year more than £20 billion-worth of food and non-alcoholic drink products were exported. Most farming and food organisations see significant opportunities to increase that figure if the right new trade agreements are in place. The Scottish food and drink industry has been particularly successful and has grown to the point where the president of NFU Scotland felt able to say that it is a bigger driver of Scotland's economy than oil and gas. Its turnover is currently in excess of £14 billion, and it accounts for 4.5% of employment in Scotland. Scottish food and drink exports were worth £5.5 billion in 2016 and reached 86 countries. NFU Scotland sees opportunities to grow those markets and to open up new export markets elsewhere in the world.

Critical for the farming, food and drink industries of both Scotland and the UK post-Brexit is a new UK register of protected food names to replace the current EU regime, with mutual recognition for UK and EU protected names having been agreed. The Minister may be able to update us on the Government's plans on this matter. In Scotland, the current EU regime protects food names such as Scotch beef, Scotch lamb and Arbroath smokies. Elsewhere across the UK, protected food names include Welsh lamb, Cornish pasties, Melton Mowbray pork pies, Stilton blue cheese and Jersey royal potatoes, to name but a few. It is important that we have a new UK regime for protected names.

Another very important Scottish product that benefits from a protected food name is the UK's single most valuable food export: Scottish farmed salmon. Some 65% of its production is exported to 64 countries across the world. The industry is worth £1.5 billion and supports 8,800 jobs. It is now the biggest seller in the UK fresh seafood market. It is highly invested, and it sees future opportunities for new value-added products and new markets. Its contribution to the rural economy and local communities is immense. The vast majority of the 2,500 directly employed people—with salaries totalling £75 million—are in remoter parts of the highlands and islands.

Fishing is an industry of importance to many local communities as well as to the rural and wider economy. It is also the sector that anticipates the most immediate opportunities from Brexit. Given the UK's plans to resume sovereign control of its waters by coming out of the common fisheries policy and the London fisheries convention, this is the first opportunity in 50 years to rewrite existing policies on who can fish in our waters, the management of our fisheries and their sustainability,

our fishing effort, the regulation of fish products, support for fishermen and their coastal and island communities, and such thorny issues as quota hopping.

In short, there is a significant and long-awaited opportunity to establish a new regime that is more effective and more responsive; better tailored to UK waters and fishing fleets; based on fairer, more appropriate and more intelligent controls; and developed in consultation with local interests and the local industry. Post Brexit, the UK industry will also be better placed to explore new markets for UK fish products outside the UK among some of the world's fastest-growing economies.

Also anticipating major new opportunities post Brexit is forestry, which is another vital cog in the rural economy. This is especially the case in Scotland, where the industry is worth around £1 billion and supports more than 25,000 jobs. The widely held belief that policy integration is the key to unlocking future opportunities applies especially to the forestry sector. The industry body, Confor, feels that the single biggest obstacle to new woodland creation in the UK has been the CAP, which has meant that any farmer considering planting trees has faced decades of lost income due to lost subsidy payments.

Furthermore, a lack of integration to date between different land-use policies has created additional hurdles. Farmers considering planting trees, for instance, have had to learn how to navigate different grant and regulatory systems administered by different public bodies, with different processes, timescales and cultures. With a sensibly integrated land-use policy encouraging new woodland and new forestry where that represents the best use of land, a number of opportunities arise—from carbon capture on the one hand to new downstream jobs with sawmills and processors on the other.

It opens up the opportunity for the UK to achieve greater self-sufficiency, which is a worthwhile objective given that the UK is now the second-biggest timber importer in the world behind China. Also of considerable importance, post Brexit, the UK will have the flexibility to take greater control over imports that are deemed to be high risk in terms of tree pests and diseases. This of course has been a real concern for the sector and indeed for anyone with an interest in trees.

I recognise that in the time available today I have not been able to cover all the many different sectors and diverse strands that make up our local rural economy, or all the wonderful regional patterns and local circumstances that make up this wonderful, rich tapestry. I hope that others might touch on topics such as renewable energy, tourism, planning and housing. That said, I hope I have done justice to the local rural economy sectors that I have been able to cover. Most are facing some short-term and very real challenges arising from the uncertainties surrounding Brexit. These can and must be avoided or resolved. But, looking further ahead, above and beyond those challenges there are undoubtedly a number of very significant opportunities, all of which are seen by the industries and organisations involved as once-in-a-lifetime opportunities. I beg to move.

12.04 pm

**Lord Whitty (Lab):** My Lords, I thank the noble Earl for this debate and for his wide-ranging introduction. He is of course right to have begun with the real historic importance of this debate: the retirement from this House of the noble Lord, Lord Plumb. I first met the noble Lord, when he was plain Sir Henry, back in the European Parliament days when he was leader of the Conservative group. In those days the Conservatives were a very influential group within Europe and in the European Parliament and had many friends, but times change. My conversations with him then must have revealed to him that I did not have a very clear grasp of agriculture. Since he knows the way of the world, it can hardly have come as a surprise to him that a few short years later I was appointed as the Agriculture Minister in this House. That was in very difficult times in the immediate aftermath of foot and mouth; indeed, it was still going on. I think I speak for everyone on every side of the House who has spoken on agriculture or had responsibility for it when I speak of the importance of the contributions we had from the noble Lord, Lord Plumb, in the Chamber, in Select Committees and in private conversations. I thank him for that. I am not saying we always agreed. I am not even saying he was always right, but he usually was. This House and many people in it will miss him.

I have two points to make today. First, the noble Earl is clearly right that we have an opportunity to substitute for the CAP a new British agricultural policy. As I said a few days ago, we need to remember that the CAP had multiple objectives and multiple effects. It was not simply a protectionist policy, although it was that and a very effective one; it also had environmental aims, land-use aims, rural development aims and aims that affected the whole of the food chain, which accounts for well over 10% of our employment and our GDP. Whatever reform and replacement there is of the CAP, which was never a perfect fit for the UK in any of its manifestations, has to recognise all those multiple dimensions. If we regard it simply as an agricultural or environmental policy, we will not have done the job of replacing it and taking this opportunity seriously. I will not expand on this, given the time.

My second point relates to an issue that rarely gets referred to here and, to be honest—looking at the list of speakers—may not be quite so popular, as in some cases it is the dark side of certain parts of the agriculture and food-processing industry: the labour force and the industry's treatment of it. The last 40 years have seen an increasing dependence on migrant labour for certain parts of agriculture and food processing. It may not be politically correct to say so, but that imported labour and its effects socially and locally have led to social tensions in some parts of our country. It is no coincidence that many of the largest votes for Brexit were in the small towns and villages in counties in the east of England where these issues are at their most acute. It is also ironic but no coincidence that many of the farmers who, contrary to the advice of the NFU, advocated Brexit and shouted most loudly for it are now among those who are shouting for exemptions from what will be a stronger migration policy following Brexit. I am



[LORD WHITTY]

not against a new and properly regulated seasonal workers scheme; in fact, I am for it, and I hope it is part of the outcome. However, the more general outcome needs to see a situation where the workers within the agriculture and first-line processing sectors are treated better than they have been over the last few decades.

Contrary to the reassuring noises made by several noble Lords when we debated the abolition of the Agricultural Wages Board a few years ago, the reality has been that in a period when real wages for the rest of the economy have not gone up, the relative position of agricultural workers, as far as statisticians can make out, has still deteriorated. The abolition of the board and, for example, the restriction until recently on the activities and resources of the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority have meant that the problems within that sector had not been properly addressed. Whatever we do in terms of the new agricultural and rural development policy, we must make sure that we have a workforce who are invested in it, properly trained and properly rewarded.

12.09 pm

**Baroness Scott of Needham Market (LD):** I add my thanks to the noble Earl for securing today's debate, for introducing it so ably, and for giving us the opportunity to hear the valedictory speech of the noble Lord, Lord Plumb. Although he sits on the other Benches, I would still very much like to refer to him as my noble friend. His wisdom, experience and dedication to this industry is legendary and we shall miss him in this House. I imagine there must be a certain bitter-sweet quality for him and for others that, having fought for so long to get agriculture on to the public agenda, it has taken the result of the referendum to begin to get people talking about farming and what it means for this country.

I guess that in a sense one impact of the CAP was that agriculture was something that happened over there somewhere and that we did not have much say in the matter. There is some truth in that. So, if we are about to take back control, it is time to take some responsibility.

Around 18 months or so ago, the EU Sub-Committee on Energy and Environment, which I chaired at the time, carried out an inquiry into building resilience in the farming sector. It was in the context of our EU membership, but the challenges we identified are systemic to the industry and will not disappear after Brexit. Indeed, making progress on some of these basic structural issues will be vital if our farming sector is to survive in anything like its current form.

I guess for me that is the starting point. Do we actually want something that is the way it is now? I am not clear on the Government's vision for agriculture, as we go forward—whether it is a Grayling-esque fortress Britain or the dream of the noble Lord, Lord Forsyth, of a low regulated buccaneering sector, or something more aligned to the Secretary of State's vision where we have high environmental and welfare standards.

Taken as a whole, the agri-food sector accounted for 7.2% of the national gross added value in 2014. The agricultural workforce that same year was around

429,000, and some 71% of land in the UK is utilised by agriculture. This is an enormous sector for the well-being of this country, and its needs ought to be very high on the Government's agenda as they negotiate trade policies, for example.

We need to reflect that farming is an industry quite unlike any other. Farmers provide a secure supply of safe food, manage the land and contribute to the wider rural economy. They cope with multiple risks such as unpredictable and catastrophic weather, the impact of political decisions such as the Russian embargo, and volatile international markets. They do that while providing public goods, such as a managed environment and animal welfare standards. Their investments are often made over a very long period. Land is often family owned and passed through the generations. Short-term price volatility, which is becoming an increasing feature of agriculture markets, is an uncomfortable bedfellow with that sort industry structure. That is why, right across the globe, we see public support for agriculture. Many countries offer short-term assistance for particular problems such as catastrophic weather because those risks are insurable, but very expensive. Government need to reassure us that the previous funds available from the EU will continue in some form after/if we Brexit.

In the long term, there is a very fine balance between providing the sort of support farmers need to smooth out short-term volatility on the one hand, and providing a permanent cushion which creates a disincentive for innovation and change of business practice. At the moment, when our farming sector is receiving between 40% and 60% of farm income in subsidy, it is difficult to see how that will be sustainable financially or politically in the long run. If UK taxpayers are expected to contribute on that level, they will expect to see much clearer outcomes in return for their money, whether it is in landscape, biodiversity, animal welfare, food security or the wider rural economy.

New Zealand is noteworthy for having removed public subsidy pretty much overnight in 1985. The committee was told that the dominance of a few key exports meant that periodically revaluing the currency was a viable way of ensuring competitiveness. That is still government intervention in my book. The US is sometimes cited as an example we should follow, but the committee was not convinced by that either. Public subsidies are still enormous, but they are entirely linked to a few crops and not at all to public goods such as the environment or landscape. The American system is also notoriously bureaucratic. Canada, Australia and New Zealand operate various schemes of support, including income equalisation and agri-investment. I very much look forward to hearing from the Minister the Government's thinking on how support for agriculture will be framed as we go forward.

12.14 pm

**Lord Cameron of Dillington (CB):** My Lords, it is a very sad day when we have to bid farewell to the noble Lord, Lord Plumb. Our Henry is a national and international celebrity. If you go with him to Brussels, you get off the train and, 10 yards down the platform, the first person will say, "Bonjour, Monsieur le Président".



It goes on all day; every five minutes someone will come up and say “Bonjour, Monsieur le Président”. Even at night, in shirtsleeves, going out to find something to eat, someone passing in the darkness will say, “Bonsoir, Monsieur le Président”. He is a legend in his own lifetime. Our agriculture, our countryside and indeed our nation owe him a huge debt for a life of immense contribution and service. So thank you to our Henry, from the depths of our hearts. I could go on far longer, but I want to contribute to this important debate.

I was not a Brexiteer, but we must all move on. As the well-chosen title of this debate would indicate—my thanks to the noble Earl for that—we have an opportunity now to put in place a system for managing our countryside that is fit for the 21st century. The first question we must ask is: what is our countryside for and how can we pull together the various policy strands? Having an environmental plan separate from an agricultural plan is not a good idea. Any vision for our countryside has to include agriculture, the environment and rural communities. They are all interlinked.

The next question a department for food has to ask is: how much food do we need to produce from our own resources? Both too little and too much are risky. The Government need to establish some achievable long-term parameters. A shortage of food would be an easy way for a Government to fall. As I have said before in this House, we are only ever nine meals away from anarchy, so we need to work out the levers to keep our farmers producing. As our post-CAP costs inevitably go down, especially rents, some farmers will be able to produce at world prices. Others, particularly in the uplands, will only be able to farm if they and their households can supplement their agricultural income.

This brings me back to my first question: what is our countryside for? There are services that society will want to buy from our land managers: landscape, improved access opportunities for leisure and health and greatly improved diversity of habitats and species—all of which I know British voters would support. But another lever for keeping farmers producing is to create more diversified jobs, so that they and their households can survive on the land. Of course, creating rural jobs is equally important to the 96% of rural dwellers who are not farmers. This is vital for all our countryside, and a department for rural affairs must pursue this agenda with gusto, which we have yet to see. We need better broadband, the promotion of tourism and the facilities and training to make our rural economy hum.

We have an opportunity here to make a difference to wherever rural deprivation exists or will exist. We need a range of schemes promoting rural diversification. Let us take ex-CAP money to help farmers and others to find new sources of income and employment. What I love about my fellow countrymen is that, of those below the poverty line, compared to their urban counterparts, more than twice as many are self-employed and avoid state aid. They would rather get out there with their entrepreneurial flair and, through a variety of probably part-time jobs, earn enough to survive. But they need help: business advice, careers and planning

advice and, above all, grants for projects, building conversions and marketing and so on. A whole new comprehensive diversification scheme is required.

I will stop there, but I just repeat that this is an opportunity: we can make our countryside hum economically, socially and environmentally. I have not even touched on the new possibilities for the nutritional health of our nation that any department for food should be thinking about.

12.19 pm

**Lord Plumb (Con) (Valedictory Speech):** My Lords, I thank my noble friend Lord Lindsay for raising this issue and putting forward this important Motion. It is equally important that we debate the issue a little more often than we have done in the past. It is good for us to know where our food comes from, who produces it and how and where it might come from if we do not produce it here.

As I move towards retirement, after 30 years and a rewarding and enjoyable education among so many distinguished colleagues, I thank the clerks and the staff for their tolerance and understanding in recent times. I thank in particular my Whip, my noble friend Lord Sherbourne, and the Chief Whip, my noble friend Lord Taylor.

As I look back over a long life and career, I recognise that agriculture has been at the very core of it, in both practice and political interest. My formal education was cut short in March 1940, when my father and headmaster both agreed that the war could not last more than six months and so I could return to my studies in the autumn. Therefore, I had to leave and go back to work on the farm. That suited me fine as I was not too happy at school, but I was in at the deep end and well into hard work and a lot of responsibility, with bombs falling round us on land between Coventry and Birmingham. But then the land girls came to the rescue as farm workers.

You could say that my politics started through the Young Farmers' Movement, an organisation able to advise and provide mentorship for young entrepreneurs in agriculture and rural business. My CV reads as if I was a collector of presidencies. My father used to say that anyone can become a president. Well, I have proved him right. I moved from the Young Farmers' Movement to the presidency of the National Farmers' Union in 1971, as noble Lords have heard. My path then took me from the presidency of the Society of Ploughmen to Chancellor of Coventry University, and from non-executive roles in finance and business to a fellowship at Ohio University, where the agricultural faculty was created in 1860 by Professor Charles Plumb. The Plumbs get around everywhere in interesting times.

Among other organisations, I was best known through the NFU. I remember a farmer once complaining, “If you're joining this old common market, don't hold it on a Wednesday because that buggers up ours”. Negotiations on our entry, changing from one policy to another, required six steps in five years to change to the common agricultural policy. I ask the Minister: will this happen in reverse? I was an enthusiast for our membership and the opportunity it presented for co-operation and competition for the food market of

[LORD PLUMB]

500 million people. However, with a £22 billion deficit with European countries on food and farming products alone, our exit will not be successful without government assistance and encouragement, and changes in the method of support.

Retiring from the NFU presidency came at a time when it was agreed that we should hold direct elections to the European Parliament. Discussing this with my son, who had just come back from Argentina, I said that I would welcome his advice. "If I come home instead of going elsewhere, where do I start?", I asked. His reply was short and sharp. "You can start by sweeping the yard because you always complain that it is untidy when you get home". So I decided to stand for membership of the European Parliament. It was a pleasure to represent the people of the Cotswolds over the 20 years I was there. It was a great experience.

In Parliament I had no particular ambition to get too involved, but I found myself as the first chairman of the 50-strong agriculture committee, with Barbara Castle as a member. I then became leader of the Conservative Group for Europe, which also included members from Northern Ireland, Spain and Denmark. In 1987 I was elected President of the whole Parliament, as your Lordships have heard, and I can now say that I was—and, presumably, will be—the only Brit to have been elected to that position. I was a bit surprised when I received a very complimentary letter from Mrs Thatcher inviting me to become a working Peer. It did not happen at once but it certainly happened later—and I have enjoyed my 30 years.

Even our friends in New Zealand and Australia, after some years of heavy criticism, accepted that by joining Europe we had helped at least to widen the world market for their products. We had of course helped to shield them when we joined Europe by obtaining import quotas for their products—quotas on which in later years they were no longer dependent.

Whenever agriculture is debated, in this House or elsewhere, there is always a tendency to underestimate its importance in the life and the economy of the nation. Some 0.7% of GDP does not sound like a lot, but let us not forget the sector's massive input into the food and drink industry, which employs some 14% of the workforce and generates £96 billion-worth of business. It is a major part of our economy. Therefore, we must not think of agriculture purely in terms of its product; as we have already heard, we must remember its jobs and its contribution to our GDP. It is a major factor in determining the success or otherwise of our national environmental policies.

My noble friend Lord Ridley, who unfortunately is not with us today, is right to predict that we can all reap rewards from robotised farms—what he means by that is for your Lordships to imagine—drawing on existing technical and scientific advice. Developments have taken and are taking place. However, I enter the two caveats that matter as regards development. First, we have to ensure that the rural environment is not negatively industrialised. The character of our countryside is something rightly precious to all of us, wherever we live. Furthermore, as we face the challenge of increasing agricultural production, whatever happens we must keep a weather eye on the land available for that

purpose—farming. For example, the HS2 rail project alone is estimated to require 100,000 acres of agricultural land and, of course, the need to increase housebuilding will make further significant demands. I do not say that that is wrong, but it is a fact as we see it at the moment.

With a food trade gap of over £22 billion, we need to increase production and it is not obvious that all the countries which are supposed to be queuing up to do a deal with the UK are motivated by sentiment; the US, Canada, China, Australia, New Zealand, Brazil and the like all have their own interests. We are also in danger of losing benefits from joint research and development with our European friends.

In today's debate many have not taken on board that agricultural support post Brexit is not something over which the UK will have an entirely free hand. The fact is that whatever the UK will do must fall within the framework of rules set by the WTO. The reason why the cap changed so radically over the years was not principally because EU politicians saw the light about the need for reform; it was much more because world trade agreements made the reform inevitable.

We have to admit that it is difficult to imagine precisely what the world, the EU and the UK will look like on the other side of our withdrawal. At the end of what we hope will be a successful negotiation, we will pass across the yet-to-be-designed bridge of an implementation stage. The media are currently focusing the national gaze on that period of five years or so as our "future". As I look back on almost five decades of the European project, I also look far beyond those mere five years.

The UK is moving on—but in ways not yet agreed upon in detail, because inevitably the EU will also move on. It will be for another generation altogether, both here and there, to determine whether the respective directions of travel will tend to diverge or converge. My instinct tells me that the future generations in Britain and Europe will favour a reconvergence.

I hope to spend some time in the future with many young people, encouraging them to develop their skills in rural affairs, business and enterprise, and always to remind them that they make a living by what they do but make a life by what they give. I am sure that agriculture will provide many of them with many opportunities to do just that and still be proud to be British.

12.31 pm

**Baroness Byford (Con):** My Lords, it gives me the greatest joy to follow the very special contribution today of my good and noble friend Lord Plumb. As other noble Lords have already indicated, Henry's contributions to agriculture over his lifetime have been immense. His leaving school at 14 to take on the running of the family farm, his membership of young farmers' clubs, where he met Marjorie, his first steps into agricultural politics and, eventually, his rise to be the youngest vice-president of the NFU at the age of 38 all reflect a man with a mission.

My noble friend was elected as MEP for the Cotswolds in 1980, as we have heard, and later became President of the European Parliament. His people skills and

ability to persuade marked him out as a man who could make things happen—and they did. This House has heard his memories of amazing events over these past 30 years and the lessons learned, but—and it is a very big “but”—he has always continued to look forward to challenges and opportunities, as we have heard today. We shall be very sorry not to see him on these Benches again.

On a more personal level, I have witnessed the contribution made by my noble friend Lord Plumb to the wider community through his support for farming charities and rural communities, as well as his desire to encourage young people to go into farming businesses. As some of your Lordships know, he is a past master of the Worshipful Company of Farmers and was master when I became a liveryman.

Time restricts me to these few remarks but, lastly, I should like to pay tribute to him for setting up the Henry Plumb Foundation in 2012. As he explained, its aim is to give young farmers a start—a leg up, not a handout. To date, 54 scholarships have been awarded. Each scholar is allocated a mentor, who is there to help, advise and encourage.

We warmly thank my noble friend Lord Plumb for all his contributions in this House, where he has been a walking encyclopaedia, and for his ambassadorship for the farming industry internationally. I know that he will continue to take an interest in parliamentary work, though perhaps from a more comfortable seat in Warwickshire.

I turn now to my very brief contribution as I am well aware that we are time-limited. I declare my farming interests as listed in the register.

We must have robust outcomes to the Brexit negotiations if the challenges we face on leaving the European Union are to be resolved. We must ensure that our agricultural, food and other businesses in rural areas are best prepared for the new trading opportunities that will emerge. Our producers must not be put at an economic disadvantage. Fair trade should mean free and fair trade for all, recognising the high standards set for UK businesses, especially for livestock producers.

We await the agriculture Bill, and I am pleased that it will be taken simultaneously with the 25-year environment plan; the two go together and should not be divided. This Government are committed to developing a system that will enable the UK to grow more, sell more and export more. I, like others, welcome this commitment.

I should like to raise three items. The first is trade agreements. We need the ability to increase the home and overseas markets to which I referred earlier. The second, as touched on by the noble Lord, Lord Whitty, is labour, including seasonal workers and skilled full-time workers. We must encourage more young people into apprenticeships so that they can learn while gaining work experience. Here, again, I congratulate this Government on what they are doing in encouraging apprenticeships.

Thirdly, and most importantly, we need more highly skilled scientists, technicians and engineers. In a world where GPS systems are the norm, where drones can

give the exact area of crops that need fertiliser or other dressings and where robots will be able to pick soft fruit, one realises that farming methods have changed rapidly. A hundred years ago, the steam tractor was being developed. Today's developments will change traditional methods of production, opening up new opportunities. As some noble Lords will know, earlier this year Harper Adams University cultivated, planted and harvested a complete field of barley—all with driverless equipment.

The question is: will we be ready? We must be, but equally we must not be afraid of doing things differently or taking calculated risks. We must have an open mind. Most importantly, we must encourage and support present and future generations who are eager to rise to the opportunities and challenges that we face in agriculture, fisheries and the rural economy.

12.38 pm

**Lord Hunt of Chesterton (Lab):** My Lords, this is an important debate not only for those living in rural areas but also for the whole of the UK population, which relies on rural areas and the adjoining coastal seas for natural resources, environment and energy, both above and below ground level. These areas are as reliant on appropriate governmental, human and financial resources and policies as urban areas are. The Labour Party has a long tradition of introducing new policies, from national parks and planning in the 1940s to the recent establishment of the Marine Management Organisation at the end of the Brown Government. Some of us thought that the MMO should have been part of an overall environmental organisation. Such integration occurs in the USA, India and other countries.

I declare my interests as a director of an environmental consulting company and the president of ACOPS, a marine sustainability NGO. I am also the owner of a small property in a national park in the south-west.

I offer my congratulations to the noble Lord, Lord Plumb, and thank him for his contributions, particularly in dealing with foot and mouth disease, which is a critical environmental issue.

Our first concern should be the social and educational development of rural communities. In the period of the Blair-Brown Governments, following the idea of Bill Clinton, there was the considerable success of the unified development of welfare, education and housing in critical areas and the Sure Start programme. I saw this in small villages and certain deprived areas. However, these programmes have declined under the coalition and Conservative Governments in rural and urban areas across the UK.

In Wales, the PISA calibration of educational attainment is low on the international scale. This inhibits all levels of commerce and industry. Engaging school pupils in practical and out-of-school activities may be one way of stimulating learning. One initiative for such an integrated approach is being developed by the Darwin Centre in Pembrokeshire, which I have visited. A research and engagement programme supported by Dragon LNG, based at Milford Haven, has been effective. This is a beautiful estuary where the environment is studied to stimulate children at different levels. Practical projects for cleaning beaches around the



[LORD HUNT OF CHESTERTON]

British Isles are essential for improving the environment and the tourist economy. The ACOP survey produced every year is supported by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. However, this needs more funding. In Wales, in particular, such centres are being planned in connection with universities.

The sustainable building project at Machynlleth in the centre of mid-Wales is another successful project which engages the interests of teachers, communities and tourists. It develops new materials and techniques, which is particularly important for areas that are prone to flooding.

Another aspect of community development in rural areas should be the provision of mobile information, with a much wider range of services and advice than is available in the mobile libraries, the number of which is greatly declining—a fact which I checked on the internet this morning. Many people do not have or know how to use the internet for their daily needs. In many villages there are, of course, now no longer banks, post offices or even buses, and it is essential that we do more for these communities. Given the changes in welfare payments that we have been hearing about, particularly in the House of Commons, a new approach needs to be developed for these areas. This week this House has discussed the problems of financial fraud on the internet. Again, we must develop methods of helping people in remote areas. If these wider services were provided the funding could be obtained from many other budgets rather than relying on the library budget, which is extremely depleted.

Successful economic development in rural areas requires innovation, such as that made possible through the world-class Dyson innovation centre in Wiltshire, which has its own university. As the noble Earl, Lord Lindsay, mentioned, various kinds of green energy are of great importance for jobs and for science centres in rural areas. The Government's research agency, the Natural Environment Research Council, is very effective in this area.

As has been mentioned, some fishing ports around the UK need to recover. As stated in a Marine Management Organisation report covered in a House of Lords Library paper, there has been a great decline in shipping and fishing boats. Part of the reason for this has been attributed to the fact that fish caught in the North Sea and elsewhere have been landed in continental ports in countries where people eat more fish per head. The Government need a stronger programme to support fisheries and to bring more fish back into our cities. There are now very good fish shops in Tufnell Park, which we never had before.

12.44 pm

**Lord De Mauley (Con):** My Lords, I thank my noble friend Lord Lindsay for tabling a debate on this important subject. My noble friend Lord Plumb, of Coleshill, knows a thing or two about growing grass—but, as we have heard, he never lets it grow under his feet. He was always generous with his time and helpful to me as a junior Minister at Defra, and I hope that noble Lords will forgive me if I add my tribute to him to those of others.

A pioneer of adding value to the rural product, my noble friend starting selling his Ayrshire milk direct to the public early in his career and publicised it on his waxed cartons as “Easier to digest”. An inspector from the local authority was quickly round to ask him to justify his claim. “Well”, said my noble friend, “it doesn't say than what it's easier to digest, does it? I mean that it's more easily digested than, um, Ayrshire cows”. The inspector went on his way.

We have heard about my noble friend's glittering career with the NFU and in the European Parliament. He served as President of the latter from 1987 to 1989, the only Briton ever to do so; how we could do with him there now. Among his other achievements, he was knighted in 1973—incidentally earning himself, in view of the butter and beef mountains of the day, the soubriquet “Sir Plus”. He has held most of the senior positions related to agriculture in this country and in the EU, holds more honorary doctorates than Nelson Mandela and has a chest full of medals to compete with a Chief of the Defence Staff from countries as far apart as Germany and Tonga—not bad for a chap of whom a headline in the farming press once read, “Henry will never be president. He's too nice a chap”.

While acknowledging its shortcomings, my noble friend has always been a staunch supporter of the European Union. He is truly international. He has grandchildren married to an Argentinian and a Zimbabwean, and one living in Australia who is to marry a citizen of the People's Republic of China. Another is living in Singapore. As he said, the Plumbs get around. He has 18 great-grandchildren. The Government could do well to engage the Plumb clan in promoting British trade in a post-EU world.

I declare my interest as an owner of farmland and residential property. Much of what I would have said today has already been said. Like my noble friend Lord Plumb and other noble Lords, I am concerned to enable our farmers to keep farming and maintaining our countryside in a world after CAP. After 2022, I would expect the Government to prioritise for support those farming in the most difficult conditions, such as hill farmers. To the extent that we can support agri-environment schemes elsewhere, we should—but I cannot see the UK continuing to pay much by way of basic farm payments, the loss of which would of course place a lot of farmers in financial difficulty. So we need to help them to help themselves—the more so if, in a free trade world, tariffs are reduced, thus letting in food imports to compete and bring prices down. The positive flipside of that is that it will benefit consumers.

To deal with this, farmers need technology. Perhaps my noble friend the Minister will be able to update us on progress with the agritech strategy. My noble friend Lord Plumb made a substantial contribution in this arena as well. His foundation, mentioned by my noble friends Lord Lindsay and Lady Byford, awards grants and, importantly, mentoring to people aged between 18 and 35 with a great idea in agriculture. Started in 2012, the foundation already has a good spread of successful graduates.

We also need to foster more diversification. Although it is not an option for everyone, one of the most straightforward is to develop, for example, redundant



farm buildings for residential or commercial use. There are things that the Government and local councils could do to make this considerably easier. Residential landlords are treated as little better than criminals by both the national and local tax systems, and a spider's web of rules applies to them. If the Minister would like me to, I can come and explain some of my thoughts to him. As we heard at Questions this morning, there is strong concern about bad landlords, particularly in urban areas. I understand that, but I urge the Government to keep in mind that such people are in the minority and that to ensure an adequate supply of housing we need properties to be made available for renting.

Life is not meant to be easy and I am afraid that I do not think it is going to be for farmers. They need our help as we emerge into a world in which they will need to be brave and resourceful. We need to be there for them.

12.49 pm

**The Earl of Caithness (Con):** My Lords, I wish that this was a five-hour debate rather than a three-hour one, but to have a debate at all is better than not on this very important subject. I offer many thanks to my noble friend Lord Lindsay for introducing it.

Mr Plumb first came into my life in 1970 when I was sitting behind a desk at the Royal Agricultural College at Cirencester. The agricultural tutor said to me, "Mr Plumb says ..."—and Mr Plumb has been saying, for at least 50 years that I know of, that farming is important. We have all benefited from his words of wisdom. As the noble Lord, Lord Whitty, said earlier, he has been a life force in the farming industry, not only to those on these Benches but to those on other Benches. I agree with him that he has not always been right, but he has been 99% of the time, and those who did not listen to him are worse off.

If there have been vast changes in agriculture during my noble friend's lifetime, they will be as nothing compared with the changes of the next few years. It will be a big experience for farmers. The common agricultural policy has benefited farming to some extent, but it has been very bad for the environment. Thank goodness we are getting out of the EU on that score alone; it offers us huge opportunities.

I want to highlight two groups who are bad for the countryside: bad farmers and some dogmatic environmentalists. The noble Lord, Lord Hunt of Chesterton, said that people on the land needed more education. I am concerned about the huge disconnect between people in urban areas and those who live on the land, as well as how those who live on the land work and have to exist. Education is needed just as much in urban areas as in rural ones.

What are the opportunities? We need to work together with regulation that suits everybody. I know that is easier said than done. We need to deliver goods in the public interest, as the noble Baroness, Lady Scott, said. Those of us who sit on the NERC Committee have found that the Government really lack concise data, agreed across the board. Data will be hugely important if we are to produce benefits for farmers producing public goods.

As the noble Lord, Lord Cameron—I call him my noble friend because we are fellow Scots who have known each other all our lives—said, we need a flexible and dynamic land-based sector for the future, which works not only for humans but for everything in nature. One way we can do that is by following what the NFU suggested with farm clusters—farms working together to identify improvements in nature for their own good. Never talk down to farmers; work with them and bring them along.

The CLA has recommended an excellent idea: land management contracts. I am all for that. I think that could very well be part of delivering public goods. Let us never forget that private landowners are the best and most excellent preservers of our landscape and environment. They are the people we need to support.

We must take a holistic approach to the environment and the countryside in future. I am grateful to my noble friend Lord Lindsay for mentioning forestry. I say to my noble friend on the Front Bench that you cannot divorce farms from forestry because so many farms include bits of woodland. That is one of the mistakes of CAP. For goodness' sake, let us have an integrated policy, because that will help the environment—and let us get control over grey squirrels to get our broadleaf woodlands back.

We had a recent debate on air and water quality, but soil quality is hugely important. The red light is flashing for soil. If our soil quality decreases, there will be no farming, no landscape, no natural environment and no tourism. The countryside will be poorer.

My third point is that, because we are coming away from CAP and the devolved Administrations, we need a holistic approach on the environment and farming. We also need to let the devolved Administrations get involved. That will be a tricky hand for the Government to play—but if we are united we will have a much better environment than we do now.

12.54 pm

**Lord Greaves (LD):** My Lords, I was thinking about the noble Lord, Lord Plumb, and I realised that in all the time I have been here—which is not as long as he has been here, but seems a long time—he has, if he does not mind me using the analogy, seemed like part of the furniture. Without him, your Lordships' House will feel a little bit emptier.

I will speak briefly about the rural economy, particularly the contribution of outdoor recreation, which is an important part of it. Various noble Lords hinted at what is too often an apparent conflict between landowners and farmers, and people using the countryside for recreation, education and so on. An important part of any new system that will come in is to work actively and deliberately towards reconciliation and people working together, because the countryside belongs to everyone in the country, not just the people who own and farm it. Both sides need to understand that. It is a national resource, but at the same time it is there to allow farmers to undertake their livelihood and produce food for us. The noble Lord, Lord Cameron of Dillington, said in his very sensible speech that any policy must include agriculture, the environment and local communities, but it has to be done in a way that brings

[LORD GREAVES]

together the outsiders who use the countryside and the people who live there. This is important because of the contribution to local economies made by visitors, particularly people engaging in outdoor education.

Walkers are Welcome is an organisation that is now 10 years old. It was formed in Hebden Bridge, where a lot of good things used to happen. It has just produced a 10-year national survey of all the work it does to promote local walking in conjunction with local businesses. A very interesting report this year from Manchester Metropolitan University on behalf of the Sport and Recreation Alliance called *Reconomics Plus* sets out a large number of the benefits of people visiting the countryside. What the noble Earl just said about the need to educate the overwhelming number of people and children growing up in urban areas is vital. We all know the stories about people who, when asked where milk comes from, say it is from the supermarket.

One of the important things groups such as Walkers are Welcome are doing is spreading the load, because no doubt there are problems in some places that are honeypots, where the number of visitors is great. As the noble Lord, Lord Plumb, will remember when we did the marine Bill, I am a great supporter of coastal access and the coastal path. I went to Dorset last year to Lulworth Cove and saw the wonderful, newly built coastal path there. The queue of people walking up it was like an old-fashioned queue outside a cinema or a football ground. It was quite extraordinary. I thought, "Is this really what we want?". Of course it is not. We want to spread the load and spread the visitors around.

A very interesting submission has just been made by an alliance of the British Horse Society, the Byways and Bridleways Trust, the Open Spaces Society—I declare an interest as a vice-president—and the Ramblers on how public access can be improved post Brexit. If and when Brexit occurs—even if it does not—this is vital work. These proposals suggest that an opportunity is here for,

"model funding schemes for agriculture to ensure that public money achieves maximum public benefit and promotes public wellbeing".

It is talking about people walking on footpaths and on access land. It says:

"Public benefit should include public access, whether by paths or open access to land (freedom to roam), because such assets support local economies, and improve people's health, wellbeing and safety".

They are also one of the very important ways in which diversification of local businesses and farming businesses can be brought about. There needs to be a great deal more work to bring people together, rather than trying to keep them apart.

1 pm

**Lord Inglewood (Con):** My Lords, I must begin by doing two things: first, to declare my interests in the register and, in particular, explain that I am a farmer; secondly, to congratulate my noble friend Lord Lindsay on the timeliness of this debate. That is obviously partly because Brexit means that the CAP will no longer apply here, but, more importantly, because the general political and socioeconomic framework within which agriculture is set is changing around the world.

In this country, such change goes back to the Attlee Government at the end of the war. Perhaps to simplify a bit: it is now no longer the case that agriculture is the only suitable land use for the countryside and that food production is the universal presumption of farming. It has all become much more complicated and nuanced than that. After all—just to name a few—leisure, the environment, energy, carbon, ecosystem services, natural capital, flood alleviation, trees and woodland and landscape are all serious aspects of what used to be known simply as "farming".

In this context, it is helpful to notice the recent inscription of the English Lake District as a world heritage site under the new category of "cultural landscape". When I was a member of the then Lake District Special Planning Board 30-odd years ago, this process was then under way. It was only earlier this year, under the canny leadership of the noble Lord, Lord Clark of Windermere, that it was achieved.

What was traditionally known as farming seems to be morphing in the direction of what was traditionally known as estate management. A lot of what farmers previously produced as by-products are becoming part of their primary output. In the past, much of this was not expressly paid for, but it now seems that if the rest of the community wants such things, it may well have specifically to pay for them. Much of that, I suspect, must be via the clearing house known as the Government.

Subsidies for agriculture have overtones of feather-bedding farmers, but this is not necessarily the case now, even if it ever was. They are payments for providing myriad public goods and services. After all, nobody suggests that teachers and nurses, policemen and the military should not be remunerated for providing services for the public. Equally so it seems to me that that should be the case for farmers, not least in an era of the minimum wage. For this reason, it may be fanciful to suppose that public disbursements for agriculture will necessarily go down in a post-Brexit world. They may well have to go up, if this sector is to generate enough to enable those involved to have an appropriate standard of living commensurate with what they do and for the sector as a whole to remain sustainable.

Agriculture is not a homogenous activity. As has already been mentioned, livestock farming and arable farming are in many ways very different. In reality, I cannot see bureaucracy declining, since relatively detailed individual farm plans and contracts seem an inevitable result of the changes that will happen.

Finally, as we have already heard, today is my noble friend Lord Plumb's swansong. He has been a friend and mentor to me for more than 30 years. His is a career which, as we have heard, goes back to watching the German bombing of Coventry in the war and, as a young man, buying cattle in Scotland for his neighbours in Warwickshire. He then moved up the hierarchy of the NFU, where my father, who was then a junior Agriculture Minister, commented, "He was difficult; that is to say, he fought the corner of his members hard". He then moved on to COPA and the European Parliament and its presidency, which I believe to be the real summit of his achievements.

These days, when it is fashionable in some circles to display self-generated malice towards anything to do with the European Union, it is worth remembering

that, in the eyes of many observers, of different nationalities and different politics, he has been the best President that the Parliament has had. Throughout that career, he fought for the values and interests to which he subscribed in alliance with his political friends at home and abroad, always promoting his country's interests as he perceived them. As someone proud to consider himself one of them, I am sure that I speak for all his friends when I conclude by saying: "Henry, you've done us proud".

1.04 pm

**Baroness Seccombe (Con):** My Lords, I add my congratulations to those offered to my noble friend Lord Lindsay for securing this debate on this important day and at this vital time for British agriculture. My noble friend Lord Plumb, known to us locally in Warwickshire as Henry, is a living icon and so very much respected across the Midlands, the UK and beyond. He and I have our roots firmly planted in Warwickshire and are extremely fortunate to live in the rich agricultural countryside, which will become even more important to us as we leave the European Union in 2019.

I have personally admired my noble friend's many elections over the years to positions of importance, both nationally with the NFU and internationally, becoming first the MEP for the Cotswolds and then President of the European Parliament. Perhaps I may be allowed to share a short story which my noble friend told me.

Mrs Thatcher, known for not being a fan of the European Union, held a reception for internationally and nationally important people. My noble friend, then the President of the European Parliament, flew in to attend, having been greeted around the world with red carpets wherever he went. Mrs T introduced him to one guest: "Have you met Lord Plumb? He was our president of the NFU, you know".

We in Warwickshire are so proud of his achievements, so I, with love and gratitude, thank him for his immense contribution to our county, this House and our country over so many years.

1.06 pm

**Lord Curry of Kirkharle (CB):** My Lords, I declare my interests: I farm in Northumberland and am a trustee of a Devon estate. Other interests are listed in the register.

This is a hugely important debate at this point in our history. I thank the noble Earl, Lord Lindsay, for his sponsorship of it and his comprehensive opening statement. As has been said a number of times, this is a generational moment, so I expect we will continue to debate this topic over the next few years as we try to influence and shape this new chapter in our history.

The debate is important also because, as we all know, it marks the retirement of the noble Lord, Lord Plumb, of Coleshill. I thank him for his excellent valedictory speech. I make no apology for commenting on his importance. I met an elderly friend in Hexham market on Friday. We were only a couple of minutes into our conversation when he said, "And how is Henry?". I did not need to ask who he was referring to. The noble Lord, Lord Plumb, has achieved the remarkable

feat of being the most recognised "Henry" in Britain. Having gazed around the Prince's Chamber next door and seen the portrait of Henry VIII, I have concluded that we need a new portrait of our most important Henry.

It is not an exaggeration for me to state that I would probably not be here, in this House, if it were not for the inspiration I received from observing Henry Plumb. My wife and I started our farming business in 1971 by renting a farm, Kirkharle. This coincided with the election of a new NFU president, one Henry Plumb. I attended the Northumberland AGM to hear him speak and was inspired. I hope that Henry's successor presidents will forgive me, but no one since then has had the same ability to charm an audience, had the same gift of oratory and been able to establish themselves on the European and global stage in the way that the noble Lord, Lord Plumb, has done. He has been, without question, one of the most influential figures in agriculture of the past century, and we all owe him immense gratitude for what he has achieved and how he has helped shape British agriculture. As we have heard, he has devoted recent years to encouraging young people to become established in business through his foundation, which is a wonderful thing. Perhaps what he has not realised is that there are many people in Britain today, such as myself, who have been, in an unstructured way, mentored by Henry himself. As he steps down from this place he leaves an amazing legacy.

Rather than duplicate comments that have already been made regarding the seriousness of the need for a new, sustainable policy, particularly those made by the noble Baroness, Lady Byford, which I fully endorse, I will make three comments.

First, like the noble Earl, Lord Caithness, I am concerned about soil. In conversation with one of our leading soil scientists recently, he bemoaned the fact that we have degraded so much of the world's soil, compromising our future ability to feed ourselves. He said that it is not possible to recreate soil. We, who have the responsibility of being stewards of God's creation—which includes soil—are not being very responsible. So I hope my noble friend the Minister will take this issue very seriously in the design of new policies post Brexit, and find ways of encouraging farmers to adopt cropping and management practices that improve the organic matter and the quality of our soil. If anything is fundamental, this is.

Secondly, and again looking forward, we need to address the uptake of stewardship management schemes. I am sure that Defra, the RPA and Natural England had the best of intentions when they redesigned the schemes but the current suite is unpopular and participation is declining. Having achieved almost 70% of eligible land under stewardship management, largely through the entry-level scheme, which I had some responsibility for, we are now going in reverse. Post Brexit we need to reinvigorate the stewardship management of our countryside and have well-designed schemes that address the environmental challenges we face on a landscape scale.

Thirdly and finally, I will comment on the rural economy. The briefing provided for this debate was very helpful indeed. The figure that jumped off the page for me was that 24% of all businesses are located in rural areas and they employ 3.5 million people.



[LORD CURRY OF KIRKHARLE]

However, the data underplay the importance of farming businesses in contributing to the rural economy. The noble Lords, Lord Cameron and Lord De Mauley, commented on this subject and I fully endorse their comments. Over 50% of farm businesses have diversified into an alternative enterprise so a significant proportion of the 24% of businesses are located on farms. This diversified activity is sustaining many of these businesses and recent data show that those without an alternative source of income are under severe pressure. It is really important that we replace the incentives that currently exist within the rural development scheme in the new design of schemes.

1.13 pm

**Earl Cathcart (Con):** My Lords, no doubt I will be proved wrong but I am sure that everything has been said about the noble Lord, Lord Plumb, by now. So I just wish him a very happy and well-deserved retirement. I shall miss him.

As a farmer and egg producer, I will talk about the egg industry—a great success story, achieved without grants or subsidies. Last winter we had a number of outbreaks of bird flu. We were required under a veterinary order to keep our hens housed to protect them from the threat of the virus. This lasted for 18 weeks, two days. If birds are housed for more than 12 weeks, the producer loses his free range status and can sell his eggs only as barn eggs, at a fraction of the price of free range eggs, so that continued production becomes unviable and unprofitable. So I thank my noble friend, Defra and the British egg industry for persuading Brussels to extend the 12 weeks to 16. If approved, this will greatly help producers.

My main point concerns the current rules for the cleaning and disinfection of sheds when there is an outbreak of bird flu. Many EU countries perform only one cleanse and disinfection operation; for example, Holland has never had a further outbreak following the one cleaning-out operation. The German process is much swifter and cheaper than ours. Britain does the operation twice. The first is paid for by Defra, which sprays the shed with disinfectant, which dampens down the virus. The second operation is paid for by the producer and can cost anything from £5 to £10 per bird. So for a 16,000-hen shed such as mine, this can cost anything from £80,000 to £160,000, depending on how the contaminated muck and water can be dealt with.

What incentive is there for a producer to spend up to £160,000 cleaning his shed when in a normal year his flock might make a profit of £70,000, so that it will take him two and a half years to recoup the cost? If he does nothing and waits for one year, he is allowed to restart production without needing to do the expensive second clean because the virus is considered dead by then. We should not forget that it is not just the £160,000 for the cleaning; he has also lost his hens, which has cost him £65,000, and when he restocks after cleaning, he will have to buy new hens, at a cost of a further £65,000, plus consequential costs of feed and labour of about £35,000, before he starts generating any profit. He could be £325,000 out of pocket. So why would he want the cost of cleaning if he could avoid it by doing nothing?

However, this inactivity by the producer would be a disaster for the British egg industry as Britain would lose its bird flu-free status for a whole year. There would be no exports of eggs or meat; there would be zones around the producer for the whole year, with all the restrictions on movement, whether of laying hens or hens for meat; and jobs might be lost. The decision not to carry out the cleaning operation would affect the whole UK poultry industry in the most disastrous way. Could we have just one cleaning and disinfection operation like Holland does, and could Defra pay a proportion of that cost, which might just encourage the producer to carry out the cleansing operation?

1.17 pm

**Baroness Mallalieu (Lab):** My Lords, I declare an interest as a hands-on small-scale sheep farmer on the top of Exmoor and therefore in receipt of single farm payments. I have also been president—just once—of the Countryside Alliance.

This House is sometimes said to be a House of experts but the press usually focus on how often a Peer speaks, asks questions or votes. But of possibly greater value, in my view, is the Peer who is always ready to share his expertise, answer questions and give his take on an issue. Throughout my time in this House, the noble Lord, Lord Plumb, has been my first port of call when I need facts, guidance or a steer on agriculture, and I see others doing that constantly. He is never too busy. He is always full of humour, wisdom, patience and generosity. I will miss him and so will this House.

Five minutes is totally inadequate to even list the many important issues raised by the well-timed and well-chosen debate in the name of the noble Earl, Lord Lindsay. In the four minutes I have left, I will confine myself to one: the future of small and medium-sized family farms, which still exist in the remaining and besieged rural areas of our country, which are themselves already changing very quickly.

For many small farms, the single farm payment represents the difference between break-even and loss. For many tenant farmers, who usually receive those payments directly, the current rents they pay are based on that fact. Without replacement in some form, either those farm rents must fall in compensation or those farmers will no longer be viable, the farms will be untenanted and eventually they will be swallowed up into larger and larger units. Yet if we want small-scale farming, which has shaped—indeed, created—our landscape and keeps our landscape as it is, and if we want to retain the cornerstones of their local communities, which those farmers and their families are, we have to find ways in which future funding continues. It should be based not on acreage, as at present, but on incentives to innovate; to promote animal welfare, which is increasingly a marketing tool in itself; to compensate them for environmental improvements which they are often required expensively to make; and to maintain and enhance a landscape and what it offers to the wider public. It is a challenge but it is also a brilliant opportunity, and I believe that the next generation is already up for it.

The pace of change is already fast. Twenty years ago, there was little shooting where I live on Exmoor. Now, commercial shooting is vast—some would say



too big—and has a worldwide reputation. The most recent survey shows that it contributes £32 million a year to the local economy there, up from £18 million a year in the national park survey just five years ago. Two visitors who came into the House on Tuesday told me that they had received an EU grant without which they could not have converted their redundant farm buildings to small business units. They have been full ever since and have brought much-needed new employment as a result. I recently asked someone from Cornwall what she did on her farm and the answer was, “Sheep and solar”.

The Countryside Alliance’s rural retail awards show every year what is happening up and down the country, with small businesses, specialist foods, new land-based businesses and some truly inspirational environmental projects, often with education as a part of them. So the pace of change is rapid, at least for some, but all this needs good communications and, especially, fast broadband. We have that across most of Exmoor, thanks to the national park, but my noble friend Lord Hollick, who lives in the New Forest, was complaining the other day that he could not even get a mobile signal let alone fast broadband. Surely that must be the most important infrastructure project of all at present.

Why was it that so many people voted in rural areas to leave the EU? I believe it was because of the dead hand of bureaucracy and regulation, which lies particularly heavily in those areas, and the EU, usually rightly, gets the blame. We used to be able to bury a dead sheep; now we are not allowed to and I have to pay £21.60 plus VAT for each one. The New Zealanders do not incur those charges. I also have to get a licence to burn my hedge trimmings and have to go on courses, at £250 a go, to go out with my knapsack sprayer or to buy a tub of effective rat poison. All those things may well be good things, but every time it is the farmer who has to pay for it. Driving across Exmoor at sunrise this morning the landscape, made up of small farms, was so beautiful it makes you cry. We must not lose it or them. That is the danger, that is the challenge and that is the opportunity.

**Baroness Vere of Norbiton (Con):** My Lords, I have few jobs in this debate, one of which is to keep your Lordships to time and I am failing. Perhaps noble Lords could wind up in their fourth minute so that when the clock says five, that is the end of the speech.

1.23 pm

**The Earl of Shrewsbury (Con):** My Lords, I congratulate my noble friend Lord Lindsay on securing his debate today. I declare an interest as a former farmer and a current member of the National Farmers’ Union and the Countryside Alliance.

This debate provides the opportunity to say farewell, on his retirement from the House, to one of this country’s great names from the agricultural community. Over the vast majority of his life my noble friend Lord Plumb, of Coleshill, has devoted himself to standing up for and promoting British agriculture in all its forms. Over my lifetime there have been a number of great presidents of the National Farmers’ Union, and my noble friend is at the top of that list. He is a true

farmer and a stockman with a deep love of the countryside and his animals. He and I have regular conversations about his top-quality herd of British longhorns, of which he is rightly very proud. These conversations usually begin with him saying, “Charlie, have I told you about the time that?”—and I listen, totally enthralled. It can take an awful lot of time.

A few years ago I asked my noble friend, as we are both past presidents of the Staffordshire & Birmingham Agricultural Society, whether he had received an invitation to the president’s lunch on county show day. He had not, so it was duly arranged and we agreed to meet beforehand. I met him at the entrance gates to the showground and we started on a tortuous walk to the main pavilion. Every few yards, we were stopped by local farmer after farmer who wanted to chat with his Lordship. I got the impression that my noble friend thoroughly enjoyed that experience. He is held in such high esteem in that part of the world and through the rest of the country. I wish my noble friend and Lady Plumb a long and extremely well-deserved retirement.

I want to take this opportunity to make three points. I seldom agree with the noble Lord, Lord Greaves, but in the debate “Brexit: Farm Animal Welfare” on 17 October last, he said:

“I just want to say something about food security and the very learned comments made by the Transport Secretary ... that all we have to do is grow more food in this country”.

To my mind, my right honourable friend the Transport Secretary has not noticed that it has been a pretty awful year so far. It rained for most of the summer and it is turning out to be one of the most difficult harvests on record, with thousands of hectares yet to be harvested and much already ruined. That is the unpredictability of the farming industry. Another problem is that under EU rules, a lot of waste happens among all the crops that we grow in our farming. Cucumbers, tomatoes and so on—even carrots—are, as the noble Lord said,

“rejected by the supermarkets because it is not the right shape and colour; it is left unsold in supermarkets and thrown away”.—[*Official Report*, 17/10/17; cols. 567-68.]

What a waste. I agree with many of those comments made by the noble Lord, Lord Greaves. Perhaps Brexit will give us the opportunity to undo some of the completely barmy ideas and rulings which have emanated from the EU with regard to the shapes of fruit and veg, and its objection to the use of glyphosate, for pity’s sake, among numerous other matters. Glyphosate is one of the major tools in the cabinet for the farmer.

My second point is that in its vision for a future domestic agricultural policy in March 2017, the NFU proposed a framework of three specific cornerstones, one of which is,

“to enhance positive environmental outcomes from farming”.

I am in complete agreement. Whatever shape Her Majesty’s Government’s new agriculture policy takes following Brexit—and I sincerely hope and trust that support for the industry will continue—it is vital that assistance and encouragement is given to those who derive their livings from farming in the upland and less-favoured areas. These regions are the backbone of the livestock industry and without agriculture and tourism, in which I include the shooting and fishing

[THE EARL OF SHREWSBURY]

sports, such communities will surely wither away. We must support and promote these very special areas.

Galloping on—I am going as fast as I can—my final point concerns ritual slaughter. I have no difficulty with ritual slaughter if the animal has been pre-stunned, but I have a very strong objection to it if there is no stunning. I cannot for the life of me understand why there can possibly be any objection to pre-stunning. It is inhumane not to do so. Every vet with whom I have ever spoken supports pre-stunning and objects to not doing so. The NFU would seem to support no action, as we as a country are exporters of sheepmeat products to those throughout Europe and further afield who require ritual slaughter through their religious views. But this is a serious animal welfare problem and, in my view, completely unacceptable. If my local abattoir in Staffordshire can conduct ritual slaughter for the halal trade by pre-stunning every animal, surely the whole industry could follow that example. It is very much with this in view that I support the Government's initiative to place CCTV in abattoirs—well done them. Now with Brexit approaching fast and a new policy for agriculture on the stocks, let us get something done about non-stunned ritual slaughter. This country leads the world in animal welfare. Let us prove it and show what we can do by grasping the nettle. That is five minutes.

1.28 pm

**Baroness McIntosh of Pickering (Con):** My Lords, I congratulate my noble friend Lord Lindsay on calling this debate and I refer to my register of interests. I would like to share a cautionary tale with your Lordships: the first verse of an ode to Henry Plumb when he left the European Parliament. It went:

"The chief defect of Henry Plumb  
was keeping resolutely mum  
in every language of the earth  
except the language of his birth:  
in which regard, you will agree,  
he was as English as can be".

I yield to no one in my admiration for and gratitude to Henry—my noble friend Lord Plumb. The very reason I am here today is that he selected me as one of three staff to join the secretariat of what we knew as the big family of the European Democratic Group, in September 1983. He and my noble friend Lady Byford were my supporters when I entered this place.

Many have waxed lyrical about Henry's presidency of the European Parliament. He was preceded by Mr Pflimlin. They did a double act around Strasbourg, as "pflimlin" means "little plum"—so Little Plum was followed by Big Plum. It is not so well known that he became co-president of the African, Caribbean and Pacific-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly and served with distinction, sharing his knowledge and expertise with a wider audience including many countries in Africa.

Another song springs to mind: the Henry Plumb song "The Three Drums":

"All de native drums were beatin'  
Right across de ACP  
We were summoned to a meetin'  
Wit de famous MEP".

We shall all miss the advice, wisdom and expertise that Henry has shared with us over the years.

I shall take up one strand he has pursued today: not seeing the rural environment negatively industrialised. The rural economy of North Yorkshire is very fragile and depends largely on farming and tourism. North Yorkshire is probably the most beautiful county in the land, with a deeply rural economy dependent on farming, fisheries and tourism. North Yorkshire Moors Railway, of which I have the honour to be president, is the biggest attraction, followed by Castle Howard and Flamingo Land, and with the natural beauty of the moors, vales, hills and dales and the magnificent coast, the vibrant yet fragile economy could so easily be imperilled by—dreaded word—fracking, over the wishes of local people, who fear for their health, the safety of the water and the value of their homes and are concerned about disruption from increased lorry movements bringing construction material to the sites and removing waste substances.

A number of countries have banned fracking. We have to ask why. Will the Government accept that while hydraulic fracturing may boost UK energy output in the short term, the technology has never been successfully tested in the UK and that the level of self-regulation is inappropriate given the potential long-term damage to the environment, people and property of North Yorkshire? Britain prides itself on tough regulation of the offshore oil industry, yet accidents happen, as the Piper Alpha accident showed in July 1988, with 167 deaths from a catastrophic event—an explosion—and the resulting fire. The inquiry chaired by the noble and learned Lord, Lord Cullen, made 106 recommendations for changes to North Sea oil procedures.

A particular concern about this nascent, unconventional fracking industry in the UK is how the flowback oil resulting from the process will be disposed of without allowing it to make its way into watercourses or the sea. Can the Minister assure us that any money raised from fracking operations will be spent locally to make good any damage done and that any future fugitive emissions will remain the responsibility of the present fracking company, not any future landowner? There are alternative sources of energy which are equally unpopular but to which I subscribe, such as energy from waste and combined heat and power. This Government were elected and given a democratic mandate on localism—letting local people have their say on major issues affecting them. Currently the North Yorkshire economy is vibrant, so why would anyone put that at risk? Will the voice of the local people of North Yorkshire be heard today? I hope so.

1.33 pm

**The Duke of Wellington (Con):** My Lords, I, too, pay tribute to my noble friend Lord Plumb. He and I were elected to the European Parliament in the first direct elections in 1979. He came having been president of the NFU, so it was very fortunate for Britain that the first chairman of the elected European Parliament's agriculture committee should be a British Member. As has been said, he went on to become the first and, sadly, only British President of the European Parliament. I certainly salute his service in the European Parliament. Surely his career there was more distinguished than any of the rest of us who served as British MEPs.

My noble friend Lord Plumb, sadly, leaves the stage at a moment of great difficulty for British agriculture. I must declare my interest in agriculture as detailed in the register. Many people in this House know how difficult it is for small and medium-sized livestock farms, many of which are family farms—I particular commend the speech by the noble Baroness, Lady Mallalieu, a few moments ago. They cannot possibly make a profit without the financial support which they currently receive from Brussels. The Government have, fortunately, guaranteed that those payments will continue until 2022, but nobody yet knows what will replace them. Family livestock farms cannot continue to care for the countryside and environment without financial support. Livestock farming is by its nature very labour intensive, and animal welfare and high environmental standards must surely suffer without support. There was a discussion earlier today in this House about the 58 sectoral analyses that have been prepared by the Government. I got a list yesterday of the sectors, and I see that one of them is entitled “Agriculture, Animal Health and Food and Drink manufacturing”. I hope that the Government will feel able to publish it as soon as possible and that it will include the impact on British farmers of leaving the CAP.

There are two other major risks for agriculture. Two-thirds—some say three-quarters—of our agricultural exports go to the EU. Any tariff or, indeed, non-tariff barrier to this trade would be most serious for British farmers. Tariff-free and barrier-free access to the EU market must surely be a priority for our negotiators in Brussels. The third risk is a lack of EU labour to work in agriculture and associated industries, which has been mentioned by the noble Lord, Lord Whitty, and other speakers. This has been mentioned many times in this House but, as with overseas students, somehow the Government are reluctant to give the necessary assurances, in this case to farmers. The Motion refers to the,

“opportunities and challenges for agriculture”.

The opportunities rest on continued financial support, particularly for livestock farms, continued access to the EU market and the continuance of the supply of skilled labour, so when the Minister replies I hope he will go as far as he can to provide assurances to farmers on some of these disturbing matters, because farmers supply so much of the raw material for our food processing industries, which are so important to the economy of this country.

1.38 pm

**The Earl of Kinnoull (CB):** My Lords, I, too, add my congratulations to the noble Lord, Lord Plumb, on his amazingly wonderful valedictory speech. I found it a model of vigour and clarity. I doubt I could do that even today at a much younger age. I also congratulate the noble Earl, Lord Lindsay, on obtaining this timely debate. He gave a very scholarly survey of things. I shall pick up on just one of them and talk about forestry. I should declare my interests as set out in the register of the House, particularly those in respect of agriculture.

Forestry is, I regret, slightly the poor relation in the rural economy. I note that the five-year planting target to 2020 was 11 million trees, or 2.2 million trees a year.

Forestry Commission figures for the first two years of this pledge came out in August and showed that in the first two years, in the aggregate, just 2.28 million trees had been planted. We are travelling at half speed. But the Climate Change Act 2008 means that we cannot afford to do so. I remind the House that the Act makes it a duty to ensure that the net UK carbon account for all six of the Kyoto greenhouse gases for 2050 is at least 80% lower than the 1990 baseline. The largest component by far of the six gases is of course carbon dioxide, and planting trees is self-evidently an easy and natural way of balancing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

There are many causes of this slow speed of planting, but my own take is that they really fall into two categories. The first is that the forestry grant offers and the economics generally are simply not attractive to landowners. Secondly, there are the high risks associated with plant health, pests, squirrels—a particular interest of mine—and deer. Taking the first of these categories, I was of course delighted to read policy 39 of the Government's new *Clean Growth Strategy*. We have already heard of policy 38, concerning future agricultural support, but policy 39 says:

“Establish a new network of forests in England including new woodland on farmland, and fund larger-scale woodland and forest creation, in support of our commitment to plant 11 million trees, and increase the amount of UK timber used in construction”.

Could the Minister expand on this admirable policy or tell us when we might expect to hear more?

In terms of the second of these categories, I hope the House is aware how much the Minister is doing to help. I visited the Animal and Plant Health Agency facility outside York again 10 days ago for a conference on all these matters. Ninety-nine people from all over the UK were there, and the full range of innovative and world-class research that the UK and especially APHA are undertaking was discussed. For me, in my role as chairman of the UK Squirrel Accord, it was especially heartening to hear of the great strides being made in the science of grey squirrel fertility control, which ultimately will protect our broad-leaf trees from ring-barking by this invasive alien species, which kills young trees. But as I said, that is just one strand of much of the research that is going on, and the Defra family should be warmly congratulated on its hard work in all areas of research. It would be heartening for all involved, in whatever capacity in these battles, to hear from the Minister about his own determination and resolution in these areas.

In closing, I want to cite Action Oak. This initiative was launched just 10 days or so ago in the River Room. It is a determined, UK-wide partnership of governmental, voluntary and private sector bodies working together to seek to address the multiple problems that face our iconic national tree species. For instance, they will get communication going together and commission common research. It is a wonderful partnership concept and a very commendable model. Could the Minister tell us whether this type of public/private partnership approach is one that he sees as useful in the wider context of the forestry and agricultural sector?

1.43 pm

**Baroness Eaton (Con):** My Lords, I add my thanks to my noble friend Lord Lindsay for initiating this debate and for giving the House the opportunity to



[BARONESS EATON]

thank my noble friend Lord Plumb for his very exceptional service to agriculture. I also declare my interest as a vice-president of the Local Government Association.

Rural areas account for over half of England's economic output. Non-metropolitan areas are engines of our economic growth and support industries such as advanced manufacturing, tourism and agriculture. But like other parts of the country, rural areas face significant challenges in growing their economies and securing new investment. Access to fast and reliable broadband is vital for all rural and non-metropolitan areas in supporting their efforts to grow their local economies, as they need universal access to superfast broadband to help businesses reach more customers, offer online orders and deliver services and trade internationally.

The LGA has promoted improving broadband connections on behalf of local government through its Up to Speed campaign, which uses a simple online tool to help residents compare their broadband speed to the rest of their street, local authority and county. The need for better digital connectivity is why the LGA and local government welcome the creation of the universal service obligation and why we now need the Government to re-double their efforts to achieve 100% coverage across the country, for all areas.

EU funding has been vital to many rural areas in supporting their efforts to create jobs, support SMEs and make sure that people have the skills they need to succeed. Brexit presents challenges, but also opportunities to do things differently. Following the referendum, one of the biggest concerns from councils, including non-metropolitan authorities, was addressing the potential £8.4 billion UK-wide funding gap for local government that would open up once we officially exited the EU unless a new, viable domestic alternative to EU structural funding was put in place. The Government have pledged to create a UK shared prosperity fund to replace the money. This is a positive first step, and we now need the Government to work closely with councils and the LGA to inform how this new fund operates. The funding should enable local areas to set their own priorities and target the investment in a way that gives them the flexibility to build their local economies.

It is also positive that the Government have committed to developing an industrial strategy for all corners of the country. It is crucial that this help all areas, including non-metropolitan areas, develop their economies. It can do this by giving local leaders greater influence over their local economies. One example is the skills system. The evidence shows that counties currently do not have the skills base to support the high-value growth sectors. Therefore, rural areas could benefit from greater local government influence over the employment and skills system, enabling local solutions to be developed to address specific challenges. The Local Government Association's *Work Local* report provides a positive vision for the future of our skills system, and I hope the Government will take seriously the recommendations being made by councils.

1.47 pm

**Baroness Redfern (Con):** My Lords, I am pleased to be here today to pay tribute to my noble friend Lord Plumb and to wish him well in his well-deserved

retirement. I have worked for over 30 years in the agricultural sector, during which time the landscape has changed considerably. I might take issue with my noble friend Lady McIntosh, as Lincolnshire is probably one of the most beautiful counties in the whole UK. I also thank my noble friend Lord Lindsay for initiating this debate on agriculture, which is one of the most crucial issues facing the UK post Brexit.

Whatever views each of us held during the referendum or holds now, Brexit presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity, although no doubt there will be many challenges to address in shaping the future of British agriculture. Leaving the EU means leaving the CAP, which has for several decades been determined by tradition, but offers a chance to take an innovative and transformative approach to include national and worldwide issues quickly and effectively, directly responding to local need and diversity.

We should encourage the innovative agritech sector, which unites scientific and research capacity with traditional agriculture, but this must be backed up with really good data. We should take the opportunity to applaud universities and industries that are major drivers in this area with a strong commitment to it, by emphasising the need for a strong STEM-qualified workforce for the 21st century and encouraging new entrants to help drive innovation.

But we must set about dealing with the immediate issue of poor connectivity in many rural areas, which a previous speaker has already alluded to. Superfast broadband is an absolute priority, for which there is acute need, given the reliance on remote working and long-distance relationships with customers, clients and suppliers. We also need to address income inequality, housing shortages, rural transport services and an ageing population. Rural communities are at the heart of our rural economy; compared to towns, cities and conurbations, they have a higher proportion of small businesses and entrepreneurial self-employed people delivering those vital and in many ways unique opportunities.

Tourism connectivity also plays a huge part in the diversity of the rural economy, requiring better road and rail network links, particularly for tourism in our coastal areas. That said, the character of rural land use, including agricultural land, also plays an important part in bringing tourists to our unique rural area. As the Minister, Michael Gove, has said, the UK has only 40 years of fertile crop growing left because intensive farming is cutting the ground from beneath our feet, and farmers need to be given incentives to tackle soil fertility loss and the decline in biodiversity.

There is scope to improve farming and ecosystems by recognising both the economic and the non-economic services that can be provided by agriculture, such as flood risk mitigation, climate change adaptation, habitat protection and recreation services. To promote British food at home and abroad, and because we have a reputation for quality, we should have bolder, eye-catching advertising for the little red tractor label supporting UK products, displaying our animal welfare, wildlife habitats and marine conservation. That is what our customers want to see. We certainly do not want to be flooded with products from other countries that have poor welfare standards.

Getting food to the shops quickly is important, as is looking into unfair practices in the food chain and more joined-up working practices to address major rural crime such as the theft of machinery and fly-tipping. We can all see for ourselves the devastating effect plastics are having on our environment. Lastly, a clear and effective national policy framework for setting short-term, medium-term and long-term minimum obligations and maximum entitlements must be included.

This is an opportunity for transformative change and it is important that it not be missed. Agriculture has been put under the spotlight as never before. There is huge potential for positive change. When it comes to growing more, selling more and exporting more, as has been said, the question is: how can we grow better, sell better and export better to address the environmental, economic and social challenges of our food and farming system?

1.52 pm

**Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist (Con):** My Lords, I too thank my noble friend Lord Lindsay for introducing this wide-ranging debate so expertly, and I wish my noble friend Lord Plumb well in his richly deserved retirement.

We can do so much more than merely take note of the opportunities we have before us; we should embrace them. As the noble Lord, Lord Cameron, said, for the first time for decades we have the chance to ask ourselves fundamental questions about what we consider to be the purpose of both the countryside and agriculture—for example, how self-sufficient should we aim to be? How can we leave the land in better condition for the next generation?—and to craft solutions to address those challenges. Objectives can now be set with a more holistic approach to rural communities that go beyond the business of farming. We need to encourage vertical integration of the quality and scale of Robert Wiseman Dairies, Green & Black's and the Covent Garden Soup Company, which started in a Suffolk farm. Such diversification creates rural employment and adds value in the food chain.

The structure of the CAP has hardly encouraged the industry to improve its productivity and, as we have heard again and again, there are now serious warnings about soil quality, biodiversity and the long-term damage caused by some modern farming methods. Now may be the time to prove the thesis that conventional tillage is destructive. Many believe that “no till” agriculture will help to preserve soil structure, moisture and carbon content while at the same time improving habitats for the worms, insects and other wildlife that they support. We need to keep glyphosates such as Roundup in the mix—a herbicide, incidentally, that the EU may ban despite evidence that it is safe. New methods can hugely lower the costs of cultivation while at the same time allowing the high-yield farming that is essential to raise productivity levels.

Low productivity remains a problem, production costs remain high and large parts of the agricultural workforce remain unskilled. More investment is required in our university sector. Both Sweden and the Netherlands have institutions ranked in the top five globally for excellence in the study of agriculture and forestry. Where are ours? It has been said that forestry and the

environment have long been marginalised by the dominant role in rural policy and funding that the CAP gives to farming. Now is the time to redress the balance—public good for public money, and a common countryside policy.

We can do that, as our track record shows. We are already seen to have a global leadership role in ocean conservation, taking long-term decisions such as creating vast marine reserves around some of our overseas territories. If one considers unravelling the common agricultural policy to be challenging, the common fisheries policy is even more so. However, the UK has already taken the lead in reforming the CFP, addressing issues such as maximum sustainable yields and the banning of discards. This has led to a significant improvement in managing that mobile and renewable resource sustainably. We now have the opportunity to develop our own fisheries policy, to establish a management regime that is relevant to our waters and to our fleet. The moment we leave the EU, the EEZ becomes our exclusive economic zone and our task will be to manage this change in co-operation with our maritime neighbours. Our mission will be to create a policy that is fairer to the UK and delivers not only a more modern, profitable and competitive UK fishing industry but a healthier marine environment—a policy that helps to preserve the livelihoods of the approximately 25,000 people employed in the fishing and fish-processing industries in our coastal communities.

By all means let us acknowledge the challenges, but equally, let us be positive and welcome the opportunities that present themselves to create profitable, productive industries that secure the future of our rural and coastal communities. Let us also be associated with the highest welfare standards for animals and for custodianship of our countryside, and healthy coastal waters, enabling us to take advantage of a global appetite for high-quality foodstuffs in markets that value both quality and the principles of sustainable development.

1.56 pm

**Lord Palmer (CB):** My Lords, for me this is a very emotional day, as the noble Lord, Lord Plumb, was a childhood hero of mine. I remember so well first meeting him in Strasbourg when I was the Scottish representative to the European Landowning Organisation when he was President of the European Parliament. There he stood with a magnificent chain of office around his neck. I remember behaving rather like an overexcited schoolboy. In my view, the only mistake he ever made in his long and distinguished career was to become a director of the wrong biscuit company! The noble Lord once asked me where I got the tie I am wearing today—it says “British Meat” all over it—and he gave it to my father 45 years ago. It is so sad that his dear wife Marjorie is not sitting below the Bar to hear all the wonderful tributes today; she has been so wonderfully supportive to the noble Lord in his distinguished career. In my view, he has been the finest champion of the UK's agriculture and countryside who has ever lived. As every other speaker has mentioned, he is going to be greatly missed.

If I were to declare all my interests, it would take up all my advisory time. I therefore refer noble Lords to the register of interests. I have been involved in the

[LORD PALMER]

food industry all my walking life—*Hansard*, please take note. I try to farm in the most beautiful part of the United Kingdom, the Scottish borders. I took on a staff of 17 and I was farming a bigger acreage with just three men, all of whom were born and brought up on the farm.

We live in a crazy agricultural environment, with bottled water being more expensive than milk. The distribution of the single farm payment to farmers in England and Wales, and indeed Scotland, is another unacceptable scandal. It is causing real hardship for those of us who are affected. My children reminded me that 25 years ago the telephone rang constantly during lunch at harvest time. I remember once, all those years ago, being offered £165 a tonne for low-nitrogen malting barley. Oh, to be offered that last year. Wages have gone up by 193% while inputs across the board have more than doubled in those 25 years. While I accept that yields per acre have gone up slightly since then, the right weather at the right time can make up to a tonne-per-acre difference. That is not good management; it is pure luck.

I have a friend who telephones me on Christmas Day to ask if we have started the harvest. The difference between conditions north and south is huge, and in my part of the world grain-drying costs greatly exceed those for farmers in the fertile Thames Valley, where I was born and brought up. It is too early to tell what effect the new living wage will have on commodity prices and I know that this is a great worry for many of those involved in agriculture and, indeed, horticulture, especially—this is a very important point—for those who signed contracts with retailers before the new living wage was introduced. I fear that it could well prove disastrous.

Food today is incredibly cheap. Fifty years ago, 40% of the national wage went on food, while today it is just 11.1%—a huge difference. We now have strong scientific evidence from the president of the UK science body, the Royal Society, that GM crops do not endanger every living human and plant, and I urge Her Majesty's Government to pursue the future of GM crops with the same vigour that China and the United States have done for the last 21 years.

2 pm

**Lord Colgrain (Con):** My Lords, I may be the only person speaking here today who has not had the pleasure of either knowing or working with the noble Lord, Lord Plumb. However, I know I speak for all those in the farming community who have not had the opportunity to meet and work with him in giving him a great vote of thanks for his wonderful representation on our behalf over many years. I refer to my interests in the register, in particular my farm in Kent.

Two significant trends affecting rural industries are visible over the last few decades. The first is the ageing agricultural worker population, now averaging in their mid-50s, and declining in numbers overall. According to a Eurostat 2013 survey, 83% of workers are aged 45 or older. The second, a partial consequence, is the reduction in the number of family farms, and the increase in size of individual units. The average unit in

our part of the world between the wars used to be one farmhouse and two cottages—three families in other words, on 120 acres; now, such an acreage would not support one person. We have a serious labour crisis looming in the industry. The most spoken about relates to seasonal labour in the fruit and horticultural sectors, this being tied in with the availability of casual labour post Brexit. The less spoken about, however, is the more problematic, and we must do whatever we can to encourage and attract more people to the sector.

In as much as subsidies will continue post Brexit, we must ensure that we direct some of the funding towards education, not only at graduate level—Hadlow College being an excellent example—but also at younger age levels, as some of the previous HLS schemes were directed. This is not only to motivate more and better qualified candidates to see a vibrant and exciting career in the sector, but to introduce the wider public to the rural environment. I recall an article by the noble Lord, Lord Bragg, pointing out that some titles in the English literature curriculum were no longer really relevant, given that the average urban reader could not identify with the basic rural themes, let alone some of the terminology of the great works of the canon. Surely we can devise enough of an introduction to our rural environment and its industries for children of school age to overcome such a basic disadvantage.

We have been told that post Brexit, grants will be harnessed more closely to environmental benefits. We need sensitive discrimination between those areas that will never be financially viable in pure agricultural terms—hill farms, for example, and owners of grade 1 and grade 2 land, who frankly neither need nor deserve subsidies. There has been a suggestion that the size of holding might determine eligibility for grant aid; I suggest that land quality should be a fairer determinant. In the same way, approval for solar parks should be given only to sites where mainstream arable or livestock cropping will never be commercially viable. Brexit presents us with the wonderful opportunity to rewrite the catch-all policies of the EC. At the same time, we must ensure that our animal welfare standards and food production quality control are not compromised.

My experience relates specifically to the south-east of the country. I am one of the minority who farms around the M25 corridor, where, with the proximity of London and the commuter belt, property prices remain the prevalent topic of conversation. Broadband and connectivity run property a close second, and given that diversification is a *sine qua non* for all business in the rural economy, the failure of Openreach to deliver on its promises and the inability of the Government to drive through a successful national broadband programme, is nothing short of a scandal. Tens of billions will be spent on HS2, yet there is neither financial resource nor political application to support rural industries with one of their most vital and basic currencies of competition.

Likewise with planning. The principle of utilising brownfield sites, as opposed to greenfield, for new housing demand is generally accepted. The same principle should apply to light industrial businesses, since there is little purpose in building new houses in the countryside without endeavouring to provide jobs nearby. The present



planning regulation for brownfield sites, particularly in the green belt and areas of outstanding natural beauty, is inconsistently applied, remains prey to the vagaries of individual planning officers and is failing in the Government's stated objectives. It is not surprising that local sentiment is often hostile to planning applications when confronted with the evidence of inconsistent and irrational local policies.

Opportunities in the rural economy should be legion. Increased productivity as a result of new crop varieties and mechanisation, extended growing seasons as a result of climate change and a reputation for producing high-quality food safely should give the rural economy the ability to compete internationally regardless of the outcome of Brexit. But we must provide a regulatory framework that is simple to understand and not costly to implement, which cannot be said by any stretch of the imagination of the current regime.

2.06 pm

**The Earl of Home (Con):** First, I thank my noble friend Lord Lindsay for initiating this debate. I must also declare an interest in the register as I am a director of a farming company. I also add my own tribute to my noble friend Lord Plumb, along with the many others that he has already received. There is very little more to say to him, except for what an amazing figure he was at the Royal Show. I once tried to walk behind the Royal Pavilion with him and it took us about five hours to get anywhere. Everyone swarmed around him. It was wonderful. It is also very good news that his foundation is doing a first-class job.

I do not want to be depressing at the end of a very interesting debate. It is good that there is an increasing awareness of the need to preserve our countryside, but there are certain parts of our modern life that need addressing urgently if our countryside and the rural economy is not to be seriously damaged. The most obvious is litter thrown from cars and lorries in ever increasing amounts. I live near the M24 and last year I picked up 10 big black bags of litter from one slip road off the M74. This year the problem is just as bad. One way I would like to see it alleviated would be to get those required to do community service to pick up litter. Other countries use prisoners to do the same thing. I am very well aware of the requirements laid down by the Health and Safety Executive on such matters, but with the right equipment, a great deal could be achieved without being hit by a car or a lorry.

The same group of people could help with another scourge of the countryside—ragwort. The worst offenders for allowing ragwort to proliferate are the railway and road authorities responsible for our motorways both nationally and at local level. I am not suggesting that anyone should go on to the sides of roads or railways to pull up ragwort, but ragwort seed is blown into many of the adjacent fields and is very damaging. That could be pulled up without any problems at all. All that is really needed is a strong pair of gloves, and ideally a ragwort fork.

Another problem is Himalayan balsam which is taking over our river banks. In areas away from running water, it could easily be sprayed but it is also very easy to pull up and I know my noble friend Lord Gardiner

has done that himself, so I congratulate him on knowing exactly what the problem is. It is possible to eliminate such weed and the River Tweed authorities have now eliminated giant hogweed. It took 10 years to do it, starting at the source of the river and going downwards, and there is no reason why one should not do the same thing with Himalayan balsam. At the moment, it is killing all other plants which grow anywhere near it on the river banks.

Finally if Brexit happens and we leave the European Union, I beg that we remove the ban on Asulox; it is far and away the most efficient way of getting rid of bracken, which is spreading very rapidly in the whole of Scotland. I hope that the Minister will look favourably on those ideas.

2.09 pm

**Lord Cavendish of Furness (Con):** My Lords, I join others in thanking my noble friend Lord Lindsay for securing this timely debate and for an excellent opening speech. In taking part in this debate, I need to declare personal interests; they are rather considerable and I therefore refer noble Lords to the register.

It is a special privilege and pleasure for me to be present at my noble friend Lord Plumb's final contribution in your Lordships' House. Important milestones on our journey through life often have aspects of sadness and nostalgia. These are not negative sensations; on the contrary, as with today, they accompany the admiration, affection and gratitude that so many of us feel towards my noble friend as he brings down the curtain on the parliamentary phase of such a distinguished career. I join others in wishing him well.

I felt it was almost a tribute to my noble friend when I saw the NFU's recent paper, *Farming's Offer to Britain: How Farming can Deliver for the Country Post-Brexit*. It opened:

"Farming is Britain's backbone. It matters to everyone. Leaving the EU creates a defining opportunity for British farming. For too long the success of our sector has been determined not in Britain, but in Brussels".

I do at some point part company with the NFU, in so far as I find ever more compelling the ancient doctrine of free trade. Even then, I accept that free trade can result in concentrated losses that must be set against the large but distributed gains that free trade bestows. If Britain were to adopt a unilateral free trade policy, as we have done in the past and as other countries have done more recently, the benefits would favour especially the poorest and most vulnerable in our society. It would also favour the poorest and most vulnerable in the developing countries with which we trade.

While I believe that the ultimate aim should be free trade, in today's complex world, special consideration is owed to our farmers. For nigh on four generations, our farmers have been denied—often for good reason—the one thing that they need: the ability to look to the long term. To a large extent, they have had little or no contact with their marketplace and have been told what to produce and how to produce it. Sensitivity and imagination are now required to assist farmers as they face the biggest upheaval probably in living memory. In the more settled times that one hopes lie ahead, literally nobody knows what our farmers will be capable of when they find themselves operating in conventional

[LORD CAVENDISH OF FURNESS]

market conditions. My own hunch, for what it is worth, is that our farmers can and will rise to almost any challenge put in front of them.

I spent yesterday morning following with great interest on the parliamentary website the Secretary of State for the Environment taking questions upstairs from the EU Energy and Environment Sub-Committee. A number of the committee members are speaking in this debate. I was not only much reassured by the Secretary of State's command of his brief, but felt strongly that his instincts in respect of our countryside and rural enterprise are completely in tune with the times that we live in. He highlighted innovation as one of the most important challenges facing agriculture and the countryside generally and I understood him to say that there may be merit in underwriting in part the risk arising from innovative investment, which will be crucial as we aspire to greater productivity.

Many of the historic problems faced by rural Britain are already identified: the skills shortage; the housing shortage and the hugely damaging defects in the planning process; complex and burdensome regulation, which has been spoken about a lot and is the main complaint of farmers and SME managers; the poor quality of connectivity and low-quality broadband; the miserable underinvestment in infrastructure, and high taxation. These shortcomings must be addressed if we are to have a prosperous future.

For any sector to prosper there needs to be investment and, therefore, a willingness to accept risk. I hope that my noble friend the Minister recognises that today's fiscal regime impacts on margins to the point where investment is becoming less and less attractive. I am among those who believe that Brexit, with all its short-term problems, will open unimaginable opportunities—it is a question of grasping them.

2.14 pm

**Baroness Jones of Whitchurch (Lab):** My Lords, I thank the noble Earl, Lord Lindsay, for initiating this debate and all noble Lords who have spoken. From our Benches I also pay tribute to the noble Lord, Lord Plumb. My noble friend Lord Grantchester, who cannot be here today, has also asked me to pass on his gratitude for the noble Lord's lifetime contribution to farming. As he says, to be from farming and to become President of the European Parliament is a unique achievement.

When I first joined this House over 10 years ago, I was very pleased to be put on EU Sub-Committee D, which dealt with EU farming and fishing issues. Little did I know that I was about to join the cream of the Lords' farming fraternity—and giant among them was the noble Lord, Lord Plumb, or Henry as he is known. My lack of knowledge was all too apparent, but Henry could not have been nicer. He was kind and supportive and never patronising. He genuinely made me feel like part of the team. Like the noble Lord, Lord Cameron, I have a strong memory of going to Brussels with the committee. On previous occasions, we had dutifully queued up to go through security and collect our passes and so on. This time, with Henry at the helm, we swept through like royalty. It was obvious

that all the staff, from the porters right through to the Commissioners, held Henry in deep regard and affection—a view that I know this whole House shares.

Many colleagues have spoken today about Henry's contribution as president of the NFU. I add another accolade: as a trade unionist at that time, Henry taught us the power of direct action—and very good he was at it, too. But, at his heart, he is a moderniser. His speech today captured the challenges and opportunities of the future perfectly. That is what I want to build on in my contribution.

The shadow of Brexit has hung over a number of our debates recently, but I do not want to dwell on the depressing facts and statistics highlighted by the excellent Lords reports on the implications for fishing and agriculture. Undoubtedly, huge challenges remain in securing tariff-free access to the EU markets for our farmers and fishermen. It is impossible to imagine how we will feed the nation post March 2019 unless we have access to the crucial EU food imports and migrant workers on which our nation depends. Indeed, a new RSA report has highlighted that the bulk of fruit and vegetables that make up our five-a-day target are grown in the EU or harvested by EU workers in the UK. But, rather than dwell on the negatives, in the spirit of this debate, I thought that I would concentrate on the positive opportunities ahead.

A number of noble Lords have talked about the benefits that the agriculture technology sector can bring to food production and to the protection of the environment. The UK is already a leading player and has the opportunity to be at the forefront of global agricultural innovation. Precision farming and smart machines are revolutionising the way that crops are grown by using intelligently targeted inputs, such as fertiliser and pesticides. Robotics are being developed to drive tractors, kill weeds using lasers to avoid chemical use, pick and grade fruits and manage pests and diseases. Agricultural drones are increasingly used to inspect crops and livestock. Interactive livestock collars are used to track animal activity and behaviour. Perhaps most importantly, technology innovations are speeding up the search for natural, sustainable alternatives to chemical fertilisers. These are great initiatives but, of course, they cost money. It is therefore welcome news that Innovate UK—the Government's innovation agency—has been funding much of this research through the agritech catalyst. The Secretary of State's recent announcement of a further £40 million grant for the countryside productivity scheme will also help growth in this sector.

Similarly, new technology is shaping the livelihoods and prosperity of the fishing industry. Boats are better designed and are safer. Satellite technology, sonar, remote cameras and submarine drones are all enabling fishing fleets to target their activities more effectively. Nets are being designed to attract or dispel different varieties of fish stocks and allow juvenile fish to escape. Innovate UK's blue economy sector is finding new ways to track illegal and unregulated fishing and to measure changes to sea temperature and supplies of plankton, which again will impact on fish sustainability.

Better scientific evidence is feeding through to the evaluation of fishing limits to prevent overfishing and maintain healthy fish stocks for the future. Therefore,

in both farming and fishing, new technology is at the heart of our new opportunities. However, other common themes must be addressed for the sectors to thrive. First, as a number of noble Lords have said, we need to address the entry of young people into the farming and fishing sectors. My noble friend Lord Whitty rightly made the point that there is a particular problem with farming, given its reliance on EU and other migrant workers. This is a huge challenge. Only 4% of UK workers would even consider farm work. It is seen as low paid and taking place in remote settings with unsocial hours. There are similar concerns in the fishing sector, which has an increasingly ageing population. Therefore, vocational education, apprenticeships and training packages are key to attracting a new generation, and a new emphasis on high-tech, high-skill employment will help to provide new incentives for people to work in those sectors.

Secondly, we need to build up local markets and consumer demand for British brands. This has to be synonymous with high-quality products. Labelling of country of origin for all products is vital for this. Consumers need to feel a sense of pride and commitment in backing British food and understanding its provenance. In the fishing sector there is still considerable public ignorance about what fish are caught in British waters. As the noble Lord, Lord Plumb, will recall, when our committee visited Peterhead fish market some time ago, most of the catch was loaded on to lorries heading for France and Spain, where it would be consumed in large quantities by British tourists who all assumed that it was a local delicacy, so developing local food markets and local food loyalty is key.

We need to ensure that our food is grown and fished sustainably. The UK's limited land supply and our growing environmental and climate change challenges demand that we maximise output and minimise waste, without damaging the quality of our soil, water and biodiversity for the future. The reduction of bees, linked to concerns about pesticides, and the recent report that insects have reduced by three-quarters in the last 25 years, need to ring alarm bells. Insects and bees are crucial pollinators as well as helping to control pests and sustain our ecosystem.

At the same time, we need to respond to changing UK diets, including the desire to eat less red meat, and encourage production of, for example, more protein crops and other more diverse food production. Therefore, the replacement of the CAP could create a new farming era which encourages balanced, environmentally sound farming methods while reducing bureaucracy. We welcome the Secretary of State's recent supportive comments in this regard. I hope that the plans will include incentives to restore vital habitats such as native broad-leaf woodland, which would help with carbon storage and natural flood-risk management and encourage the development of successful smaller farms, as a number of noble Lords have said.

Sustainability should be at the heart of our future fishing policy too. Overfishing serves nobody and we will need to continue a dialogue with our neighbours to get this right, as required by international law. Science will lie at the heart of the solution, but we also need robust systems to police and protect our waters so that fish stocks remain high for the longer term.

I have tried to look at the challenges ahead in a more constructive frame of mind. I have not been able to touch on the wider challenges for the rural community, which we know are legion. But, as with other issues, technology could be transformative. Indeed, many people have a simple ask—noble Lords have echoed this—which is that the Government deliver on their long overdue promise to sort out rural broadband. So, there is the potential for a bright future ahead based on sustainability, new local markets and the creation of high-skill jobs for the next generation. I hope that the Minister shares that vision. In the meantime, I wish the noble Lord, Lord Plumb, a very happy and well-deserved retirement.

2.24 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Lord Gardiner of Kimble) (Con):** My Lords, I am most grateful to my noble friend Lord Lindsay for securing this debate to discuss the historic opportunities and challenges facing our rural economy, agriculture and fisheries sectors. I declare my own farming interests as set out in the register.

We have a vision of a thriving United Kingdom that offers unparalleled business opportunities, an agricultural community that produces world-renowned produce and a fisheries community with sustainable stocks. The challenges we face on the path to this vision are of the utmost importance to the United Kingdom. As the noble Lord, Lord Cameron, said, they are all mutually dependent and highly interlinked with the future of rural communities.

Your Lordships have all raised essential points and, given the time available, I shall write in detail on those I am unable to cover. It is very clear from the contributions today that this is an important debate as it has given us all an opportunity to reflect on the service of one of our own number. My noble friend Lord Plumb is so venerable that I can say that he knew my grandfather—yet he has a timeless quality. He is held in the greatest respect and affection not only in farming circles or, indeed, in the county of Warwickshire, as my noble friend Lady Seccombe said, or, indeed, in rural areas, but has been widely respected and held in great affection over many decades of public service, both at home and abroad. If my noble friend were a tree, he would surely be an oak: steadfast, resolute and strong. He will be remembered as one of the giants of agriculture, not just over these last generations but of all time. The name of Plumb joins those of Townshend, Bakewell, Coke and Boutflour. We owe him, Lady Plumb and his family a profound expression of gratitude.

The vibrancy of the rural economy goes unnoticed by some. It contributed over £230 billion of gross value added in England in 2016. Rural areas are home to many small entrepreneurial businesses. A quarter of all registered businesses in England are in rural areas. Employment in rural areas is higher than the UK average, with an employment rate of nearly 80% in rural areas compared with 74% in urban areas.

Farming and fishing are the backbone—I used that word before the NFU did—of rural life, helping communities to prosper, shaping the environment and making rural areas places that people want to live in



[LORD GARDINER OF KIMBLE]

and visit. As my noble friend Lord Inglewood said, the Lake District is now a world heritage site. The unique and treasured landscape has been shaped by people and nature over the millennia. I was very struck by the remarks of the noble Baroness, Lady Mallalieu, on Exmoor—a wonderful part of the country. Tourism is important for rural economies, providing an estimated 13% of employment in rural areas. However, my noble friend Lord Home spoke of litter. This scourge lets our country down and reduces our appeal. I was very taken by what the noble Lord, Lord Hunt of Chesterton, said about marine litter. We must address this. I do not know whether noble Lords saw the footage of Sir David Attenborough and an albatross taking plastic food wrapping back to the nest. It was extremely depressing.

I am also grateful to my noble friend Lord Home for mentioning the volunteers who pull up Himalayan balsam and ragwort. This is where the community can be engaged. I certainly had a wonderful day in the New Forest with a great team of volunteers. Their efforts in pulling out Himalayan balsam have much reduced it in the upper river catchments of that national park. I was pleased that, although their interpretations of recreation may be different, the noble Lord, Lord Greaves, the noble Baroness, Lady Mallalieu, and my noble friend Lord Shrewsbury all recognise that country pursuits create jobs and are an undoubted pleasure, as I well know. They are all key features of the rural economy.

The rural economy is a microcosm of the national economy. The sectoral mix of the rural economy is broadly similar to that across the UK. The main difference is that the proportion of small enterprises is greater in rural areas, and they undoubtedly face different opportunities and challenges arising from their location. The Government are committed to bringing sustainable growth to the rural economy and boosting rural areas, so that people who live in the countryside have the same opportunities as those who live in towns and cities. We want to ensure that rural communities are vibrant, that rural businesses can increase their productivity, and that people in rural communities have improved life opportunities.

As Minister for Rural Affairs and the Government's rural ambassador, I often speak directly to people living and working in rural areas and to organisations representing rural interests. What impresses me greatly is the sense of community and entrepreneurial spirit, whether it is the parish council, volunteers or the many small businesses that provide employment and services for the area. They all contribute greatly to well-being and prosperity, but there are also steps that government can and must take to support and facilitate growth in rural areas. I was grateful to my noble friend Lady Redfern and to the noble Baroness, Lady Jones of Whitchurch, for what they said. The industrial strategy and the rural productivity plan are absolutely key in helping businesses secure the skills and infrastructure they undoubtedly need to grow.

A number of your Lordships—the noble Baroness, Lady Mallalieu, and my noble friends Lady Eaton, Lady Redfern and Lord Colgrain—spoke in their varying ways about connectivity. Whether mobile or broadband, connectivity is vital for rural businesses

and for those who live and work in rural areas. By the end of this year, 95% of homes and businesses in the UK will have access to superfast broadband, but we need to do more. We are committed to introducing a universal service for high-speed broadband by 2020 that will act as a safety net for those areas not covered by superfast broadband. Last month saw the launch of a £30 million scheme to fund rural broadband projects that support economic growth, and over £2 billion is being spent through DCMS's superfast broadband programme.

The Government recognise the importance of rural proofing. I am grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Cameron, who has worked tirelessly on this. We have now revised guidance on rural proofing on GOV.UK and have improved the ways in which government departments consider the impact of policies on rural areas.

Our farmers, in maintaining world-leading animal welfare, food safety and environmental standards, produce the best. We champion and will continue to champion these high standards in an approach that works for farmers. The UK produces 60% of the food that we consume. The noble Lord, Lord Palmer, and my noble friend Lord Shrewsbury spoke of challenges. I was once asked in an interview what the challenges were. The commentator was surprised when I said, "The first one I was taught about was the weather and the difficulty of wet harvests", as we have heard from your Lordships.

We are already in a strong position to maximise opportunities. At every stage of the food chain, the UK is creating exceptional food and drink that is enjoyed around the world. In just 10 years, global demand has grown by nearly a third and is now worth £20 billion, providing unlimited opportunities for UK exporters, international buyers and investors. For instance—I have many details but do not have the time—exports in whisky have risen to £4.1 billion. We will continue to promote and enhance the reputation of British food through the Food is GREAT campaign.

In response to my noble friend Lord Lindsay, the Government support the use of geographical indications and will prioritise continued protection of the best of our UK food and drink. The EU rules that currently govern the enforcement of geographical indications will be placed on a UK legal basis through the EU withdrawal Bill.

I was very pleased that my noble friend Lord Cavendish, in particular, as well as other noble Lords, referred to research, development and innovation. They are crucial to improving agricultural productivity. In conjunction with this, we are facing a renewed threat of antimicrobial resistance, and it is essential that we tackle it. Last week, government announced the historic 21% drop in UK sales of antibiotics for use in animals to the lowest level since records began in 1993. We must press for further progress.

I also entirely agree with the noble Baroness, Lady Jones of Whitchurch. We are world leading. The UK has substantial strengths to build on, including a number of world-class research institutes and universities. I say to my noble friend Lady Byford that I look forward to visiting Harper Adams next week. Through agritech and precision technology, the UK is developing

innovative ways of optimising production and taking advantage of cutting-edge technology to identify weeds and diseases in crops. Farmers are increasingly engaged in this advance—in particular the next generations coming up. I find the next generation of farmers very enthusiastic about the prospects ahead. One of these challenges—referred to by my noble friend Lord Caithness and Lady Bloomfield and the noble Lord, Lord Curry—is the issue of soil health and fertility. This must be at the fore of our considerations.

Agriculture is of great importance across the United Kingdom—my noble friend Lord Lindsay's speech and his references to NFU Scotland were important. That is precisely why the ministerial team regularly meets both Ministers and farmers from all parts of the kingdom. The UK Government are working closely with the devolved Administrations on an approach to returning powers from the EU that works for the whole of the UK and reflects the devolution settlements of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

As we develop our future farming policy, we are aware of the vital questions on trade policy from the integrated supply chain in Northern Ireland and labour shortages. My noble friend the Duke of Wellington and the noble Baroness, Lady Jones of Whitchurch, referred to these matters. Defra is ensuring that these issues are at the forefront of the EU exit discussions, and we are actively working with the Home Office and industry to ensure that we have the necessary labour we need to harvest our crops and look after our animals. We will continue to work with industry and consumers as we promote and ensure global trade opportunities for the UK and for British agriculture.

In response to my noble friend Lord Cathcart, Defra has been working closely with the industry to review the requirements for secondary cleaning and disinfection. The principles have now been agreed and the Animal and Plant Health Agency is working on standard operating procedures which will minimise the need to dismantle complex machinery, thereby reducing the cost of secondary C&D without compromising—I emphasise that—disease risk, which is our responsibility.

I am pleased that a number of your Lordships raised the issue of forestry and woodland. Indeed, a number of us were at the National Forest reception yesterday. Forestry and woodland are important for so many reasons, be it timber production or our own sense of tranquillity and well-being.

I am acutely aware of my responsibilities as Biosecurity Minister. I can tell the noble Earl, Lord Kinnoull, that the Government are committed to doing all they can to prevent plant pests and diseases reaching our borders. Research, biosecurity and collaboration are key to this. My noble friends Lord Lindsay and Lord Caithness also raised this point. I am indeed determined.

We are committed to developing a future agriculture policy that values the high-quality food and drink that our farmers work hard to produce, sustainable British farming, excellent produce and protecting our treasured countryside, with the twin aim of producing excellent food and enhancing the environment. The noble Lord, Lord Whitty, and the noble Baroness, Lady Scott of Needham Market, made points about the importance of this.

Public money should, and will, reward environmentally responsible land use. We know that good environmental practice and profitable businesses are not mutually exclusive; they run hand in hand. A practical farmer in the form of my noble friend Lady Byford identified that a good environment and a strong agricultural sector are eminently compatible.

On fisheries, we have a clear vision to create a resilient, competitive and ultimately more profitable UK seafood sector, and to deliver a cleaner, healthier and more productive marine environment. The fisheries sector, including marine fishing, aquaculture and processing, contributes £1.3 billion to the UK economy and employs nearly 35,000 people. It is therefore crucial to the prosperity of our coastal communities. I agree with my noble friend Lady Bloomfield that leaving the EU provides opportunities to set our future aims for sustainable fisheries that will support and enhance these communities.

I was also very interested in what the noble Baroness, Lady Jones of Whitchurch, had to say about fisheries. I assure your Lordships that the Government will continue to be a consistent champion for sustainable fishing, based on the best science and evidence. Through the use of initiatives such as fully documented fisheries and on-board cameras, we have been a leading player in the recovery of stocks. An example of this is the recent recovery of cod stocks in the central and northern North Sea. They are being fished within safe biological limits and now have Marine Stewardship Council accreditation.

Our commitment to working with the EU and other coastal states to promote sustainable fisheries will remain as strong as ever. To deliver a profitable fishing industry, we must fish sustainably now and in the future. The UK is fortunate to have global centres of excellence and world-renowned fisheries science. These will be invaluable in achieving our ambitions. As custodians of our own waters, we want to build on our record to ensure that this valuable resource is preserved for future generations to harvest. My noble friend Lord Lindsay rightly wanted assurances that this is seen as a whole-UK point of policy. We are working actively with colleagues in the devolved Administrations, the Crown dependencies and the fishing industry to ensure that we have a successful fishing sector across the whole of the United Kingdom.

As stewards of our own waters, not only will we be able to husband fish stocks more wisely but we will allow our fishing industry to grow sustainably in the future. We can be home to a world-class fishing fleet, be an environmental leader and, in turn, have thriving coastal communities. Again, I know that up and down the kingdom coastal communities are looking to the opportunities they wish to grasp for the prosperity of their companies and the communities they serve in providing an outstanding part of our diet.

In the very brisk gallop to articulate the many points that we wish to make, we should remember that around 90% of the United Kingdom is rural. Our rural communities provide us with many benefits. They are producers of food of globally renowned standards and they are custodians of our fish stocks so that our seas are a sustainable source of food.

[LORD GARDINER OF KIMBLE]

I think of how brave the many generations of people running the fishing fleets have been. These communities manage much of our natural environment and are a source of employment and recreation, providing places that people want to live in and enjoy visiting. They are many things, and they are also our pleasure and our tranquillity.

My noble friend Lord Plumb has been a champion of rural interests all his life. He has encouraged future generations and inspired many people. In observing the courtesies, I think I can safely say that we all know him as Henry. The rural parts of the country provide us with food and water, thriving businesses, beautiful landscapes and cultural heritage. As my noble friend retires from this House, there is no better legacy for us all than to continue to place the rural interests of our country at the very heart of our national vision.

2.44 pm

**The Earl of Lindsay:** My Lords, I am hugely grateful to all noble Lords who have taken part in this very stimulating and timely debate. I am also very grateful to the many Members of this House who raised the topics that, with regret, I did not have time to mention in my opening remarks. The sheer number of topics we have touched on today proves just how multidimensional our rural economy and rural life are.

I am grateful to the Minister not only for doing a very able job in summarising the kaleidoscope of issues that have been raised today but for the specific assurances that we have had on protecting product and food names and on the United Kingdom's approach to solutions that genuinely involve all the devolved nations. I shall not summarise any other key themes—they have been well explored and well expressed.

I think we all agree that we are living in a period of significant change. We all accept that that change is driving challenges but, equally, most of us accept that it is also driving some very real opportunities. As my noble friend Lord Cavendish of Furness said, it is now a question of grasping those opportunities. They are there to be grasped.

The breadth and depth of the wisdom and expertise that we have had in today's debate, in the finest traditions of the House, has been entirely appropriate, given that the House is saying farewell to someone who has been a pinnacle of wisdom and expertise. All the tributes we have heard expressed have been greatly deserved. The remark from the noble Lord, Lord Curry of Kirkharle, that my noble friend is the most recognised "Henry" in Britain is a nice way for him to be remembered.

I will just finish by sharing a comment from my noble friend Lord Plumb, who is sitting next to me. It was not picked up by *Hansard* and probably was not heard by many other Members of the House during the debate. The noble Lord, Lord Whitty, acknowledged that my noble friend is usually right, and in fact my noble friend Lord Caithness even offered the thought that my noble friend is right 99.9% of the time. My noble friend next to me said, "I'm always right". He is.

*Motion agreed.*

## Northern Ireland Statement

2.47 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office and Scotland Office (Lord Duncan of Springbank) (Con):** My Lords, with the leave of the House, I will now repeat a Statement made by my right honourable friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in the other place:

"With permission, I would like to make a Statement about the current political situation in Northern Ireland. As the House is aware, Northern Ireland has been without a properly functioning devolved Executive and Assembly for nine months. During this time, the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Féin, as the two largest parties in the Assembly, have been engaged in a series of discussions to restore inclusive, power-sharing government at Stormont. The latest phase of the discussions began in August and has run for the past nine weeks.

It is the responsibility of the parties to reach an agreement, and the Government have been working tirelessly to support this process. In addition, I have kept in regular contact with the Ulster Unionists, the SDLP and the Alliance, as well as with representatives of business and civil society.

My right honourable friend the Prime Minister has also remained closely involved throughout the process and has held a number of discussions with the leaders of the DUP and Sinn Féin, as well as keeping in contact with the Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar. In addition, the Irish Government have been actively involved in the process in accordance with the well-established three-stranded approach to Northern Ireland affairs. I would like, in particular, to acknowledge the contribution of the Irish Foreign Minister, Simon Coveney.

Our efforts have been focused mainly on bridging a small number of differences between the two largest parties, particularly around language and culture, which have prevented a sustainable Executive being formed. While important progress has been made, the parties have not yet reached an agreement. Therefore, I am not in a position to bring before the House the legislation necessary for an Executive to be formed this week. The consequence of this is that it is now highly unlikely that an Executive could be in place within a timetable to be assured of passing a budget by the end of November, which is the point at which we and the Northern Ireland Civil Service assess that Northern Ireland will begin to run out of resources. No Government could simply stand by and allow that to happen and we would be shirking our responsibilities to the people of Northern Ireland were we to do so.

That is why the Government will take forward the necessary steps that would enable a budget Bill to be introduced in the House in order to protect the delivery of public services in Northern Ireland. This budget Bill would deal only with the current financial year. It would incorporate figures provided by the Northern Ireland Civil Service, reflecting its assessment of the outgoing priorities of the previous Executive. It would not set out any spending decisions by me or the Government. As my right honourable friend the leader has indicated, I would expect the budget Bill to be



considered in this House shortly after the November Recess. Subject to parliamentary approval, this Bill would give the Northern Ireland Civil Service certainty to plan for the rest of this financial year by giving the necessary legal authority to spend to existing plans. I would like to take this opportunity to put on record my deep appreciation for the professionalism of the Northern Ireland Civil Service in maintaining public services during this very difficult time.

The Government's strong desire would be for a restored Executive in Northern Ireland to take forward their own budget. So this step is one that I am now taking with the utmost reluctance and only in the absence of any other option.

I also want to be clear to the House that passing a budget in Westminster does not mark a move to direct rule any more than the passing of legislation by this House to set a regional rate did in April. Furthermore, it is important for me to emphasise that it is not an obstacle to continued political negotiations, and the Government will continue to work with the parties with that intent. Even now, however unlikely this may be, should the parties demonstrate that an Executive could be formed in the immediate future, I would clearly wish to proceed with legislation to allow that to happen on the condition that a means could be created to provide an expedited procedure on an exceptional basis to enable the budget to be passed by the end of November.

In addition to preparations for budget legislation, and in recognition of the strength of public concern, I will also reflect carefully on the issue of salaries for Assembly Members. This is a devolved matter and I cannot intervene without primary legislation in Westminster. As I recently told the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, in the continued absence of a functioning Assembly the status quo is not tenable. Therefore, I will be seeking independent advice on MLA pay and what steps may be taken to reflect the current circumstances.

I still hope that the parties can resolve their differences and that an Executive can be formed. We will continue to work with them and support them in their efforts. Together with the Irish Government, we remain steadfast in our commitment to the 1998 Belfast agreement and its successors, and to the institutions that they establish. It remains firmly in the interests of Northern Ireland to see devolved government restored; to see locally elected politicians making decisions for the people of Northern Ireland on key local matters such as health, education, transport and economic development. We are clear that Northern Ireland needs a properly functioning, inclusive, devolved Government, along with effective structures for co-operation, north-south and east-west. But ultimately the Government are responsible for good governance in Northern Ireland, and we will do whatever is necessary to provide that. I commend this Statement to the House".

2.53 pm

**Lord McAvoy (Lab):** My Lords, first of all I thank the Minister and the Government for making the Secretary of State's Statement available to us. In the spirit of co-operation, we are very grateful for that.

I echo the words of my honourable friend Owen Smith, with which I think the Minister will agree: it is profoundly disappointing that after 10 months of talks, two elections and countless and increasingly meaningless deadlines, the larger parties remain deadlocked, unable to agree an agenda for change and unwilling to show trust in one another.

Where we perhaps disagree—although disagree might be too strong a word—is on the assessment of what more could have been done and might still be done. My honourable friend Owen Smith has, as befits the House of Commons, robustly expressed comments on some of the Government's efforts so far. I hope a more productive approach will be taken.

The time may have come to consider drafting in outside help for the Northern Ireland politicians and the Secretary of State, as has happened before, to try to break the deadlock. The Labour Party, in co-operation with the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats, has a proud history of facilitating progress in Northern Ireland, and independent chairs for the talks were employed to great effect during that period. Will the Government consider doing likewise and bring in a fresh pair of eyes? Can the Minister tell us any more about the Government's intentions now that this round of talks has failed?

We fully support the Government in bringing forward a budget, as it is the responsible thing to do. Public services in Northern Ireland, as elsewhere, need investment and not cuts. We hope the Minister will tell the House how the Government intend to consult the parties in Northern Ireland on the priorities and, most importantly given the history of Northern Ireland, ensure that the funds are spent equitably.

There are reports in the press that the Government have had discussions with the political parties in Northern Ireland to find ways to sustain and create a role for the Assembly, even under direct rule. Will the Minister enlarge on the thinking behind that? We do not believe that direct rule would be a good thing. It would be a profoundly damaging reversal in the peace process, and we cannot afford that. A shadow Assembly, scrutinising or advising Ministers and, crucially, sustaining the north-south and east-west institutions that are such vital components of the Good Friday agreement, might provide some mitigation. That is an idea we would be willing to explore and support the Government in as a means of sustaining the talks and finding a route back to devolution.

We hear what the Government are saying about MLAs' pay. We understand the frustration and sometimes anger at the fact that payments are ongoing for MLAs and their staff in the current situation. It would be very easy to respond negatively to that. As we have found to our cost in the past, cutting politicians' pay will always be popular. But we need this generation of Northern Irish politicians to talk, to work and to rebuild devolution. I know patience is wearing thin on the streets of Northern Ireland, but we hope the Government will resist steps that would diminish the engagement of negotiators and undermine the smaller parties in particular.

Finally, to echo my honourable friend Owen Smith, I want to give the Minister a foretaste of what direct rule would mean for the Government. Does he agree

[LORD McAVOY]

that this morning's report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies makes shameful reading for any Government? It shows that more children will be driven into absolute poverty in Northern Ireland by universal credit and the two-child policy than in any other component nation of the United Kingdom. Will the Minister commit to considering using the forthcoming budget to undo that harm to the children of Northern Ireland?

I hope my comments are not taken as severe criticism. I repeat for the record that the Government have our full support in trying to reach a solution to the problems in Northern Ireland.

**Baroness Suttie (LD):** My Lords, I too thank the Minister for repeating the Statement today and welcome him to his new role. It is a deeply challenging time to be taking on these responsibilities and I wish him well in the weeks and month ahead.

We on these Benches cannot help but be deeply disappointed by the lack of progress in forming a new Executive. It is much to be regretted that we have now reached the stage where, once again, it has become necessary to legislate to put in place a budget for Northern Ireland. However, we recognise our obligations to the people of Northern Ireland to ensure that public services can continue and agree that this is the responsible course of action at this time.

It has now been 10 months since the Executive collapsed and during this critical period Northern Ireland has been without an effective Government and without an effective voice. Northern Ireland is showing the strains of this political vacuum, with no one able to take the much-needed decisions to ensure effective public services and to build the shared society that we all want to see. This is all the more tragic at a time when strategic planning to grow the Northern Irish economy in the challenging months and years ahead is so deeply needed.

However, we take some comfort from the fact that the Secretary of State is not abandoning the talks process and that this Government and the Irish Government are continuing to work hard to restore the Executive. It is vital that the hard-won gains of recent decades are not discarded without exploring all of the options and alternatives. Northern Ireland and its political leaders have in the past overcome seemingly insurmountable challenges to find the accord that became the Belfast Good Friday agreement, but this requires a degree of leadership, flexibility and a spirit of compromise that, sadly, seems all too absent at present.

We therefore urge the Secretary of State to keep in mind that there may be alternative ways to save devolution and provide for shared and sustainable government for Northern Ireland. For example, has the Minister considered intervening to provide reform of the petition of concern? This mechanism is now not being used for the purposes for which it was intended, and the mutual veto in the hands of the DUP and Sinn Féin seriously hampers free and open debate and decision-making. Secondly, to echo the words of the noble Lord, Lord McAvoy, has the Minister given active consideration to the suggestion made by my noble friend Lord Alderdice and others that the Assembly could continue

even if the Executive Ministers are not in place? In that way, there would be an elected body with which the Northern Ireland Office Ministers and other Ministers could consult and ensure that a Northern Irish voice is heard during the Brexit negotiations, including possibly some level of effective representations on the joint ministerial committee which is dealing with Brexit matters.

We on these Benches continue to believe that power-sharing devolution is vital to local democracy and representative decision-making, facilitating reconciliation and providing a coherent regional voice in critical matters such as Brexit. We believe that it is possible to find creative solutions to the current impasse and urge all of those involved to redouble their efforts. The people of Northern Ireland deserve no less.

**Lord Duncan of Springbank:** I thank the noble Lord, Lord McAvoy, and the noble Baroness, Lady Suttie, and welcome their support. At this time, it is important that we, as a House, are united in recognising that the best place for decisions for Northern Ireland are made in Northern Ireland. I can assure the House that that is the principal aim of the United Kingdom Government. We want to facilitate talks and hope that out of those talks will emerge a functioning, sustainable Executive which can deliver for the people of Northern Ireland. In the short term, of course, our discussions are limited to the financial year and a budget, but the points that have been raised are none the less valid and I shall try to address them as best I can.

I agree it is disappointing that an agreement has not been reached, but that has not been for want of effort from the United Kingdom Government, the Prime Minister, the Irish Government and the Taoiseach, who have each committed to trying to deliver an outcome that will work for the communities of Northern Ireland.

As we look at the budgets, it is important to recognise that they are not budgets of the United Kingdom: they are budgets and budget elements which have been determined by the Northern Ireland Civil Service based upon the priorities of the outgoing Executive. There has been no attempt or means used to try to influence or change that by the United Kingdom Government. Clearly it will not work in the long term, for obvious reasons, and that is why it remains our principal priority to return and deliver a functioning Executive.

On the issue of payment for Members of the Assembly, it is important to stress two things. As many will know, the Members have a constituency role as well and that cannot be lost sight of. My right honourable friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has committed that this issue will be carefully examined, and he will not commit to any particular outcome until he has received that careful consideration. No decision has been taken and we want to make sure that any decision that is taken works.

On the issue of involving the smaller parties, it is right that we should emphasise that this is not simply a discussion among the majorities; it must also involve all of those who are part of the widest community in Northern Ireland. The settlement that we need to see and deliver will involve all. This will be done on the basis of consent, which is important.

As to the notion of joint ministerial committees, wearing my other hat as a Minister in the Scotland Office, I have sat in on meetings where the Civil Service of Northern Ireland has participated. I can assure the House, as my right honourable friend the Secretary of State emphasised, that it is remarkably able and has defended and articulated the views and needs of Northern Ireland very well indeed. However, we must ensure there is a point at which those views are articulated by the elected Members of the Assembly, and that must be done as quickly as we can make it so. Again it is important to stress that we are working against a backdrop of Brexit at a time when those voices are more critical than ever, and that must be delivered in order to ensure that.

On the wider point raised by the noble Lord, Lord McAvoy, about universal credit, bringing people into work is an important first step towards ensuring that they are in a better place. However, going forward, I would prefer to see a situation in Northern Ireland where decisions are taken by those elected in Northern Ireland.

I will leave it there. There are other elements which I may be able to pick up on in a written response if that is considered appropriate.

3.06 pm

**Lord Robathan (Con):** To what extent does my noble friend believe that Sinn Féin wants to come to an agreement and form a new power-sharing Executive? If it does, can he list to the House what concessions it has made in the discussions?

**Lord Duncan of Springbank:** I thank my noble friend for his comments. He will appreciate that the discussions have been challenging. They represent two sides trying to reach an accommodation over remarkably challenging elements. The principal areas for discussion where there has been a failure to find common purpose have been around the wider cultural area and the language question. That remains, as yet, unresolved.

It would be inappropriate to interject at this point and iterate exactly what has not been secured during those discussions, particularly because the discussions are ongoing. I emphasise that. Although it looks at the moment that we are now at an end point. I cannot emphasise strongly enough that these talks are ongoing. I certainly hope—as I am sure everyone in this House hopes—that the talks are able to deliver an outcome and that in due course a budget will be developed by the appropriate authorities inside Northern Ireland.

**Lord Murphy of Torfaen (Lab):** Matters cannot go on as they are. Something dramatic and imaginative must happen. I beg the Minister once more to talk to the Prime Minister to ask her and the Taoiseach personally to go to Northern Ireland and take charge of these negotiations. When I was the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the only time we had real breakthroughs was when we had the heads of Government there.

My noble friend Lord McAvoy mentioned the issue of the Assembly being set up in some sort of shadow form. That worked in the past. It brings all the parties together, makes a difference in the way the talks happen

and involves all the smaller parties. We need change—otherwise we will drift into direct rule, which would be a total disaster for the people of the Northern Ireland.

**Lord Duncan of Springbank:** I thank the noble Lord, who brings much experience to these discussions.

It is important to stress that everything is on the table going forward. No one is trying to preclude any particular outcome, whether it be in regard to the individuals participating, how often they participate or what they do when they are around the table. I include within that my right honourable friend the Prime Minister and others.

The key question now will be not to rule anything out. We have moved through a nine-month period in which we have not secured the outcome we wish to see. It is important to stress that I do not believe anyone around the table wants this outcome either. So the next step will need to be an accommodation between the parties at the table.

I appreciate the idea that involvement at the highest possible level is the answer. However, sometimes it is and sometimes it is not. What we have to determine is how to deliver the outcome we all desperately want—which is to set up a sustainable Northern Ireland Executive. The noble Lord is right: we should not rule anything out. At the moment we are doing the best we can to keep all options open and to take those talks to the next stage.

**Baroness Butler-Sloss (CB):** My Lords, what voice will Northern Ireland have, particularly in relation to the border, on Brexit?

**Lord Duncan of Springbank:** That is a good question and an important one. Right now, the voice of Northern Ireland is being drawn from a number of sources. We would prefer to have an Executive who could be the principal for that, but at the moment stakeholders inside Northern Ireland are articulating a number of views, and that is absolutely critical. Through the joint ministerial committees we are seeing again the civil servants drawing those voices in to make sure they are absolutely at the heart of the discussion. I would like to emphasise again to the people of Northern Ireland that they are not being overlooked and they are not being silenced. Their Civil Service is performing a valuable function in ensuring that not just one single view but a diversity of views are being heard. The noble and learned Baroness is absolutely right to emphasise the importance of the border question, because that is where a number of the biggest challenges of Brexit will be experienced. We cannot afford to turn a deaf ear to any of those communities and stakeholders in Northern Ireland.

**Lord Morrow (DUP):** My Lords, I thank the Minister for the Statement which, regrettable though it is, is essential. Today, Northern Ireland finds itself without an Executive and an Assembly. This is due entirely to the intransigence and the declaration of red lines laid down by Sinn Féin. Someone has already queried whether its representatives are really sincere, and I suspect that they are not. The message that they want to get out across the world is: “Northern Ireland is an unstable society and ungovernable”.



[LORD MORROW]

One thing that must not happen today is instability, because that brings many problems with it. Can the Minister assure the House that the Government will not allow a drift situation to develop, that a budget will be struck, and that in the event of there not being an arrangement at Stormont, direct Ministers will be appointed to create stability and progress? The issues for the people of Northern Ireland are simple: good government, housing, policing services, health services and education. Those are the issues that the people of Northern Ireland wish to see addressed.

**Lord Duncan of Springbank:** The noble Lord is absolutely right. The things that people are most concerned about are the elements of good government through a sound and stable economy, housing, education and the wider welfare question. It is the ambition of this Government to deliver a strong, stable and sustainable Executive who can address those self-same points. As a former Member of the European Parliament, I have always believed in the notion of subsidiarity: we should deliver those things as closely to the people they affect as we possibly can. I believe that we can do that in the Executive.

The noble Baroness, Lady Suttie, made a strong point when talking about the people of Northern Ireland and the indomitable and unsurpassable efforts they have made to move forward. I believe that right now they are watching all of us to make sure that we are hearing their points. I hope that the self-same voices are being heard around the table. It is absolutely critical that the two principal groups at that table should find a way of securing common ground because it is on that common ground that firm foundations will be laid for the ongoing good governance of Northern Ireland. Only by having good governance can we actually hope to deliver the things which I know are dear to the noble Lord's heart, which is the welfare of the common people. I believe that that must also be at the heart of our ambitions as a Government.

**Lord Reid of Cardowan (Lab):** My Lords, it is at times of deadlock like this that we again have cause to regret the passing of the late Ian Paisley and the late Martin McGuinness, but we are where we are. I believe that the Secretary of State had no option but to do what he has done, and correctly to say that it is a regrettable necessity rather than a desirable option. It was also wise of the Minister and the Secretary of State to point out that this is for one year only. An assessment of the decisions on the distribution of the funds will be made on the basis of the Northern Ireland Assembly. However, it does not mean that there is no role for the Government in the oversight of this. Nothing would be worse than if there were a maldistribution of those resources, ignoring equality of opportunity to all the communities in Northern Ireland. Can the Minister assure us that although they will not be making the decisions, they will not be blind to the effect of those decisions for the future?

**Lord Duncan of Springbank:** The noble Lord, Lord Reid, makes a very important point. The budget for the financial year coming up has been set on the foundations of the previous outgoing Executive and

on the advice of the Northern Ireland Civil Service. At the heart of that must be a recognition of balance and fairness for all the people of Northern Ireland. There can be no point at which there is maladministration, misdirection or anything of that sort. The heart of our ambition, if we are called upon to move the budget forward, is to secure a fair and equitable settlement for all the people. In that way, when they see what is going on they will recognise that that is a proper outcome. But again I would emphasise that the future rests in the hands of those who are sitting at the table now. When they are able to determine a common ground for the next stable Administration to be formed, they can begin to grapple with the very challenging issues which I know exist in Northern Ireland across a whole range of areas. We cannot simply roll over that which emerged from the previous outgoing Administration because it will not work in the long term. We can move forward on that basis for the financial year ahead, but we cannot do so for ever.

**Lord Lexden (Con):** My Lords, in which specific areas has progress been made during the interminable hours of talks at Stormont? What are the specific reasons which make the Government believe that agreement can be reached, given that the five parties which qualify for seats in the new Executive have not been round the same table since June? Is this not a five-party process, not a two-party affair, as the Government keep repeating? My noble friend Lord Empey, who is unable to be with us today, has asked me to draw that last point in particular to the attention of the House.

**Lord Duncan of Springbank:** I thank my noble friend. It will not surprise him to learn that the noble Lord, Lord Empey, has already spoken to me at some length on a number of these issues, and he made the self-same points. I have taken those on board. With regard to the specifics, I hope that I will be forgiven for repeating myself. The very fact that the parties are still at the table is in itself a measure of some of the success. We have not seen a walking away from the table. The fact is that we are still able to see common ground going forward. We may not be able to occupy that common ground, but at least where it lies has been identified. Again I would hope, as we pass another potential milestone in so far as we are setting a budget, that those round the table will recognise what that means. The milestone is important to all of the parties involved for obvious reasons. I am afraid that I cannot give my noble friend the specifics and I hope that he will forgive me. In truth, they rest inside that room at the moment. However, noble Lords should be assured that progress has been made; that is why they are still at the table.

**Lord Dubs (Lab):** My Lords, perhaps I may raise two specific issues. The first concerns the spending in the budget. The Minister has said quite rightly that the main thrust of budget spending will be that which was determined by the Executive some time ago. However, there is quite a nest egg of extra money which the DUP got as part of the coalition agreement. How will that money be spent? Who will make the decision? While we are considering that one, perhaps I may

make a plea that integrated education in Northern Ireland should not be forgotten. That is because it is a key element of policy for bringing the communities together, and one about which my noble friend Lady Blood has been passionate for many years.

My second question is this. If the Executive is not to be restored, will the Government ensure that elected Members of Stormont will continue to represent Northern Ireland on international bodies such as, for example, the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, so that the voice of Northern Ireland goes on being heard even if the Executive is not functioning?

**Lord Duncan of Springbank:** I thank the noble Lord for those comments. He is absolutely right to point out that the voice of Northern Ireland cannot be extinguished because we have not yet been able to secure a settled basis for an Executive. The important thing will be for the UK Government to commit themselves to delivering an Executive, and that is the absolute core of our ambition right now. It is also the core of the ambition of those who are sitting round the table right now discussing these elements. On the question of education, I believe that that is a question best resolved by those in Northern Ireland in a functioning Executive. That is why I shall come back again to the earlier point I made, which is that we cannot overlook the importance of subsidiarity in determining the outcome of that question.

As regards the DUP supply and confidence support element, that has no part in the proposed Bill which will move forward as we look at the budget; it will be entirely separate. What we are looking at right now is the ongoing budget for the Executive based on what was determined by the previous Executive—although as has rightly been pointed out, it was some time ago—along with the involvement of the Northern Ireland Civil Service determining exactly what the points need to be in order to offer support going forward. However, as I said, this cannot go on for ever. The noble Lord is right: the further we get from that point in the past at which the outgoing Administration determined priorities, the more we will be overtaken by events and overtaken by time. We need to get to the stage where there is an Executive who are able to deliver against the priorities of Northern Ireland now. That should be at the heart of the discussions which I believe are ongoing even as we speak.

**Lord Dubs:** With the leave of the House, may I have a second go? I followed what the Minister said about spending, but there is a lot of money sloshing about—money that the DUP got as a result of joining the coalition. Who will decide how that will be spent? From what the Minister said, no decision will be made about that. Surely, a decision could be made about that right now?

**Lord Duncan of Springbank:** I would argue that that decision must rest with the Northern Ireland Executive. It is not in any way for the UK Government to determine what the spend should be in that particular area. That is why I come back to the point and stress that the milestone we are talking about right now is ensuring that the budget that has been determined moves forward, to stop a situation occurring in November

where the resources run out. That is the critical element. It must be the Northern Ireland Executive who determine the priorities that will arrive through the money from the supply and confidence relationship. In the interests of all communities, that must be how it goes forward.

**Lord Reid of Cardowan:** Will the Minister explain whether the £1 billion extra going to Northern Ireland is excluded from this budget consideration?

**Lord Duncan of Springbank:** I am very happy to say that yes, it is excluded.

**Lord Robathan:** Since we are allowed a second go, with the leave of the House, I reiterate my agreement with the noble Lord, Lord Murphy. To knock heads together—if I can put it rather less delicately than the noble Lord did—you need serious leadership from the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach, or whomsoever. At the moment, however, heads are obviously not being sufficiently knocked together.

**Lord Duncan of Springbank:** I thank my noble friend for his comments. I am not quite clear on how many heads have been knocked together at this point.

**Lord Robathan:** Not enough.

**Lord Duncan of Springbank:** They may well be not enough, but I can assure you that the Prime Minister is intimately involved in the process and the negotiations are not over yet. That is why we can say they are ongoing. I would rather they were ongoing toward a resolution that I could bring back here and explain to you at some length, but I cannot do that yet, as much as I would like to. It may be that the knocking together of heads will be part of the ongoing process, but I suspect that that is not necessarily the best way of moving forward.

## Calais: Refugees

### *Question for Short Debate*

3.23 pm

*Asked by Lord Roberts of Llandudno*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the condition of refugees and migrants still in Calais and the surrounding area, one year on from the refugee camp there being demolished.

**Lord Roberts of Llandudno (LD):** My Lords, I am grateful for this opportunity. First, I will quote a friend who was there when the bulldozers came to demolish the camps in Dunkirk and Calais 12 months ago. He said that,

“after I visited the Calais refugee camp, I still have an image in my head, which I'm sure will be with me for the rest of my life. When I arrived at the camp, there were police in riot gear everywhere. There was a pastor standing, holding what was left of two religious buildings—a blue cross, which once stood atop the camp's church. The look of complete despair. This was a man who had had the last bit of hope ripped away from him. To remove a religious symbol, a place of hope and prayer, from people who have only the clothes they are wearing and a shelter that is surrounded by mud, must be one of the worst, most inhumane things that I have ever witnessed”.

[LORD ROBERTS OF LLANDUDNO]

The demolition is not only of the camps, but of hope—replaced by despair. The refugees housed there were dispersed to different locations in France. The agreement was that the UK Home Office would go to all the “welcome centres”, as they were called, and do proper assessments of the young people and their claims. However, the evidence is that the interviews lasted no more than five minutes, and no interpreters were present. A few of the claimants were brought to the United Kingdom in the winter period, but those who qualified under the amendment of the noble Lord, Lord Dubs, were ignored. Many who had a strong Dublin III claim were also overlooked. People who backed Brexit must realise that the Dublin EU regulations will no longer be there for the UK if we come out of the European Union. Another strand of hope will be gone.

There is evidence, reported by Professor Sue Clayton in her film, “Calais Children”, that in the welcome centres facilities were mixed. Some were good, but others not so, with no medical facilities, not enough food, opposition from local populations and many other problems. Hope was not rebuilt. Calais Action and other refugee organisations are still active in Calais; they are back there. Many refugees returned to Calais and, this very day, sleep in fields, forests and ditches. They dream of being physically present in the United Kingdom, where they have family—and they have the language. They gather at points of transit, in Calais itself, Dunkirk, Brussels and Zeebrugge. They risk their lives on illegal routes.

However, last March the French Government made it a “crime of solidarity” for citizens or aid workers to give food or shelter to a refugee, even a child. People who run a Catholic safe house say that of 600 lone children, less than 40 have a bed to sleep in at night. The recent report published by Human Rights Watch, *Like Living in Hell*, describes the abuse of child and adult migrants in Calais. We know that there are 85,000 unaccompanied minors in Europe. The amendment of the noble Lord, Lord Dubs, which we supported, would have brought 3,000 youngsters into this country; but that was gradually reduced. The Government refused. I say to the House, especially Members opposite, that it was one of the saddest days of my life when I saw the Conservative Benches marching into the Not-Content Lobby, refusing to welcome these children. It was a very sad day.

In February, France closed the centres, leaving young people in limbo. They have gone back now. On 24 October, I received these numbers: there are now 750 refugees in Calais; 250 in Dunkirk; 400 in Brussels; 400 in Metz; and they tell me that as many as 1,500 are sleeping in Paris, seeking shelter wherever they can find it.

Over the centuries—not centuries, although it certainly seems like that sometimes; it must seem like that to the noble Baroness because we discuss it so often—over the years, we have pleaded with the Government to look again at our policy towards refugees, especially children. Some action has been taken, which we welcome, but we desperately need to look at the long-term, worldwide strategy. We must respond to need. We must bring hope. We know that David Cameron made a promise that 20,000 Syrian refugees would be received

into the United Kingdom before 2020—which they presumed would be the end of the last Parliament. I would very much like to know the actual figures for how that is going on.

I will quote the words of a 15 year-old from Afghanistan, who is a member of our Citizens of the World Choir; I remember them singing at the Llangollen Eisteddfod. He said to me afterwards, “Do you know, that was the best day of my life, singing in this Eisteddfod”. We can either bring hope to the most vulnerable, or we can leave them in their present despair. So much that we take for granted is denied them. The United Kingdom should not be trying to create a hostile scenario toward immigrants—the Prime Minister said that was her aim. The Government seem intent on pulling up the drawbridge of hope and denying them what we take for granted.

We have not only a political but a moral responsibility as fellow citizens of the world, which is what we are. Mrs May once said that if you say you are a citizen of the world, you are a citizen of nowhere. I prefer Socrates, who said, “I am not a citizen of Athens or of Greece. I am a citizen of the world”. We are citizens of the world. We need to take new initiatives. I am sure that other noble Lords will mention them as the debate continues. Then, many more people will be able to say, “These are the best days of our lives”.

Let us do something honourable and memorable. The opportunity is there. The Minister and her colleagues can move in this direction, even though the courts said differently this morning. We can have these 3,000 children here if we have the determination. I plead with the Government—I have argued with them for a long time and I plead with them this afternoon—to take new initiatives so that children like that little 15 year-old from Afghanistan will be able to say, “There is hope. These are the best days of our lives”.

**Lord Young of Cookham (Con):** My Lords, this is a time-limited debate with very little margin of safety, and a noble Lord has indicated that he would like to speak in the gap. I urge all noble Lords to follow the excellent example of the mover and to stick within the time limit.

3.31 pm

**Baroness Morris of Bolton (Con):** In July 2016, like many noble Lords taking part in today’s debate, I travelled with my noble friends Lady Jenkin of Kennington and Lady Hodgson of Abinger to the old camp at Calais. I thank the noble Lord, Lord Roberts of Llandudno, for giving us the opportunity to speak on such a crucial subject. We went with UNICEF UK, of which I used to be a trustee, and we were hosted in the camp by Citizens UK volunteers operating as Safe Passage.

It was probably one of the most harrowing and troubling visits I have ever made, one which left its mark on me mentally and physically: physically because I picked up a virulent bacterial infection—I have never seen so many dead rats in my life—and mentally because, although I have visited many refugee camps over the years, I had never before in one place witnessed the shocking human cost of war, terrorism, economic



instability and natural disaster. I pay tribute to the NGOs and volunteers who work with refugees for their resilience and their tireless work.

I will never forget the distressing story of one young man who had fled from Syria and had been one of only 30 survivors in a boat that had left Libya with more than 400 people on board. He said that if he could send one message it would be not to make the perilous journey to Europe. While deaths at sea have decreased this year, as at 30 September 2,655 people have died or gone missing while trying to cross the Mediterranean to Europe. That is why I wholly support and applaud the Government's policy of doing all they can to provide a safe refuge, clean water, education and training in and around countries experiencing strife, especially for victims of the brutal war in Syria. I remind noble Lords of my interest in helping to provide jobs for Syrian refugees in Jordan.

The reality is that thousands of refugees, many of them children, are still placing their lives in the hands of ruthless traffickers and making the dangerous journey to Europe. I urge my noble friend the Minister to ensure that, where there is a legitimate claim, we are doing all we can to help charities working across Europe to reunite children with their family members in the United Kingdom to allow those children the safety and stability they so desperately need.

3.34 pm

**Lord Dubs (Lab):** My Lords, I am grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Roberts, for making this debate possible. The cause of unaccompanied child refugees is one that commands all-party support, as evidenced by the debate that took place in the House of Commons earlier this afternoon. Whether it is under Section 67 or Dublin III, the Government are committed to bringing 480 unaccompanied child refugees to this country. So far, only 200 have come. Why can we not get a move on? Why should they lie there in Calais or Greece? Nothing seems to be happening, yet the Government have made that commitment. There must be some reason. Furthermore, many local authorities are willing to take more child refugees, whether in England, Scotland—which has hardly been tapped for this—Northern Ireland or Wales. We have evidence of local authorities in those areas that are willing to help.

I have been to Calais three times recently. The situation there is absolutely desperate. People are sleeping in the woods. Some wonderful NGOs and Safe Passage are helping refugees, but on the whole refugees depend on a food kitchen and the situation is pretty desperate. A temporary accommodation centre has been opened recently. It is much too small. People there need legal advice so that they know what their rights are. The long journey to Lille to have their application documented is pretty difficult, particularly since the office there is small and very little processing can take place.

There is a cut-off date of 20 March, which the Government devised of their own making. That date is very difficult because we know that the documentation on when young people arrive in Europe is never very clear-cut. I know, for example, that in Greece some of the children who arrived were not documented until after 20 March, although they had arrived some time before. There was a fire in a reception centre on one of

the islands. The records were burned. The same probably goes for children in France as well. I urge the Government to be flexible about the cut-off date, otherwise it will be excessively rigid and children will be denied a decent situation.

When the children come to this country, many of them will do extremely well. I have heard of situations where young people do well and where they are getting on in school. I know of one young Syrian boy in Northern Ireland who was rejected by most of the schools in Belfast because his English was not good enough. He went to an integrated school and he got top marks in English after two or three years. There are real success stories that we need to talk about.

I believe public opinion is still on the side of our taking more child refugees. None of us is arguing that we should take the lot. None of us has said every child refugee in Europe should come here. But we should take our fair share. It is my contention that we are not doing that. I believe public opinion is behind us on this.

3.37 pm

**Baroness Hamwee (LD):** My Lords, a production at this year's Edinburgh International Festival, a diorama about two young refugees from Afghanistan, depicted the police in northern France as huge aggressive birds. It was very powerful. We must thank the big-hearted people who still present a human face in Calais, as the noble Baroness said. They come back from helping refugees, appalled that the French police pepper spray babies' nappies, as one example. They ask for donations not of tents but blankets, because they can be salvaged in the face of wanton, "nonsensical"—as one of the NGOs put it—violence by the police.

Reports by Refugee Rights, the Human Trafficking Foundation and others make very grim reading. I hope the Minister can tell us what discussions British authorities are having with the French regarding what I describe as an international humanitarian issue in northern France. Will she also update us on the Government's thinking about whether there is any evidence—I stress evidence—of a pull factor bringing refugees to northern France seeking to reach the UK, as distinct from the many significant push factors? Indeed, is it in anyone's interest not to apply Dublin III except those of the traffickers, other abusers and criminals?

In the case of children without adult guardians, not enabling their reunion with family—"family" being rather wider than just parents—in the UK is exposing them to considerable dangers. It is a matter of the rules and of ensuring they have access to advice about the rules through facilities and outreach work. The current situation is not "safeguarding". To ask the same question in different words: why not safe and legal routes that are managed and regular?

3.39 pm

**Baroness Butler-Sloss (CB):** My Lords, I declare my interests, which are registered. I start by congratulating the Government on bringing a considerable number of children to this country. That is admirable, but the

[BARONESS BUTLER-SLOSS]

Government have a blind spot about Calais and Dunkirk. Last July, the former MP Fiona Mactaggart and I wrote and published a report, *Nobody Deserves to Live This Way!*, as a result of our visit to Calais in May and a great deal of evidence presented to us in two months. We set out there the parlous state of children in Calais and Dunkirk. What is so sad is that it has not improved, and the brutality of the police is as bad now as it was then. That is set out in our report and in other reports, including a number of French reports, in which French humanitarian organisations are said to be absolutely horrified. As has already been referred to by other noble Lords, the French have put in temporary accommodation for 20 children, but there are 200 in Calais, as I understand it, and some in Dunkirk. Those are unaccompanied children needing help. Many of them have the right to come to this country under Dublin III—the noble Lord, Lord Dubs, has made that point already, but it needs to be made again. For this reason, they are in Calais; they are in Dunkirk. The registration place is 100 km away. How does one expect a 15 or 16 year-old unaccompanied minor to travel 100 km to get registered? This is truly shocking.

There is the danger of exploitation, but I do not talk only about the danger. As someone involved in the issues of modern slavery and human trafficking, I know that many of those children have already been exploited, but they are in danger of being exploited again. What worries me is that so many of them have the right to be here, mainly under Dublin III but many under the wonderful Dubs amendment that, just for a moment, we thought would work; however, only 200 children have come. The Government have a duty at least to deal with Dublin III and to cast a sympathetic eye on the Dubs children. Nothing is being done, and I ask the Minister why not.

3.42 pm

**Baroness Berridge (Con):** My Lords, I declare my interests as outlined in the register. This debate is tribute to the tenacity of the noble Lord, Lord Roberts, on behalf of refugees. The conditions in Calais are part of a refugee system that is under strain like never before. Those conditions are undermining public confidence in the effectiveness and humanity of the system, but another factor undermining the system in the general public's eyes is whether it is just.

In July, after much parliamentary lobbying, the Syrian vulnerable persons resettlement scheme was expanded to allow non-Syrian nationals such as Yazidis to be selected to come to the UK. Despite much lobbying, inclusion in the scheme's vulnerability criteria, set by the UK and given to UNHCR to apply, of religious identity or being at risk of religious persecution has been rejected.

The Home Office has recently released statistics on people from vulnerable religious groups recommended to the UK by UNHCR for resettlement. Of the 8,136 resettled in the UK in 2015-16, 70, or 0.8%, were Christians, 22, or 0.3%, were Yazidis, and 33, or 0.4%, were Shia Muslims. Therefore, only 1.5% were from vulnerable religious communities; yet 23% of the pre-war population of Syria were Christian, Shia, Alawite or Yazidi.

The violence experienced by smaller religious communities in Syria and Iraq is well known. The UN Security Council last month announced that it was establishing an international investigative team to explore the crimes against humanity committed by ISIS. Can my noble friend the Minister explain why members of Syrian and Iraqi religious minority communities are so under-represented in UK resettlement schemes, and why an individual's religion or religious persecution has not been identified as a criterion of vulnerability?

I recognise that the devil may be in the detail and there may be an explanation for these figures, but there is a clearly a case to be answered by Her Majesty's Government and, I might add—although it is of precious little comfort—by the United States Government. Will my noble friend the Minister and the Minister for Immigration in the other place meet interested parliamentarians to discuss UNHCR's selection process and religious minority representation in the UK resettlement scheme? In particular, will the Minister invite the requisite senior officials from UNHCR who are in charge of delivering Her Majesty's Government's commitment to take in 20,000 refugees during this Parliament?

It will not be possible fully to understand what is happening without Her Majesty's Government sitting down with the UNHCR, which operationalises the policy for them. The system appears unjust, and stopping the confidence leaking out of it requires a lengthy meeting between Her Majesty's Government and UNHCR sooner rather than later.

3.45 pm

**Lord Judd (Lab):** My Lords, we have all to thank the noble Lord, Lord Roberts, for his courageous and constant vigilance on this issue. It has been good again to hear from my noble friend Lord Dubs, whose tireless work for practical results, however frustrating he finds it, is outstanding.

Three specific issues strike me concerning what my noble friend said. First, can we have an assurance from the Minister that the arrangements presently in place in the temporary centre in northern France will survive Brexit? How long can they be guaranteed? Secondly, can there be legal assistance for the young people at that centre? It is urgently needed. Thirdly, can proper transit arrangements rapidly be made to deal with the processing of documents?

We all know that whatever wonderful work is done by families, communities and local authorities in this country to provide a home for quite a number of refugees, the situation is still not satisfactory. In terms of the proportion of national wealth and national income for individual families, we in Britain still lag behind Europe in what we are doing. There is no reason for this. It is a tremendous challenge for us all.

Finally, I say simply that in our concern with the immediate situation in Europe, we must never lose sight of the fact that there are 65.6 million forcibly displaced people worldwide, 22.5 million refugees and 10 million stateless people. How on earth can we have a stable world—never mind the humanitarian, moral challenges—unless we work flat out with our neighbours in Europe and the international community to have

effective international strategies to tackle this? How can we tackle its source and ensure that young people who are without work or hope in their own communities have some opportunity of finding work and some kind of future?

3.48 pm

**Lord Greaves (LD):** My Lords, I want simply to support everything that has been said, and will no doubt be said by further speakers. I do not have anything specific to add, other than to pay tribute to my noble friend Lord Roberts of Llandudno for his dedication and persistence in pursuing these matters. We happen to share an office and I more than anyone else know just how much he puts into this day after day when he comes to work in this House.

My noble friend mentioned one of the projects that he launched, the Citizens of the World Choir, which is a remarkable project. It consists of 30 to 40 refugees living in this country, from 16 different countries—from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, alphabetically. It has a wonderful conductor, Becky Dell. It has sung, as my noble friend said, at the Llangollen Eisteddfod. It has sung in Llandudno. It has even sung at Ronnie Scott's. This is just one example of the hundreds of projects there are around this country working with, supporting and looking after the refugees who are already here, whether they are unaccompanied young people or families, like the refugees we have in my own patch in Pendle.

When the Government announced their vulnerable persons resettlement scheme of people from Syria, the leader of the council and I—I declare my interest as deputy leader—immediately said, “Right, we will take as many as we reasonably can. We will act as the host authority for the district”. We now have 20 families, who came in two lots, who are now suffering the climatic conditions of the Lancashire Pennines—for their sins—and who are being looked after and supported in our part of the world. We are very pleased to do it. We will take more if the Government will only bring more people over.

We set up an official co-ordinating committee of all the agencies and official bodies, which is run and clerked by the council. That is very successful but it was clear that it was not enough and a group of volunteers, who all wanted to help and provide support, set up a group called Pendle New Neighbours, which has a weekly drop-in meeting and has resulted in individual people making friends with individual families and building up those kinds of relationships, which are so important if people are going to live successfully in our community. The point is that we cannot do more unless the Government pull their weight and allow more people to come.

3.51 pm

**Lord Alton of Liverpool (CB):** My Lords, in a disturbing report issued over the summer, which was referred to earlier, Human Rights Watch reported that nearly a year after the closure of the Calais Jungle, between 400 and 500 asylum seekers and other migrants were still living on the streets and in woods in and around Calais, with no place to eat or sleep and often

treated like flotsam and jetsam. The noble Lord, Lord Roberts of Llandudno, is right to shine a light on this shameful situation.

The report documents police abuse and harassment of aid workers, which it attributes ultimately to a desire to send a signal that this fate awaits you if you risk fleeing the horror and terror of countries such as Eritrea, Syria, Afghanistan or Sudan. Scandalously, the report describes the routine use of pepper spray on child migrants, which was referred to by the noble Baroness, Lady Hamwee. This is done while they are sleeping, to disrupt their lives and, again, to try to prevent them coming in the first place.

The Refugee Rights Data Project corroborates those findings and describes the deplorable and appalling treatment of children. I was a signatory to the amendment of the noble Lord, Lord Dubs, and I wholeheartedly agree with what he has said today: the British public have a big heart and can tell the difference between people trying to arrive in this country illegally and vulnerable, defenceless children.

The RRDP report said that 98.9% of children interviewed were unaccompanied and that 93.6% reported that they had been subject to police violence, while 84.7% of respondents lacked access to information about their rights and opportunities to change their situation and 39.1% of children said they had family elsewhere in Europe, the majority of whom were said to live in the United Kingdom. Meanwhile, in Calais, refugees and displaced people are sleeping rough in the area, with 82% of children saying that police had driven them away while sleeping and 89.2% describing such incidents as having been violent.

I recently wrote to the Minister to ask about a case of family reunification involving a Syrian-Armenian family who had become separated after some of them had fled from Aleppo. Can she tell us what progress she is making in looking at that case?

As I have told the House, Europol estimates that at least 10,000 unaccompanied child refugees have disappeared since arriving in Europe. Many are feared to have fallen into the hands of organised trafficking syndicates, as my noble and learned friend Lady Butler-Sloss said. What happens to those children who make it to the United Kingdom? The *Times* reported on 13 October, in a story entitled,

“Child trafficking victims vanish from council care and into the hands of criminals”, that at least 150 Vietnamese children have disappeared from care in this country since 2015. I have sent the report to the Minister and told her of my intention to raise it today.

The Home Office can be proud of its modern-day slavery and trafficking legislation, which fundamentally recognises that these challenges require international solutions, but the plight of these children makes a mockery of the laws we have enacted. I hope that the Minister will be able to give us reassurance that the Government are acting on behalf of those children, who are desperately at risk.

3.55 pm

**Baroness Stroud (Con):** My Lords, I thank my noble friend Lord Roberts for securing this timely debate. He and many of my noble friends in this



[BARONESS STROUD]

House have done a great deal of commendable work on this issue. A year ago, when the Jungle in Calais was cleared, 750 children were transferred to the UK—200 of these under the Dubs scheme—and the rest reunited with family. Many of these children have gone on to flourish under this country's protection and I am proud of that record. However, we are still failing a great number of children.

Children who find themselves unprotected by official channels are extremely vulnerable to traffickers and I am greatly concerned by the reports of children being trafficked illegally into this country. This is a devastating fate for a child, many of whom are desperately seeking to join family or simply seeking safety but find themselves trapped by traffickers. Some of these children—so far, around 170—have been recognised and referred to authorities. However, these same children are reportedly being failed again and we have no idea where more than 100 of them are. These children are at grave risk of being re-trafficked. They are greatly at risk of sexual and labour exploitation. The true number of trafficked children is likely to be far higher, with some hidden from authorities and many more at risk. I deeply value the steps that my noble friend the Minister has taken to ensure the safety of children but what action is being taken to bring them back into a safe environment? What is being done to ensure that there are legal, accountable channels to help refugee children in Calais and across Europe?

The reason for closing the Dubs channel for helping these children is still unclear. To my knowledge, there is no evidence that providing safe routes for children acts as or creates the pull factor that some fear. Closing legal routes, however, pushes young people into the hands of traffickers. When one thinks of the scale of the refugee challenge, we are hardly looking at a pull factor. There are 6.5 million people, including 2.8 million children, displaced within Syria itself; 2.7 million Syrian refugees have made their way to Turkey; Lebanon hosts approximately 1 million Syrian refugees, which amounts to around one in five people in that country. Only about 1 million out of that entire group have chosen to make the dangerous journey across Europe. These statistics tell us a story of families wanting to stay in the region, not to travel. This is not a pull factor that we are seeing.

My key question to my noble friend the Minister is: what is the Government's strategy here? We are not faced with a huge challenge, in comparison to the size of the problem being picked up by Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan. If those countries are responding to the needs of their neighbours, surely we can do better to care for the 100 who have made it to Calais and the United Kingdom.

3.59 pm

**Lord Hylton (CB):** My Lords, I urge Her Majesty's Government to listen carefully to the NGOs working in northern France. By day and night, all year round, they provide food, clothing, bedding and first aid to refugees. I know of six British NGOs and at least two French ones. Their personnel have sometimes been harassed by the French security forces. They have seen refugees being teargassed and pepper sprayed, as has

been mentioned. We must hope that the criticisms by the French courts and the French ombudsman will lead to less brutal policies. The number of refugees sleeping rough has already been given by the noble Lord, Lord Roberts, so I shall not repeat it. It is not large.

The French Government could help by identifying unaccompanied children for the protection and shelter they deserve. France should consider providing refugee application points nearer to Calais and Dunkirk—that point was made by the noble Lord, Lord Dubs. Her Majesty's Government could do more for unaccompanied children in Europe and Turkey. Our embassies and consulates could be welcoming reference points working with the UNHCR to identify children who may qualify for reasons of family reunion or extreme vulnerability to come to this country.

We need far better co-operation in this field between statutory and voluntary agencies, our two Governments and the UN agencies. We could make far better use of sponsorships by families here of other families or unaccompanied children who could come here. There is a Canadian model for this to work on. It is not sufficient for our Government to say that we have one or two liaison officers in certain European countries. That will not solve the problem.

4.02 pm

**Lord Kerr of Kinlochard (CB):** My Lords, I declare an interest as a trustee of the Refugee Council. There are 17,000 unaccompanied children sleeping in camps in Italy tonight. There are 3,000 in Greece. Closer to home, more than 100 children will sleep rough in the Calais area tonight. As temperatures are dropping, the physical risks of that are growing. The moral risks are very clear. We have not yet taken a single child from any of the camps in Italy or Greece under the Dubs amendment. The world has forgotten Calais. Most of the great international NGOs have moved on to look at Bangladesh and at the horrible crises of today, but this one is going on and Help Refugees, the little, all-voluntary charity which brought today's High Court case, has not forgotten them. It is still there helping these children. Like the noble Lord, Lord Dubs, I believe that the country wants these children helped, so I appeal to the Government to be a little more generous in their interpretation of the commitments they made in this House, to this House, at that Dispatch Box, at the conclusion of our Dubs amendment debates, and I appeal to the country to remain generous to Help Refugees, which does wonderful work for these children and is entirely supported by donors. The need is urgent.

4.03 pm

**Baroness Sheehan (LD):** My Lords, we are told that £36 million was given to the French Government on the condition that the Calais Jungle clearance operation is full and long-lasting. Is the Minister aware of the methods that the French police are using to meet the UK Government's demands? It must be apparent to our Government that as in the townships in South Africa, homes may be destroyed but people do not vanish in a puff of smoke—they return. The Government must listen to the evidence in this debate from wonderful

organisations such as Human Rights Watch, Refugee Rights Data Project, Safe Passage UK, the Human Trafficking Foundation and Help Refugees, a wonderful organisation staffed by the most fantastic young people you could ever hope to meet. I was in Calais this August for several days and can attest to their documentation of hundreds of asylum seekers sleeping rough in forests and parks around northern France in the most appalling conditions. Traffickers run rings around the police. Of the unaccompanied children spoken to by the Refugee Rights Data Project, 93.6% had experienced police violence. These are children, and this behaviour belittles both our nations.

Let me tell your Lordships about Ismail, from North Darfur in Sudan. I first met him in the Jungle, when he was 16. He had no shoes and I tried to get him a pair. He was not successful in getting to the UK in the 750, and was moved to a CAOMIE in Challuy, near Nevers in central France, with some of his friends. The centre had no heating—it was winter—and the food was bad. Their asylum claim was rejected by the Home Office. They were not told why and they were not told how to appeal—I saw the letter. The centre closed in February and they were told to leave. Since then, he has been wandering around France in Paris, Calais, Dunkirk—then to Belgium—Bordeaux and round again. He has suffered at the hands of the police, been imprisoned for four days and is sleeping under bridges and in parks.

I encouraged him and his friends to apply for asylum in France, but he says the French do not want them. They beat them up, teargas them and pepper spray their sleeping bags. Some friends who tried to claim asylum in France gave up in despair because there was no process for them to access in Calais. Getting to Lille, where there is a registration office, is hazardous because migrants are forbidden to use public transport and arrested. But even if they make it there, nothing happens. Not one of the people who tried to get asylum in France has started school—something they all desperately want.

Ismail's story is the story of all the unaccompanied children who we have let down. They are being pushed out of France and have no choice but to try illegal and dangerous means to get to the UK. Leaving aside the ongoing legal process around the Dubs scheme, what excuse can the Government have for not meeting their own figure of 480? I know a few children have arrived in the last few weeks, but will the Minister give a commitment to your Lordships' House today that this is the start of a meaningful process to reach the Government's own figure of 480? Will the Minister also urge her counterparts in France, at the highest level, to stop their brutal methods? We are better than that.

4.07 pm

**Lord Rosser (Lab):** I too congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Roberts of Llandudno, on securing this debate. The Calais camp closed down a year ago, but reports suggest that some 500 asylum seekers and other migrants, some of whom are unaccompanied children, continue to be in and around Calais in appalling conditions, facing harassment from the authorities as well as from people traffickers.

The Government may say that what is happening now in Calais is a matter for the French. However, I do not think it is quite as simple as that. On 6 March this year, in answer to a Commons Oral Question, the then Minister for Immigration said:

“The UK Government are contributing up to £36 million to support the situation in Calais and ensure that the camp remains closed in the long term”.

The Minister went on to say:

“The site of the former Calais camp remains clear and there is ongoing work, supported by UK funding, permanently to remove all former camp infrastructure and accommodation and to restore the site to its natural state. That work will help to prevent any re-establishment of squats or camps in the area”.—[*Official Report*, Commons, 6/3/17; cols. 556-57.]

Government involvement with the French authorities and the resultant present conditions in Calais would appear far from peripheral.

In this House, the Minister said on 29 June that, “our doors are always open for local authorities to come to us and say that they can accommodate more children”.

How much money did the Government pay a local authority accommodating children under Section 67 of the Immigration Act in 2016-17, and for how many years following 2016-17 does that funding continue to apply in respect of those children accommodated in 2016-17, and at what level? How much money are the Government paying a local authority accommodating further children under Section 67 in the current year, 2017-18, and for how many years following this current financial year does that funding continue to apply in respect of those further children accommodated in 2017-18, and at what level?

On 29 June the Minister also said:

“We are working closely with EU partners to implement Section 67 of the Immigration Act and ensure that children with qualifying family in the UK can be transferred quickly and safely under the Dublin III regulations”.—[*Official Report*, 29/06/17; col. 551.]

How many of those currently in the Calais area in appalling conditions are children who would qualify or might well qualify to come to this country under Section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016, and how many would qualify or might well qualify to come to this country under the Dublin III regulations? I would hope the Government know the answer to this question because some of the £36 million or so of our money being spent in and around Calais is for actively seeking out those, particularly children, who would qualify to come to this country and then ensuring that they do so.

4.10 pm

**The Minister of State, Home Office (Baroness Williams of Trafford) (Con):** My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Roberts of Llandudno, for securing a debate on this important issue, and I pay tribute to his tenacity on this subject. I thank all noble Lords who have taken part today.

The UK is a global leader in responding to the needs of those affected by conflict and persecution, and we have a long and proud history of offering sanctuary to those in need of protection. Many noble Lords have talked about the figure of 480 children, but in the year ending 2017 the UK granted asylum or another form of leave to more than 9,000 children, and has done so for more than 42,000 children since 2010.

[BARONESS WILLIAMS OF TRAFFORD]

On the noble Lord's question about the conflict in Syria, we have pledged £2.46 billion in aid and we will resettle 20,000 people to the UK by 2020 under our vulnerable persons resettlement scheme. He asked how many so far. The answer is more than 8,500 individuals are already here, around half of whom are children. We will resettle 3,000 of the most vulnerable children and their family members from the Middle East and north Africa region by 2020 under the vulnerable children's resettlement scheme. Further to that, Eurostat figures show that in 2016 the UK resettled more refugees from outside Europe than any other EU member state, and in total over one-third of all resettlement to the EU was actually to the UK.

Our efforts do not end there. In order to reduce suffering along the key migration routes, as my noble friend Lady Morris pointed out in her eloquent speech, we assist vulnerable people on the move, inform them about the risks of onward journeys and support alternatives, such as voluntary return or resettlement in a third country. Since October 2015 we have allocated more than £175 million in humanitarian assistance to the Mediterranean migration crisis. This support has provided lifesaving assistance such as shelter, water and sanitation, food, medical care, and protection for the most vulnerable migrants and refugees. It has helped to build the capacity of host Governments to manage migration so that it is safe and orderly.

A number of noble Lords, including the noble Lords, Lord Roberts of Llandudno and Lord Rosser, and the noble Baroness, Lady Hamwee, asked about Calais. The UK provided comprehensive support, following a request from the French Government, for the clearance of the Calais camp last year. This included the safe transfer of more than 750 unaccompanied children from France to the UK, and a commitment of £36 million, as the noble Lord pointed out, to help to provide alternative accommodation elsewhere in France for migrants and to maintain the security of the border controls in Calais, which are a critical part of our national security.

One year on from the Calais camp clearance, the Government welcome ongoing French efforts to manage what continues to be a challenging situation in the area. We welcome the French Government's recent decision to deploy more police to the region and to continue to provide alternative accommodation for migrants elsewhere in France. France has many of the same international obligations as the UK towards those on its territory, and migrants in France are the responsibility of the French Government. I know that noble Lords have become frustrated by me saying that time and again, but France is a democratic country and it is true that migrants in France are the responsibility of the French Government.

We also enjoy excellent law enforcement co-operation with the French authorities and other European partners. We have increased our intelligence sharing and operational co-operation with the French through the establishment of the joint centre for information and co-ordination in Calais. Through the Organised Immigration Crime Taskforce, we have deployed officers from the National Crime Agency, Border Force, Immigration Enforcement and Crown Prosecution Service to numerous European

countries, including France, to work with law enforcement and criminal justice partners on tackling the organised crime groups that facilitate people smuggling. Just last week there were 11 arrests in the UK for people smuggling under Operation Halifax—a Europe-wide investigation into an international organised crime gang that was smuggling migrants across Europe and into the United Kingdom. Key to our co-operation with European partners is the intelligence exchanged through the European Migrant Smuggling Centre, which leads Europol on organised immigration crime.

I want to be clear that there is no need for migrants to return to Calais and the surrounding areas in the hope of travelling illegally to the UK to claim asylum here. France is a safe country and those in need of protection should claim asylum at the earliest opportunity. In the Government's regular engagement at ministerial—

**Lord Hylton:** Will the noble Baroness be kind enough to address the language question? These people, if they know any European language, know English.

**Baroness Williams of Trafford:** My Lords, that is absolutely true, and there is regular support to that end in France. I assume the noble Lord is talking about France.

We have established additional welcome centres for people already in place across the country, and four new centres have recently opened away from the juxtaposed ports, where those wishing to claim asylum will be supported through the asylum process—I am guessing, with language help as well. Regular transportation is provided to these centres.

We are well aware of reports—noble Lords have mentioned this this afternoon—that unaccompanied children are among those who have returned to Calais. I would again emphasise that any children who are in the area should claim asylum or otherwise seek support from the French authorities. We continue to work closely with France and other member states to deliver the transfer of 480 unaccompanied children from Europe to the UK under Section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016. A High Court ruling handed down today confirmed that the Government's approach to implementing Section 67 was lawful. The focus for the Government, working together with local authorities and other partners, must be on transferring eligible children to the UK as quickly as possible, with their safety and best interests at the centre of all our decisions. Children have arrived in recent weeks from France and transfers are ongoing. We have been working closely with Greece to put in place the process for the safe transfer of eligible children to the UK, and expect to receive referrals in the coming weeks. That answers the point made by the noble Lord, Lord Kerr. This is in addition to our ongoing commitments under Dublin.

Here in the UK, for the year ending June 2017, I say again, we granted asylum or another form of leave to more than 9,000 children, and to more than 42,000 children since 2010. The Government are fully committed to ensuring that unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and refugee children are safe and their welfare is promoted once they arrive in the UK. That is why the Government published yesterday a safeguarding strategy for unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children in recognition of their increasing numbers and specific



needs. The strategy includes commitments to increase the number of foster places, review the funding available to local authorities that support unaccompanied children, improve the information and advice available to children and their families, and prevent children going missing.

The noble and learned Baroness, Lady Butler-Sloss, asked about the Dublin regulations. The Home Office today published the Dublin III Regulation guidance, which covers decisions relating to the state responsible for examining an asylum claim and transfers between the UK and other European states in respect of adults and children. It is important that this House recognise that Dublin is a two-way co-operation measure which concerns adults as well as children. On the specific case mentioned by the noble Lord, Lord Alton, I will certainly respond to him about that.

The noble Lord, Lord Dubs, highlighted the local authority point. Local authorities, as he will know, have been tremendously generous in caring for migrant children, regardless of their circumstances. Every region in England is now participating in the national transfer scheme and, if we are to continue to make that scheme a success, we need more local authorities to come forward and offer places—a point I have made to the noble Lord on many occasions.

To answer the question from the noble Lord, Lord Rosser, last year we substantially increased funding to local authorities, which are responsible for supporting unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. As of the start of July 2016, local authorities now receive £41,610 a year for each unaccompanied asylum-seeking child aged under 16, and £33,215 for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children aged 16 and 17. This represents a 20% and 28% increase in funding, respectively.

My noble friend Lady Berridge mentioned Christians and members of other religious groups. We are very clear that our scheme will prioritise the most vulnerable refugees and that is why, under the VPRS, UNHCR identifies refugees for resettlement using its vulnerability criteria. Membership of a minority religious group is not, in and of itself, one of the vulnerability criteria, but members of minority religious groups may qualify under one of the other criteria.

Finally, I will answer the question from the noble Baroness, Lady Hamwee, on the pull factor, which my noble friend Lady Stroud also mentioned. We acknowledge that there are both push and pull factors affecting migratory flows. We know that the French authorities are concerned about Calais and the northern coast of France being a pull factor, and we share that concern. Those in France should claim asylum in France—that is the safest and fastest route to safety.

With that, I thank noble Lords for taking part and, in particular, the noble Lord, Lord Roberts, for securing the debate.

## A Manifesto to Strengthen Families

### Motion to Take Note

4.23 pm

Moved by **Lord Farmer**

That this House takes note of *A Manifesto to Strengthen Families*, published on 6 September.

**Lord Farmer (Con):** My Lords, it is with a great sense of purpose and, indeed, determination that I open today's debate on *A Manifesto to Strengthen Families*. It has more than 50 signatories from honourable Members on Conservative Benches in the other place and a solid showing from noble Lords here, many of whom are speaking today. I am sure that all will wish to join me in welcoming my noble friend Lord Agnew to his place on the Front Bench. Given his outstanding track record in business and educational improvement, he will, I am sure, rise admirably to the considerable challenge of making his maiden speech while responding for the first time to a long debate as a Minister. He is very well placed to do so, given his evident passion for tackling disadvantage.

I am grateful to him and all noble Lords who have taken the time to contribute to our deliberations today. They are long overdue: it is almost 10 years since my noble friend Lady Gardner of Parkes led the last debate on the importance of strengthening families, following the launch of the Centre for Social Justice's landmark report *Breakthrough Britain*. It is fitting, therefore, that my noble friend Lady Stroud is here to add her considerable weight to our debate—I trust she will take that in the spirit intended—as she was instrumental to this report's delivery.

Published mid-2007, *Breakthrough Britain* highlighted the role family breakdown plays in driving poverty and further entrenching disadvantage. Prior to it, our social and political commentary had become stuck in the groove of orthodoxy that said financial hardship caused families to fall apart and, as a result, family policy had been reduced to a three-word slogan, “End child poverty”. Yet shortly before the Labour Government came to power, Tony Blair told his party conference that a strong society cannot be morally neutral about the family, and referred to:

“The development of an underclass of people, cut off from society's mainstream, living often in poverty ... crime and family instability”.

He described this as a “moral and economic evil”. The first ever Green Paper on the family, *Supporting Families*, published shortly after Labour came to power, did not shrink from addressing family instability, to Labour's great credit. However, policy proposals to tackle relationship breakdown within it were largely abandoned and family stability became the elephant in the room of social policy, despite it being a root cause, as well as an effect, of poverty. It hits the poorest the hardest, compounds existing disadvantage and is a potent driver of wider social breakdown.

My own involvement with the Centre for Social Justice, and my work in this House, are deeply rooted in a desire to address root causes of disadvantage, and I am encouraged that current government policy is pushing in this direction. Indeed, my noble friend Lord Freud, when he was Minister for Welfare Reform, committed the Government to developing,

“a range of non-statutory indicators to measure progress against the other root causes of child poverty, which include but are not limited to family breakdown, addiction and problem debt. Anyone will be able to assess the Government's progress here. The Government are saying, ‘Judge us on that progress’”.—[*Official Report*, 9/12/15; col. 1585.]

[LORD FARMER]

In April, several family indicators were published, including parental conflict, parental worklessness and parental mental ill-health. These are all essential for building a picture of the number of children growing up in families where relationships are under such strain that children are highly likely to suffer ill effects. Certainly, that is what research on the outcomes of adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, on later life teaches us. However, there is one ACE, parental separation, that used to be captured in the family stability indicator but seems to have been quietly dropped. How can we judge the Government on their progress against family breakdown as a root cause of child poverty when we no longer measure it but instead use the proxy of parental conflict? Will the Minister explain why the family stability indicator does not sit alongside the other parental indicators?

The manifesto we are discussing today makes it clear that parental conflict devastates a child's emotional world and is a cause of mental ill-health, even if it manifests itself not in violence or verbal aggression but in a pervasive and permanent atmosphere of coldness, indifference and hostility. Couple counselling should be available through children and young people's mental health services if parental conflict lies behind children's mental illness.

However, research by Amato and Booth shows that low-conflict divorces can be as harmful to children as high-conflict but stable relationships. Children do not understand why a split has happened. They blame themselves and assume that relationships are inherently unreliable. Additionally, they almost invariably lose daily contact with one of their parents and, if they stay with their mothers, their incomes are more likely to drop. The first Children's Commissioner for England, Sir Al Aynsley Green, said that children's biggest fear was that their parents would split up. We have one of the highest divorce and separation rates in the OECD and one of the highest rates of children growing up without both birth parents. These truths make us very uncomfortable. They also make us very uncompetitive. Rightly, we have a Chancellor who is determined to boost our nation's productivity and ability to live within our means. Well-functioning families are wealth generators, which make a considerable contribution to society. However, when families falter they often become welfare consumers, and relationship difficulties that affect mental and physical health can make it incredibly hard to perform well at work.

The cost of family breakdown has been set at a shade under £50 billion per annum. However, many indirect costs accrue to every department of government. For example, high demand for local authority care has an impact on prison budgets, as a quarter of prisoners were looked-after children. Some of the greater need for counselling in schools, children's mental health services and housing stems from fractured families. They will also be less available to supplement social care for elderly people.

These costs are ultimately borne by the Exchequer, so the Chancellor has the greatest interest in demanding that each Secretary of State brings forward plans to strengthen families. Government-wide challenges need cross-departmental co-ordination. Our manifesto

recommends that a senior Cabinet Minister take responsibility for driving family policy in the same way that the Secretary of State of a big existing department champions qualities across government as part of their wider brief, is aided by an equivalent to the Government Equalities Office and has a dedicated budget.

To change the structure of government in this way would be a clear signal that this country no longer pays lip service to the importance of families. At every election there are warm words on the subject from across the political spectrum but, to date, Governments of all colours have delivered very little when they hold the reins of power. This week, the President of the Family Division of the High Court pointed out that too many Whitehall departments were responsible for children and that,

"there is no department and no secretary of state whose title includes either the word 'families' or the word 'children'",

and implied that the current structure was failing those who needed it most.

We have been encouraged by the response from Ministers since the manifesto was launched, and I think they have got the message that we are not going to go away. David Burrowes, the highly respected former honourable Member in the other place, has been appointed executive director to ensure take-up of the manifesto recommendations, whether at a national or local government level. There will be an annual progress update and, as policies are implemented, we will add more to a rolling programme of family-strengthening measures.

The input of noble Lords to this process would be very much appreciated. In the process of rallying support from our Benches, the ideas were sharpened by signatories' decades of government and front-line experience. Now they are published, all those involved in the manifesto are keen to draw on cross-party expertise. Reversing our damaging family breakdown trends will not be achieved by one or two terms of government—it will take a generation.

I conclude my remarks by focusing briefly on three areas in the manifesto in which I am personally much invested. First, in this Session I will bring forward a Private Member's Bill, the Family Relationships (Impact Assessment and Targets) Bill, which will make it a statutory obligation for all government departments to carry out a family impact assessment on all their policies and expenditure. At present, we have the non-statutory family test, introduced during the coalition years. I have found a lack of clarity in some departments about whether this is still government policy, so it has by no means become embedded. Moreover, officials are under no compulsion to publish the results and findings from impact assessment exercises, which makes a mockery of transparency and accountability.

Secondly, the manifesto refers to family hubs, about which I have spoken several times in your Lordships' House, the introduction of which was Labour Party policy just before the 2015 election. Family hubs are local one-stop shops that particularly help children in need, offering families with children aged from nought to 19 early help to overcome difficulties and build stronger relationships. Such provision is typically

co-located with superb early years healthcare and support, such as in transformed children's centres, supplementing and not supplanting those vital services.

We have recommended that the Government put in place a transformation fund and national task force to encourage local authorities to move towards this family hub model, working closely with charities and local businesses. These should build on the experience of councils, such as on the Isle of Wight, that have pioneered family hubs effectively. Barking and Dagenham is also making hubs part of a major local authority reorganisation, in which housing and other departments have been subsumed into a community solutions department that draws in community assets—not “doing to” people but “doing with” people.

Finally, policy 14 encourages police and crime commissioners to work with local schools to ensure that any child who experiences domestic abuse gets the support they need, after a bad night at home, from the minute they go through the school gate. In his book *Blue*, former borough police commander for Southwark, John Sutherland, recounts how for those young men who go on to cause serious harm,

“it all began behind closed doors—hidden in their homes and their childhoods. It's one of the undeniable conclusions of my professional life”.

Gang formation is partly driven by children and young people seeking out comfort and security from their peers because they did not find it among the adults in their lives. Schools are ideally placed to offer that but, unless children's emotional pain as a result of experiencing or witnessing abuse at home is picked up early in the school day, it can result in inattention in class, other forms of disengagement and, at worst, them mimicking that abusive behaviour. Instead of experiencing care and sympathy, they will likely be reproached and feel rejected.

Over 25 police forces have adopted this Operation Encompass model, which requires them, after a call-out to a domestic violence incident, to share data in a timely way with schools. It needs to be every force and every school, with the ultimate aim of stamping out domestic abuse for good.

In summary, this Government urgently need to develop a strategic approach to strengthening families. We recently heard in this House that the Farmer review recommendations in this manifesto are already being implemented by the Ministry of Justice. Can the Minister encourage us that this welcoming spirit towards similar policies will be evident from all government departments?

4.37 pm

**Lord Nash (Con):** My Lords, I warmly welcome my noble friend the Minister to your Lordships' House. He has worked tirelessly for the communities of Norfolk for many years, and I worked closely with him as a non-executive director of the Department for Education and in his capacity as chair of the academies board. He is particularly committed to improving the life chances of young people. He is someone of very sound judgment, with a very fine mind, and I am absolutely delighted that he has taken up this position. I am sure that he will be an outstanding Minister

and—this is probably the only time I could ever say this without upsetting someone—far better than the previous incumbent.

I also thank my noble friend Lord Farmer for bringing forward this debate on such an important issue. As he said, so many of our children and young people suffer from unstructured home lives, poor parenting, family breakdown and absent fathers, and they are at risk from gangs. At one charity in which I am involved, we surveyed the parents and asked how many of them had any kind of structured environment at home. Nearly 90% said that they had no such structure or routine system at home, but a similar number said that they would like to hear about one if someone would describe it to them. Increasingly, we are seeing children enter primary school with inadequate toilet training and some with black teeth from too much sugar. At one school with which I am involved, one of our five year-olds had to have all his teeth removed.

As the academy movement has progressed, we have seen many academy groups which started with secondaries move into primaries and then into nurseries, as have many free school primaries. One particularly successful free school—Reach Academy Feltham—engages with parents when their children are babies, and I am delighted that it has been approved for a second free school, where it will seek to have a range of services on site for families.

Overlaid on this issue of parenting is the problem of children and young people's overexposure and addiction to computers and smartphones. This can affect the development of a child's brain and lead to poor ability to concentrate, scatty behaviour and severely disrupted sleep patterns. Many schools are now exhorting parents to ensure that children do not have their smartphones with them after, say, nine o'clock at night or to consider using one of the apps available to control access time and content. All this, however, requires discipline and structure from the parents. One school in California, where many parents who work for social media and other IT companies send their children, severely limits the use of computers and smartphones.

We want our children and young people to grow up and become good parents themselves. Most pupil surveys show that the majority of school pupils aspire to finish up in a permanent, long-term relationship. Sadly, so many of them have no experience of having seen what that looks like at close range. This is why relationship education, which is now compulsory in all schools under the recent Children and Social Work Act, is so important.

I strongly support any initiative that can help deal with these issues and welcome the manifesto. I am particularly attracted to the idea of family hubs and hope that the Government will consider piloting at least some of these. I am sure that the benefits and payback, in every sense, would be substantial.

4.40 pm

**Lord Parekh (Lab):** My Lords, I too welcome the Minister to his new appointment. I begin by thanking the noble Lord, Lord Farmer, and his colleague in the other place, Fiona Bruce, for drafting the manifesto.



[LORD PAREKH]

It presents a very depressing picture of what is happening to family in our country. We are almost a world leader in family breakdown, and in economic terms the estimated cost of family breakdown is about £48 billion. By the age of five, around half the children in low-income families have seen matrimonial breakdown. That leaves deep scars. So in addition to the economic consequences there are psychological and moral scars on people growing up. The question is: what do we do about it?

The manifesto points out several reasons why this happens, including poverty, fathers not being involved in the raising of a child, domestic violence and poor ability to manage relations—all those factors are responsible. In the 18 policies that the manifesto articulates, these problems are addressed.

However, in the minute and a half that is left to me, I want to concentrate on two major difficulties that I have with the report. First, I began to ask myself what kind of family the report is talking about. Family is an abstraction. There is one structure of family among Afro-Caribbeans, another among the south Asians and a third among the white community. What kind of family model did the manifesto's writers have in mind?

If you look at the manifesto closely, it is striking that the ethnic-minority family is virtually absent. For that family there are certain peculiar problems. Parental pressures can be exerted over children asking them to perform, sometimes beyond their capacity. There can also be cultural conflicts, with children going out to school and bringing back certain cultural mores and customs that parents are unable to cope with. There can even be linguistic and conceptual problems, where parents are unable to communicate with their children. A few years ago I was part of a BBC film called "I Can't Talk To My Parents". It focused on a girl who wanted to go to university in another town, but her parents could not understand why she wanted to do that and not stay at home with them and study. She said that she wanted to explore herself, but she did not have the language to explain that concept to her parents—neither the parents nor the child could explain to each other what they meant. The report does not fully take care of Asian families and others.

The other difficulty is that the report talks about strengthening families. I always worry when I see normative concepts such as "strengthening". In many cases, for the south Asian family it is not a question of strengthening the family bond but of it being too strong. There are occasions where children are very deeply bonded to their parents and unable to exercise autonomy and independence, especially girls. In that situation, what does strengthening the family mean?

I have several difficulties of this kind. However, I simply intend to alert the writers of the manifesto to the problems that this will create and not at all to detract from the considerable merit of the manifesto.

4.44 pm

**Baroness Eaton (Con):** My Lords, I add my thanks to my noble friend Lord Farmer for enabling this debate on the report, *A Manifesto to Strengthen Families*. I fully endorse the proposals in it and have been pleased to add my name to its list of supporters.

Military families live in every community in the UK. Many in the naval service choose to settle in one place so that their children's education is stable and their spouse can have a career. The compromise they make is that the serving person has to travel, becoming a "weekender", leaving the spouse to be a lone parent for much of the time. Others choose to follow the flag. This means relocating every few years, lots of school moves and a recurring search for suitable employment possibilities for the spouse.

Research from King's College suggests that 13 months separation within a three-year period is likely to damage a romantic relationship. The Armed Forces families regularly deploy for much longer periods. Family hubs, as suggested in the manifesto, would offer real support to Armed Forces families who have chosen to settle in the community rather than live close to a base. Accessible parenting support that recognises the particular challenges of service families would be especially welcome, as the deploying or weekendening parent can struggle to maintain an effective parenting relationship.

The increasingly dispersed nature of Armed Forces families and the advent of the new accommodation model means that more and more families will become embedded in the community rather than following the flag, which brings a new set of challenges for the families. The characteristics of Armed Forces family life mean that, where it exists, families are potentially more vulnerable to domestic violence. In the case of mobility, there is increased social isolation from family and support networks, which can make it more difficult for victims to access support. It is believed that separation brings about dynamics in a relationship that can increase the likelihood of domestic abuse. Relationship support that teaches what a healthy relationship looks like and the skills and behaviours needed to maintain it would be enormously beneficial as a preventative measure.

The noble Lord, Lord Dannatt, is not able to speak in this debate but he mentioned to me that his wife worked for years as a Relate counsellor in British Forces Germany and campaigned hard—ultimately without success—for free counselling for those in need in the Army. Despite the millions used to support the Relate initiative, lack of money was the real determinant. I ask the Minister whether the issue of family support could become routinely raised in the Armed Forces covenant report to Parliament.

4.47 pm

**Lord Mawson (CB):** My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Palmer, for initiating this important debate. If I have a concern with this manifesto, it is an over-confidence in the role of the state over time.

In my experience, it takes a family and a local community to raise children well. My colleagues and I have been building a supportive entrepreneurial culture which has been supporting children and families in the East End of London at many levels for 34 years. Today the Bromley by Bow Centre employs 270 staff, is operating on 30 sites across east London, runs four health centres with 40,000 patients and hosts 2,000 visitors a year from across the world seeking our wisdom and practical insight into how you build, in reality, integrated responses and support networks with some of our

most challenged families. To help them these families need us all to take the long view. Ideally they need cross-party support over many years rather than being the subjects of party political ideology, game playing and short-term initiatives. My colleagues and I have the long view, and we know and have witnessed on countless occasions what positive outcomes can happen if you take the long view and stay around over time with these families.

If the Government are serious about this manifesto, they might like to look back over the past 30 years and learn from the programmes the state has run—because in our experience government is not a learning organisation; it has little memory and this fact has many unintended consequences for many of our most vulnerable families. Thirty years ago in our area you had a rich ecology of providers of child care and often strong relationships with parents and families. Then, government said we will encourage children to enter school two years earlier, thus destroying the business model of many small nurseries and support networks—the older ones subsidised the younger ones, who needed much higher levels of care.

They then set up Sure Start and children's centres; indeed, the launch of these centres was at the Bromley by Bow Centre. We were told that we were the model for what should happen nationally, and now of course they are saying that we cannot afford them. Being aware of unintended consequences and learning from what we have done is the first rule of thumb. The family hubs proposal is a great idea and absolutely in the right direction of travel, bringing services together and creating an integrated environment. The danger is that they will become the next shiny new thing for the next few years, rather than be embedded in communities.

One of the major causes of family break-up is poverty—arguments about money. Go on YouTube and listen to Paul McCartney's interview with David Frost and you begin to get under the surface of what was really going on with Lennon and McCartney. On the housing estate where McCartney lived, he describes the endless rows he listened to among poor families that were all about money. He and John decided that the way out of this was to make money; it was not just the music that drove them.

Today, our experience and ideas about building integrated entrepreneurial cultures in poor communities are going national. I am leading 10 projects in 10 towns and cities in the north of England for Public Health England, through the Well North programme, in communities and with families that successive Governments have failed. I declare my interest. Here we can see all the silos of government at play, often undermining and contradicting each other and not working together, and yet we say that doing anything about the systems of government is all too difficult. Really? If it takes not just a family but a whole community to bring up a child, we need communities to take greater ownership of their areas. This is what we are seeking to do, and there are great examples in the north of people trying to do just this, if only we will let them. This is how communities become successful.

Post Brexit there is a real opportunity to do something about this operating model. Some of us are already putting platforms in place on which to build, but I

wait to see whether this Government are interested in long-term, joined-up responses, in genuinely doing things differently and becoming an institution that can learn from their rich history.

4.51 pm

**Baroness O'Cathain (Con):** My Lords, I congratulate my noble friend Lord Farmer and all his 65 Conservative supporters from both Houses on his excellent paper, *A Manifesto to Strengthen Families*. It has been beautifully produced and is easy to read. It contains 18 policies to support the Government in their aim to strengthen families as part of their wider ambition for social reform.

As we have heard, family breakdown is estimated to cost almost £50 billion a year. That is a huge amount, but the manifesto points out that it is a fraction of the overall cost as fractured families are likely to be dependent on the state. Strengthening families has to be one of the most important social justice priorities of our times. The long-term, indeed probably lifetime, effect of fractured families is so sad. It is heart-breaking to contemplate how frequently marriages that were celebrated with joy and happiness collapse in a morass of recrimination, unhappiness and even hatred. Of course there are massive support systems that can be called into play, including mediation, help from other family members, support from social workers, the Church and many others.

The 18 policy points in this manifesto are set out in practical language that is free of jargon. This makes it a valuable contribution to our thinking and examination of what can be done to tackle this seemingly intractable situation. The first policy points out that supporting families cuts across every part of government and recommends that a Cabinet Minister with responsibility for families should be appointed, along with the suggestion to establish a cross-cutting body similar to the Government Equalities Office that is based in the Department for Education to enable the co-ordination of family policies. In addition, the recommendation proposes that all departmental business in every area of government should have specific targets and produce impact assessments in relation to the development of bespoke family policies.

The document contains a quite amazing amount of information, suggestions and downright common sense and it is impossible to find fault with it. It would also be presumptuous of me to attempt to do so, as I almost certainly have less experience of families than almost anyone else in the Chamber. What experience I have is decades out of touch, but from remembering my personal experience, the glaring omission in the manifesto is a recommendation for a specific policy to involve grandparents in the bringing up of children.

Today's grandparents are much more in tune with children than those of the 20th century. They are more active, more travelled, healthier and more aware of what children need and value. As an aside, I am told that Beveridge made no reference to life after retirement from work. He would be so surprised to realise that today's 60 year-olds can be so fit—marathon runners—and willing and able to be involved with their offspring's offspring.

[BARONESS O'CATHAIN]

Research from the University of Oxford has shown that grandparents play a vital role in children's well-being, and the results have informed UK family policy. Professor Ann Buchanan's study of more than 1,500 children demonstrated that those with a higher level of grandparental involvement had fewer emotional and behavioural problems. However, there is one big problem: grandparents have no legal right to see their grandchildren. Professor Buchanan has addressed all parliamentary parties to raise awareness of how grandparents contribute positively to grandchildren's well-being. I am told the Government have promised a review on family law to look at how best to provide greater access rights for grandparents. I wish the Minister well in his new position and ask him when the review is likely to be published? If it is still in the embryonic stage, will he suggest that it may be a good idea to widen the terms of reference beyond the ghastly situation now pertaining, whereby access can be hopelessly difficult in some cases?

4.56 pm

**The Lord Bishop of Oxford:** My Lords, I warmly welcome the report and I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Farmer, and others involved. I find myself liking it more each time I read it. Its very modesty is its virtue, for a small number of strategic changes can make an immense difference. I speak from a background of nine years as a vicar in outer estate parishes in Halifax, in very poor communities, and seven years before my previous appointment as Bishop of Sheffield serving again some of the most impoverished regions in the country.

I will make two points. First, I wholeheartedly commend the vision of a government focus on supporting families. The default in our culture, and across a range of government departments, is a progressively greater focus on individuals in law and public policy. Yet we all exist as part of diverse families and networks of relationships—a fundamental insight of the Christian tradition. Such families are the cornerstone of our well-being and the common good. The proposals in section A of the report offer a necessary countercultural counterweight at the very heart of government that pays attention to this reality in the deep fabric of our lives. The proposals are more radical than they sound on first reading. Let us do them.

Secondly, I applaud hugely the report's encouragement to work with voluntary and private sector partners. The task of supporting families is much too important to be left to government, national or local. However, government's role is vital in setting vision and standards, as a convenor and broker. The charity PACT—Parents and Children Together—was founded by the Diocese of Oxford in 1911. PACT exists to build and strengthen families. Last year, as part of PACT's work, we placed 87 adopted children in families and approved 49 families to adopt, as well as much other good work. Each extra family approved to adopt adds over £1.1 million in value to society.

Two years ago, Oxfordshire County Council had to cut its funding to its 43 children's centres. All but eight of them were in danger, which would have been an immense loss to local communities. The council chose

to work with the Churches and the voluntary sector. Correspondingly, there has been a tremendous response. Thanks to the power of "working with", 38 of those centres will remain open under voluntary, Church and charitable leadership. Funding to these ventures is modest, but it needs to be consistent. As was said earlier, the staccato cycle of new funding followed by funding cuts and new initiatives starting then ending prematurely halts improving outcomes for the very families we seek to support.

I welcome the report wholeheartedly. The new focus, the "working with", the modesty and the chance for a new beginning are vital. I hope sincerely that the Government will find the courage to take this manifesto forward.

5 pm

**Lord Shinkwin (Con):** My Lords, I, as one of the signatories to this manifesto, thank my noble friend Lord Farmer very much for his work in this area and for securing this debate. I also welcome my noble friend the Minister to his important new position. My support for this manifesto is not based on value judgments or a desire to turn back the clock, but neither do I think we should disown the past as if it had nothing positive or worth while to teach us.

As we all know, Britain has an increasingly serious childhood mental health problem, with one in 10 children estimated to have a diagnosable mental health condition. Indeed, in a survey of more than 4,500 children seen by child and adolescent mental health services in 2015, "family relationship problems" were cited by half of these children as the cause of their mental health problems. Moreover, the Marriage Foundation conducted research that shows that being with their married parents significantly improves both the self-esteem and life chances of teenagers. In other words, having married parents can boost children's mental health. Yet, nearly half of all teenagers are not living with both parents.

What does the data show to be the main driver of family breakdown? The data shows that it is cohabitation—that the separation of unmarried parents now accounts for the majority of family breakdowns. Thus, although cohabiting parents account for 21% of all couples, the separation of cohabiting parents accounts for 51% of all family breakdown.

I want to stress that I am not condemning parents in cohabiting relationships or those parents—in many cases mums—who find the courage to take themselves and their children out of an unhappy marriage. However, neither situation in itself devalues the case for supporting marriage as a model, which all the evidence shows brings tangible benefits across the piece. It is worth noting that a ComRes poll conducted only in August this year shows that 71% of British adults agree that marriage is important and that the Government should support couples who get married.

I say to my noble friend the Minister: what better way for this Government to show they are on the front foot on social justice than to introduce the measures contained in this manifesto, and thereby strengthen the primary tried-and-tested source of stability in our country—the family.



**Viscount Younger of Leckie (Con):** My Lords, I remind the House that Back-Bench speeches should conclude as the Clock reaches three minutes and no later. Timings are tight in this time-limited debate.

5.04 pm

**Lord Morrow (DUP):** My Lords, I too congratulate the noble Lord, Lord, Lord Farmer, on securing this important debate. I will endeavour to stick within the strictures of the time limits.

The social science evidence is very clear that the greatest driver of family breakdown is relational instability and the greatest antidote to this instability is marriage. Let us consider the following benefits for children associated with having married parents: three-quarters of family breakdown where there are children under five comes from the separation of non-married parents; children are 60% more likely to have contact with separated fathers if the parents are married; the prevalence of mental health issues among children of cohabiting parents is more than 75% higher than among those of married parents, and children from broken homes are nine times more likely to become young offenders, accounting for some 70% of all young offenders.

We should recognise that making the marriage commitment is a key driver for stability, quite apart from wealth. Crucially, even the poorest 20% of married couples are more stable than all but the richest 20% of cohabiting couples. In this context, I want to argue that there is a powerful imperative for doing more to recognise the value of marriage through the marriage allowance.

At the moment, the contribution of a non-earning spouse, who may be working full time looking after young children or caring for elderly relatives, receives only the most derisory recognition. They are allowed to boost household income by transferring just 10% of their personal allowance to their working spouse. Put another way, the Government currently refuse to recognise 90% of their personal allowance in any way even though the work that they do is of high value.

The case for change is further compounded by the fact that, during the tax year 2015-16, the Government spent more money on supporting marriage through the much more generous married couple's allowance than through the new marriage allowance. Noble Lords will recall that the married couple's allowance applies to married couples where one or both spouses was born before 6 April 1935, while the new marriage allowance applies to one-earner married couples on basic income tax. The former can reduce a tax bill from between £326 and £844.50 a year; the latter can do so by only up to £230 per year. Although it is important to recognise the public policy benefits of marriage for couples in their 80s and 90s, it seems very odd that we should afford these marriages greater recognition than those whose public policy benefits have a broader reach, impacting both adults and children.

As the Chancellor considers his upcoming Budget, I urge him to introduce a fully transferable allowance and would happily tell the Government to pay for it if necessary.

5.07 pm

**Lord Wasserman (Con):** My Lords, I too congratulate my noble friend Lord Farmer on securing time for this important debate and on playing a key role in the production of *A Manifesto to Strengthen Families*. I also add my congratulations to those offered to my noble friend Lord Agnew on his appointment to the Government's ministerial team and wish him well with his new responsibilities.

While I welcome and endorse the manifesto's conclusions and policy recommendations, I believe that the authors of this document have missed a trick. I say this because police and crime commissioners should have been given a much more prominent place in it. PCCs already play a key role in this area of government business. By the very nature of their statutory responsibilities, they are best placed to deliver many of the policy recommendations set out in the manifesto, particularly those which are best delivered locally.

As my noble friend Lord Farmer has already mentioned, PCCs have a place in the document, but it is in relation to only one policy area, education, where it is recommended that they be encouraged to work with schools in their local area to ensure that any child living in a household where domestic abuse is present is automatically offered early support. This is obviously a good idea. Many police forces across the country are already involved in this scheme, and I am happy to say that many more are planning to introduce it shortly.

PCCs are also involved in countless other programmes aimed at strengthening families. But this should come as no surprise. After all, PCCs are explicitly tasked with keeping local communities safe. Although the manifesto does not say so in terms, we all know that those brought up in families where violence is common and love and support are rare are much more likely to find themselves on the wrong side of the criminal justice system, whether for serious crimes or anti-social behaviour.

Therefore, it is clearly sensible, when thinking about how best to deliver the policy recommendations of this manifesto, to look to our local police and crime commissioners. They are already committed to strengthening families as the most effective way of keeping their communities safe. They have already established close working links with the other parts of the criminal justice system and with the other local agencies, such as health and education, which are critical to building strong families. Most importantly, they are directly accountable through the ballot box to those whose lives are most directly affected by the success or failure of these policies.

5.10 pm

**Lord Alton of Liverpool (CB):** My Lords, I warmly congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Farmer, on so ably introducing the debate. I too welcome the noble Lord, Lord Agnew, to his new role and look forward to his maiden speech. I particularly welcome what the noble Lord, Lord Farmer, said earlier about the importance of family impact statements, something I have supported for many years, and hope the Government take note of that. I also strongly endorse what the noble Baroness, Lady O'Cathain, said about the role of grandparents. I declare a recent interest in this. The Government's

[LORD ALTON OF LIVERPOOL]

housing strategy in particular should look at intergenerational housing, ways in which families can be united and the role that grandparents can play.

My brief remarks will focus on the mental health of children caught up in toxic relationships, not least because the mental health charity, YoungMinds, says that one in 10 children has a diagnosable mental health disorder, which the noble Lord, Lord Shinkwin, referred to. That is the equivalent of three children in every classroom. Early onset of mental illness suggests a strong correlation with family circumstances, and that is borne out by the evidence. Around 1 million children grow up now with no contact with their father. Common sense tells us that that is bound to impact on their emotional well-being but the empirical evidence bears it out, too. In a review of 18 international studies, the University of Sussex found that family breakdown is consistently linked with higher risks of depression in children.

In a recent answer to a question in your Lordships' House, the noble Lord, Lord O'Shaughnessy, said that,

"good relationships are very influential on young people's mental health",

and are a,

"positive benefit in reducing parental conflict, which is, of course, one of the causes of mental illness".—[*Official Report*, 30/10/17; col. 1160.]

The Prime Minister says that this,

"demands a new approach from government and society as a whole",

and we are told—and I welcome this—that the forthcoming Green Paper on children's mental health,

"will tackle mental health through early intervention".—[*Official Report*, Commons, 10/10/17; col. 151.]

Currently mental health trusts and local authorities do not routinely collect information about the family circumstances of children presenting with mental health problems. That should change. The DWP's *Improving Lives* report begins to recognise this, as do plans to put £30 million into a programme to help workless parents resolve conflict through independent providers. But the need extends way beyond workless parents. In tackling mental health issues, it is of fundamental importance that the whole family and not just the child are incorporated into the new approaches proposed by the Government.

The *Manifesto to Strengthen Families* championed by the noble Lord, Lord Farmer, and the admirable Fiona Bruce MP, calls for the provision of couples counselling by children and young people's mental health teams as a matter of course. This and the rollout of family hubs would be a very welcome outcome of today's debate. I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Nash, that some pilot schemes, at least, would be extremely welcome if that were to be the case.

Prevention and earlier intervention make financial and social sense. Instead of firefighting the symptoms, we need to tackle the root causes, which surely must mean strengthening families.

5.13 pm

**Lord Suri (Con):** My Lords, it is a real pleasure to speak in this important debate. As a Conservative, I have always considered the family to be the building block of society. My deceased friend the former Prime Minister who sat in this place had it right when she said referred to there being no such thing as society, only people and their families. We owe it to subsequent generations to keep the twin pillars of family life secure, so that we may inherit resilient communities.

All too often, in this House and the other place, we can lose sight of what holds this country together. We focus on policies that may make sense individually, but not the holistic sum of what we have passed. I remember some years ago the former right honourable Member for Witney saying that all policies would be vetted before they were announced. This vetting was to include a robust breakdown of the effect on families. Sadly, I never saw much evidence of that protocol being continued or respected, and it appears to have died a death in the Cabinet Office.

That is not to say that the Government are not aware of the problem. I supported the marriage tax allowance when it first came before us, but the depth of the policy has been lacking. Rarely do I cite the serving right honourable Member for Doncaster North, but he was right when he said that departments shape priorities and priorities shape outcomes. I understand the current pressure on government jobs, with all the new departments, and that it is an inopportune time when so many big events are coming down the track. But there is ample precedent for additional responsibilities being attached to Ministers, as this manifesto recommends.

Portsmouth received a Minister responsible for its well-being, following job cuts as navy shipbuilding moved to Scotland. This model worked well because the needs of the city cut across many departments, even if the Minister was not always of Cabinet rank. The Minister for Women and Equalities has always been of Cabinet rank, including when the current Prime Minister held it. Ministers can champion a cause in Cabinet and bring the cross-departmental focus that these policies need. In justifying the creation of a Minister for Women, the then Government argued that the lesser role of women held growth back and that there was a pressing need to address the lack of equality across systems in the public and private sector. All that holds true for the shocking state of family breakdown in our country today.

I feel that more hard facts need to be brought to bear on this debate. The most compelling statistic in all this is that, of all the parents who are still together when their children reach the age of 15, 93% are married. Children from broken homes are 2.5 times more likely to be in long-term poverty, and 44% of children in lone-parent families live in relative poverty—nearly twice the figure for children in two-parent families. If we do not support the family and marriage, we are condemning youngsters to a life more likely to be spent in poverty. The Government's own statistics show that only 1.6p is spent for every £100 of social harm that is caused by family breakdown. More needs to be done to tackle the associated price tag of £47 billion a year. I pay tribute to my noble friend Lord Farmer

and his assistant for doing the important work of collecting the facts and making the case in his manifesto.

5.17 pm

**Lord Bird (CB):** I thank the noble Lord, Lord Farmer, for the opportunity to talk about another magic bullet. This time it is the family but the magic bullet could have been education, or what I have been talking about since the moment I stepped into this House, which is prevention. There is a choice of magic bullets.

In 1991, I appointed myself the father of hundreds if not thousands of lost human beings, especially in the United Kingdom but then in Africa, North America and South America, and then into Asia. The most important thing, I had realised, was that the most disfranchised people who I met lacked a mum and dad, or a set of brothers or sisters. It was all the kind of things that we take for family life. So I tried to turn the *Big Issue*—I have to declare an interest as I am still involved in it—into a kind of loose association where people could lean on and learn from each other, and get that sense of belonging. If you can get that sense of belonging in the very early stages of your life, then in many senses you can overcome the vicissitudes.

I was unfortunately born into a family that did not really know how to act as a family. My father would beat my mother and we would often be without food and all that, largely because 42% or, let us argue, 45% of the wages disappeared into the hands of Mr Arthur Guinness on a Saturday night. When I learned to stand on my own two feet, I learned to become a family man through the prison system. I learned to make up for the things that had gone wrong in those early days because there were people who acted like mum and dad in the Catholic orphanage, the prisons and the reformatories that I was in. Let us not give up on the idea that we can all be pastoral, that we can all look to our churches and our institutions to try to iron out the difficulties that happen. I suggest we broaden the idea of the family so that we are not just talking about mum and dad and the early stages in life.

Let us also not forget that the poor have not got a monopoly on broken families. When I was a boy, if you were a member of a poor class you stuck together. It was the middle and upper classes and the aristocracy who were trading families, moving on and doing all those sorts of things. What has happened to people in poverty is that the whole system of society is breaking up with the growth of consumerism. Let us try to turn the family into a magic bullet, but I would also like the magic bullet to be prevention. If prevention was at the centre of the work we do, we could dismantle poverty and all those pressures that bear upon the lives of the poor.

5.22 pm

**Baroness Stroud (Con):** My Lords, I, too, thank my noble friend Lord Farmer for bringing this important debate to the House and commend him on his excellent and tireless work on this subject to date.

The scale of family breakdown in this country is a significant social challenge for this generation, as we have just been hearing. Far from being confined to the home, family breakdown affects society as a whole and the life chances of many. In this country today, there are nearly 3 million children without a father figure at home and 1 million children who have no significant contact with their fathers at all. Statistically speaking, there will be a child without a registered father in every primary school class. A teenager sitting their GCSEs today is more likely to own a smartphone than to live with their father.

However, the biggest question to ask is: why does this matter? Is it not just part of the social change that all countries have been going through? It matters because it affects the outcomes for children, and for many years we have been silent on this issue. Children from the lowest-income backgrounds with an active father figure at home are 25% more likely to escape the poverty they are growing up in, so it addresses the issue of poverty, as we have just heard from the noble Lord, Lord Bird. Children with highly involved fathers have better school attainment and higher self-esteem and are less likely to find themselves in trouble in adolescence, so it addresses some of our productivity challenges as well. However, boys with little or no involvement with their fathers are twice as likely to find themselves in the criminal justice system as their peers with highly involved fathers. Girls and young women with similar early-life experiences are at greater risk of mental health problems, entering into early sexual relationships, often characterised by violence and abuse, and early parenthood, so it addresses some of the issues of resilience and mental health.

In my experience, the extraordinary thing is that when one starts to have a conversation with people about the importance of family stability, many times one is confronted with the very genuine and real belief that nothing can be done about it. But examples from other countries show that it does not need to be this way. In the UK, 60% of children born to a cohabiting couple will have experienced some kind of parental relationship breakdown before they are 12 years old. That is almost 40% higher than the European average. Long term, 33% of children in the UK will grow up in a single-parent household. Comparably, in France, only 19% of children are brought up in single-parent households, in Germany 17% and in the Republic of Ireland 18%. Clearly, even in our modern 21st-century world, there is another way. We have much to learn from countries whose cultures are really similar to our own but which have better outcomes for children and families.

When the Government set a course to introduce a new policy agenda, it is really important to understand whether this is a change that the public want or not. Here, it is remarkable to see how out of step the Westminster policy-making bubble is with the majority of the British public. A poll undertaken by ComRes in August this year showed that 76% of adults agree that the Government should invest more to help strengthen families and improve parenting. If I had had that sort of poll rating for any other policy I had previously worked on, I would have thought I had hit the jackpot. Even over half of lone parents say that they recognise



[BARONESS STROUD]

the importance of two-parent families. So what could be done? I will leave it there and hand that to my noble friend Lord Farmer, who can tell us in his concluding remarks.

5.26 pm

**Lord Popat (Con):** My Lords, I, too, thank my noble friend Lord Farmer for bringing today's important debate and spearheading this manifesto on families. We have already touched on a number of issues this manifesto recommends should be addressed, from promoting the role of fathers within families to tackling the mental health crisis among young people from broken homes to developing family hubs. The Government play an important role in supporting families, which is why this manifesto is key to achieving that objective.

Stronger families are in everyone's interest. Families are much more than just a unit: strong families are a critical component for the Government to achieve their objectives to increase social mobility and deliver social justice. As my noble friend Lord Farmer says, strong families are also vital for economic growth. They are wealth creators, as opposed to broken families which, aside from causing emotional turmoil, increase dependency on the state. The noble Lord, Lord Parekh, mentioned the cost of that to be approximately £48 billion.

I will take a brief moment to comment on the British Indian community, which I am a proud member of. As in many communities, the role of families is central to the British Indian community. I believe the notion by which the British Indian community promotes strong families is the secret of our community's success. Last month, the Government released an audit on racial equality which proved this point. The report showed that British Indians had among the highest rates of hourly pay, and high levels of employment and education. They are the most likely to own their own home and among the least likely to live in social housing. All these elements link to the fact the British Indian community has the highest marriage rate and the lowest rate of divorce and family breakdown. It proves how strong, united families can create wealth and opportunities not just for themselves but also for Britain. They carry the hallmark values of hard work, education, enterprise and family—that word family is crucial.

However, there is still more to do. Regretfully, the audit also revealed deeply ingrained disparities across the country. It was disheartening to hear that the UK also has one of the highest levels of family breakdown in the world. It is for this reason that I welcome this manifesto to strengthen families and that I believe government intervention to support families is absolutely vital. Worse, family breakdowns disproportionately fall on poorer children in our society. Surely our Government cannot sit back and watch that happen. We cannot lead on social reform if we struggle to get the basics right.

I will conclude with a quote from Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who said:

“You don't choose your family. They are God's gift to you, as you are to them”.

The manifesto presents viable options for how the Government can support families, not by dictating to them but by empowering them. I hope that it reflects the positive difference that the Government can make to thousands of families across Britain in building a country that truly works for all.

5.29 pm

**The Earl of Kinnoull (CB):** My Lords, I add my thanks to the noble Lord, Lord Farmer, for securing such a generous slice of precious time for this important debate. I also welcome the Minister to his new spot. I wish him well in his important role; he has big shoes to fill.

I remind the House that I was on the Social Mobility Select Committee, which will become important later on in my very short remarks. I join the many noble Lords who have praised *A Manifesto to Strengthen Families*, with its eight calls to action and 18 suggested policies. We get sent many documents that are calls to action, but few are as crisp and well thought-through as this manifesto, and I congratulate the noble Lord and those responsible for it wholeheartedly. I had the rare benefit of an education on families policy from the noble Lord, Lord Farmer, during our year together on the Select Committee, and the passion and scholarship that I had the privilege to enjoy was visible for all to see in his remarkable speech when he opened today's debate. Along with almost all, if not all, noble Lords here today, I am wholly supportive of all eight calls to action and all the suggested policies.

However, I want to underline two matters. The first I term the “forestry point” and the second I term the “Chinese doctor point”. In forestry terms, I want to remind the House of something the noble Lord, Lord Mawson, said earlier: this is a very long-term thing and you have to take a long-term view. The effects of policy interventions, good and bad, become truly visible only many years after they are made. What is disastrous is to chop and change policy every few years. Thus, in forestry theory terms, I submit that policy interventions in the families sector need to have broad cross-party support to give them a real chance of success, as they would then stand a significantly enhanced chance of surviving a change of government. Does the Minister agree with that point?

Turning to my second and final point, the “Chinese doctor point”, we in this House rightly concentrate regularly on those in our society who are at a disadvantage. The Chinese, however, visit doctors when they are healthy. I submit that the Government's efforts in this policy area must not forget the importance of supporting and bolstering families that are in good shape. There is no magic bullet here, but each small assistance in family life would go part-way to strengthening and preserving that life. Does the Minister agree with that submission?

5.32 pm

**Lord Elton (Con):** My Lords, I welcome our new Minister and sympathise with him for being put in the hot seat before he has had time to warm his trousers. I also thank my noble friend Lord Farmer and those who worked with him for a sterling piece of work.

This is a hugely important debate. We have not altogether taken on board how countercultural it is. Societies are not static; they change. We are mostly in the top half age-wise yet we are talking about the problems of the bottom half as though we were actually part of them and understood them fully. We have to try to point out to them where they are going.

We all seem to agree that families are the bedrock of society, and that the strength of the nation depends on the strength of the family. We mostly realise, I think, that the bedrock is eroding, and the erosion seems to coincide with the way that our society has turned away from faith and, with it, from the standards of faith.

Marriage was a badge of respectability, and it was almost revered by those who did not have it. In my parents' day, it was thoroughly approved of and enjoyed—as it was in my own day. But it is becoming unfashionable. Fewer people are getting married. Fewer people are committing themselves and their life to the future and the happiness of others by getting married, whether in a registry office or a church. I see the smiles passing between Members on the opposite Front Benches, but there is a scent in the wind. You know you can smell rain before it gets here—well, I can sense a further decline in standards because they are not being taught.

I am with the noble Lord, Lord Bird, who is a personal magic bullet in himself, on the primacy of prevention. That is what we are trying to do tonight. It is what we ought to do on the big scale in intervening in families, and in helping those that have come apart to protect the children and teach the separated parents that they can have a good relationship and make life comfortable and happy for the children.

We must recover faith. I argue passionately for the Christian faith because I am a Christian and I believe that Christ is my saviour. Faith itself is something that gives stability to character, and it is stable characters we need for stable families. In three minutes, I can only begin. I wish I could go on for three hours, but thank you very much for listening this long.

5.36 pm

**Baroness Shields (Con):** My Lords, I declare my interest as the Prime Minister's special representative on internet safety. I welcome the manifesto and support it wholeheartedly.

Technology is transforming childhood and family life beyond recognition, and for this manifesto to achieve the desired results of stronger, more resilient families, we must examine the impact on family relationships of the increasing use of digital devices. The manifesto speaks to the importance of parents' active participation in their children's lives. However, it is not about just being physically present; it is equally important that parents give their children consistent and wholehearted attention, without the interruption of apps, messaging and interaction on social media platforms. These digital interruptions send the message to children that text, email, Facebook or Twitter posts are more important than they are. That message has far-reaching implications for their mental health and well-being.

An observational study by the University of Michigan showed that occurrences of negative behaviour in children, such as tantrums, whining, hyperactivity and restlessness, were far more common among children whose parents admitted to using smartphones while interacting with them. Earlier this year, a survey of 2,000 secondary school students by Digital Awareness UK reported that 44% of children felt upset or ignored as a result of overuse of mobile phones by their parents. One headmistress at St Joseph's Primary School in Middlesbrough posted signs asking phone-obsessed parents to greet their children with a smile at the end of the day rather than staring at their screens.

Active participation of parents not only means giving their wholehearted focus to their children but not reaching for tablets and iPhones to keep their children occupied. Although studies suggest the cognitive benefits to children of learning to use technology at an early age, we have to be alert to their potentially failing to learn effectively other very important human skills, such as listening, making eye contact, expressing empathy and showing respect for others.

Excessive social media use has been proven to correlate positively to mental health issues. The Royal Society for Public Health and the young health movement recently found that four out of five of the most popular forms of social media actually harm young people's mental health by,

“deepening young people's feelings of inadequacy and anxiety”, with the photo platform Instagram ranking the worst. Feeding off the already insecure minds of growing teenagers, these applications place young people into an alternative universe where they are bombarded with and consumed by messages that undermine their self-worth.

It is no coincidence that an increasing number of academic studies are finding that this soaring increase in mental health problems over the past five years coincides with the period in which young people's use of social media has exploded. New NHS data obtained in the past decade shows that the number of times girls aged 17 or under have been admitted to hospital in England because of self-harm has risen by 68%. Cases of self-poisoning have risen by 50% and cases of young girls cutting themselves have quadrupled. The Royal College of Psychiatrists has identified this as a “growing crisis”.

If we fail to acknowledge the pivotal role of technology and the resulting dramatic shifts in how we communicate within the family environment, it will be not only an oversight but negligent, because the shift is not neutral: it is often negative. If we are to ensure that children and families have strong bonds at home, we must view increasing technological dependency and its substitution for real human contact as one of the most urgent issues facing families. Whatever else we do, this will ensure that the policies we develop will be fit for today and tomorrow.

5.40 pm

**Baroness Walmsley (LD):** My Lords, I start by welcoming the Minister to the House of Lords and congratulate him on his meteoric rise to the Government Front Bench. I also thank the noble Lord, Lord Farmer,

[BARONESS WALMSLEY]

for a very interesting debate and extremely important manifesto. There are so many policy areas that could be improved in order to redress the magnitude of family breakdown in this country that it is hard to know where to start. However, I plan to mention adoptive families, the benefits of family hubs, what can be done to keep offenders in touch with their families to reduce reoffending and the importance of teaching children about relationships in school.

I start with adoptive families—not mentioned by anybody except the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Oxford—since I have a particular interest in them. I was recently contacted by a couple who are both psychologists and are adoptive parents. I took very seriously the points they were making, which were about burnout of adoptive parents and the lack of support for them. They reminded me that adoptive parents take on some of the most needy and challenging children in our society—traumatised children whose mental and physical health has been damaged by their life experiences. The people who take on these children are heroes and their attempts to give them a stable and loving family in which to recover from their previous trauma should be applauded and supported. However, these adoptive parents often have to deal with violence directed at them or other siblings, self-harm, incontinence, inappropriate or dangerous sexual behaviour, anger, school refusal and many sorts of mental health problems. Adoptive parents cannot take sick leave, resign or ask for a transfer to another department. Unlike foster parents, they do not get much help. Indeed, if they adopt after fostering, whatever help they had before often just stops.

Adoption UK thinks that as many as a quarter of all adoptive parents are in crisis and in need of professional help to keep the family together. But local authority post-adoption services vary tremendously; despite the fact that adopters save local authorities a massive amount of money, some are less than helpful when asked for help. Can the Minister say what is being done to ensure that an appropriate level of support for adoptive families is offered everywhere? If we do not do this, the NHS will be saddled with the cost of the mental health issues of the parents as well as their children.

Mental health has been mentioned by several noble Lords—the noble Lords, Lord Farmer, Lord Shinkwin and Lord Alton, among others. This brings me to the subject of teaching relationship and sex education in schools and the ability of schools to identify and signpost mental health problems. The best way to deal with mental health is of course to prevent the problems arising in the first place—the noble Lord, Lord Bird, mentioned prevention. Many of the issues that children face arise from family break-up or from violence or poor relationships in the family. Many children do not have a good model of healthy and respectful relationships at home. It is therefore often the job of the school to pick up the pieces and help build up children's resilience. There is a major role for relationship and sex education in this, so I welcomed the Children and Social Work Act earlier this year, which should ensure that all children get it in an age-appropriate manner as part of their PSHE curriculum.

I have become aware, however, that the regulations to mandate schools to prepare and publish their RSE policy have not yet been made. Can the Minister say why this is and when it will be done? I welcomed the Prime Minister's initiative on mental health first aid training in schools and wonder if the Minister can update us on how that is progressing. Such work can help children to ride out the worst effects of family unhappiness or even breakdown.

We live in a very unequal country, and an interesting statistic in the briefings we have received caught my eye. It showed that poor families break up more frequently than more affluent ones. As the noble Lord, Lord Parekh, said, almost half of five year-olds in poorer families are in broken families, compared with 16% in wealthier ones. This did not surprise me. It is widely known that a high percentage of parents are worried about money, and that money is frequently the cause of family arguments, so what is being done to improve the finances of families with children? I am afraid that the marriage tax allowance, which the noble Lord, Lord Morrow, mentioned, brings in less than £5 a week, even if the family applies for it, so that is not going to make much difference. By the way, I am not suggesting that it be improved, as I do not approve of it in the first place. I do not think it is the role of the state to support particular kinds of families.

Benefit cuts and the six-week wait for universal credit have sent far too many families into debt, and to food banks. If the Government are really concerned to keep families together, which, of course, is a laudable aim, they need to do everything possible to ensure that parents can feed their children and pay the bills. We hear about the record number of people in work, but the fact is that many jobs are very low paid and a high percentage of poor people are in work and eligible for benefits, which makes a nonsense of the Government's constant claim that the best way out of poverty is through work. I would say it depends what sort of work, and how well it is paid. Can the Minister say what plans the Government have to make what they choose to call the living wage into something people can actually live on?

Many families need a range of services to help them survive, stay together and bring up their children successfully, and it is desirable that these services be easily accessible and linked together. That is why I, like the noble Lord, Lord Farmer, and others, support the idea of family hubs, which can be based on children's centres or Sure Start centres. I hope they will not become what the noble Lord, Lord Mawson, called the shiny new thing that disappears before long, as they would offer a wide range of services for parents as well as children. This is not a new idea. Several years ago, I visited the Coram Centre, where all kinds of services such as debt advice, immigration advice, English lessons and help to find a job and a home were offered to the parents of children in the nursery. It was a great example of what can be done in response to the particular needs of the families in the locality. Therefore, can the Minister say whether the Government support family hubs and whether extra funding will be made available, given the savings to many other services that they could provide in the future?



I will say a few words about prisoners and their families. There is an important role for families to keep in touch with offenders while they are in prison in the interests of their relationships with their spouses and children, and of reducing reoffending. However, in many cases, the prison system does not make it easy for families to visit. There is some very good practice, such as Skype conversations, but in some cases it is hard to see the logic of where offenders are placed. For example, there is a large, brand new prison in Wrexham, near where I live in north Wales. I recently learned that only 10% of the inmates come from Wales and that many come from a very long way away in England. In addition, the prison is located on an industrial estate miles from the nearest railway station. It cannot be easy for families without their own car to visit in those circumstances, so what is being done to ensure that families who want to keep up their relationship with the offender are helped to do so?

Finally, from experience, I issue a warning about impact assessments. During the coalition Government, my then honourable friend Sarah Teather said that policies would have a child rights impact assessment. I am not aware that that is being done. Therefore, if we are to have a family impact assessment, I hope that it really happens.

5.49 pm

**Lord Hunt of Kings Heath (Lab):** My Lords, it is a great pleasure for me to wind up for the Opposition on what has been an interesting and important debate. I too welcome the noble Lord, Lord Agnew, to the Dispatch Box for his maiden speech. We look forward to working with him in the future. It has indeed been a wide-ranging debate. In a sense, the last three speeches—the noble Lord, Lord Elton, talking about the impact of loss of faith and the unfashionableness of marriage, as he put it; the noble Baroness, Lady Shields, on digital harm; and the noble Baroness, Lady Walmsley, on adoptive parents—could almost be debates in themselves. I should say to the noble Lord, Lord Elton, that I was laughing partly because two of my children got married in the last year—there are three to go. I am not sure that I absolutely agree with him that marriage has lost its fashion; it is just that people tend to do it rather later—and rather more extravagantly—than we used to do.

**Noble Lords:** Oh!

**Lord Hunt of Kings Heath:** Noble Lords know what I mean there.

The enormity of the consequences of breakdown of so many families has been well documented in our debate today. We all know from personal experience, and from the statistics that are so readily available, the misery and long-term damage that this can cause, particularly to children. Therefore this debate is timely and welcome. One symptom of this was a briefing we had this morning from the Children's Society which detailed the 72,000 children in care in England and Wales. We know from previous debates—the noble Lord, Lord Nash, in particular focused on this—about the poor outcomes of so many children in care, whether one looks at mental health, their employment prospects,

or simply the statistic that 34% of care leavers were not in education, training or employment at the age of 19 compared to 15.5% of the general population.

The noble Lord, Lord Farmer, has explained the background to the manifesto, which was published by a group of Conservative MPs and Peers. I agree with a number of recommendations. In particular, he is right to say that at heart, creating a Government who are focused on families would be a good start—although I agree that it is not everything. I also welcome the recommendation to remove financial disincentives for those on low incomes, promoting healthy relationships to tackle the country's mental health crisis, and helping prisons to put the role of families at the heart of efforts to reduce reoffending. The noble Lord, Lord Bird, underlined the importance of that.

However, a manifesto produced by one political party might have had somewhat more credibility if it had not rather ignored some of the damage being done to families by so many current government policies. I also share the view of the noble Baroness, Lady Walmsley, that in emphasising couple relationships we need to be careful not to stigmatise one-parent families, and we need to acknowledge that there are different families today. That goes to the point that the noble Lord, Lord Elton, made; we are in a different situation than many generations ago. My noble friend Lord Parekh and the noble Lord, Lord Papat, spoke about some of the cultural dynamics in families of different ethnic groups. Perhaps there are some lessons to be learned.

In his opening remarks, the noble Lord, Lord Farmer, made some interesting comments about the link between poverty and family breakdown. In fact, he was cautious about it. I understand that; as regards what makes families strong, there are clearly much wider elements than that. The noble Lord, Lord Bird, was very interesting when he talked about a sense of belonging. The noble Lord, Lord Farmer, suggested that if Government were prepared to invest more in preventive programmes up front, that would have a beneficial impact on downstream welfare benefit payments and other government expenditures. We cannot ignore the impact that poverty can have on family relationships. Work done recently by Relate, Relationships Scotland and Marriage Care found that a significant number of respondents cited financial matters as the key strain in terms of breaking up long-term relationships. The noble Baroness, Lady Walmsley, is right.

The last Labour Government took hundreds of thousands of children out of poverty, but new research published today by the Institute for Fiscal Studies shows that the number of people living in poverty will soar to a record 5.2 million over the next five years because government welfare cuts are biting deepest on households with young families. As the IFS said, freezing benefits, the introduction of universal credit and less generous tax credits will mean a surge in child poverty, and the steepest increases will be in the most deprived parts of the country. That must have some impact on family cohesion and relationships.

As Polly Toynbee wrote last week, universal credit was introduced as a strong incentive to go to work. However, the taper rate means that claimants lose

[LORD HUNT OF KINGS HEATH]

63p for every pound they earn. That, to me, is not a work incentive. On top of that, the cruel six-week payment delay is going to leave those without savings in debt and trapped in rent arrears, and many will be forced to go to loan sharks or food banks. I cannot see how that supports families. It would certainly be a very good introduction to ministerial life if the Minister made the triumphant statement today that the Government are not going to introduce universal credit throughout the country and that the six-week delay will be done away with. However, perhaps that will not happen.

I can see why family hubs are supported by many noble Lords. I would have been interested to hear from the noble Lord, Lord Farmer, how he thinks that they might impact on and relate to Sure Start centres. I have to say to him that the closure of more than 1,200 centres as a result of a £437 million budget cut has had a very disadvantageous effect. I believe that Sure Start centres have benefited hundreds of thousands of young children and their parents, particularly those from a poorer background.

It is right to welcome the increased number of people in work but the fact is that for many, work is very insecure. The problem of low pay and the iniquity of zero-hours contracts are the reality for hundreds of thousands of people. That must have an impact on the way that family life works.

The noble Lord, Lord Farmer, wants to see the appointment of a Secretary of State for government responsibility and organisation. I can see exactly why he would want that and why family impact assessments might work. However, all experience shows that, unless that Secretary of State has a strong departmental responsibility, they will not have the influence required to make such an appointment work. All my experience of government is that, if you give a Minister or a Secretary of State responsibility for cross-government working, unless they have the support of the Prime Minister, and indeed the Treasury, and unless there are targets that other departments have to meet, it might sound good but in practice it does not work. It would be interesting if some further work were done to see how that office could be enabled to work effectively.

The same applies to family impact assessments. If they simply become a tick-box exercise, they will, as the noble Baroness, Lady Walmsley, knows from experience, simply be a waste of time. Officials can produce impact assessments till the cows come home. They produce equality impact assessments and other sorts of assessments, but at the end of the day I do not think that they have any impact whatever on how a government department does its work. You have to combine tough impact assessments with a policing role in central government to make them effective in the way that the noble Lord would like.

This has been a fascinating debate. I am sure that the preventive measures that many noble Lords have suggested are well worth pursuing, although, like the noble Baroness, Lady Walmsley, I have some reservations about tax benefits for married couples, and I should place that on the record. However, I do not think that

we can ignore the impact of government policies, which I am afraid in many ways are working against families at the moment.

5.59 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education (Lord Agnew of Oulton) (Con) (Maiden Speech):** My Lords, it is a great privilege, if somewhat terrifying, to become a Member of the House in this way. I must thank many noble Lords on both sides of the House for the warmth and courtesy of their welcome. I am grateful to my noble friends Lady Evans of Bowes Park, Lord Faulks, Lord Younger and Lord Courtown, who have all provided early guidance. In particular, I must thank my predecessor, my great and noble friend Lord Nash. I only hope that I can live up to the standard that he has set, both for debate in this place and in his ministerial duties. As one noble Lord said earlier, his huge personal impact on the improvement of the school system in England leaves me with very big shoes to fill.

I know that a great number of noble Lords share my passion for transforming the lives of young people through education. Looking around these Benches, I see many who surpass me in knowledge or skill—probably both. I can only trust that I may look to other noble Lords for wisdom and support as I set about learning the intricacies of this place.

I am delighted to be making my first contribution in your Lordships' House on the subject of families. I am one of seven children and when I was four years old my mother left my father with all seven of us. I remember going to Heathrow Airport, aged four or five, and watching as her plane took off for South Africa and wondering why we were not going with her. But I have been very lucky in many other respects, with a supporting and loving father and rumbustious and entertaining siblings. There is an African saying that it takes a village to raise a child. I had that too, in a wonderful community of farm workers and their wives who provided everything that a child could ask for, including picking me up from school when my father forgot. We all forge our way into adulthood coloured by our childhoods. Failing the 11-plus, but still benefiting from a good education because of the sacrifices my father made, was a major motivation in my becoming involved in the education debate.

Many noble Lords have seen the challenge in the classroom. I have seen it as a businessman and as a school leader. Each of these roles has given me a valuable perspective on the gaps in our system. The first gap lies between this country and our international competitors. I experienced this 18 years ago in southern India, where I was able to employ maths graduates for one-tenth of the cost of UK-based staff with lower levels of education. Today that business employs over 30,000 people. This is the conundrum of globalisation: hundreds of millions of people being lifted out of poverty, but overseas. It is my strong conviction that education is the way out of this dilemma.

Noble Lords will be all too aware that we are the only OECD country where the basic skills of our 16 to 24 year-olds are no higher than among those aged 55 to 64. This is what I am determined to try to change. However, it is important to acknowledge the

progress that we have made since 2010. Nearly nine out of 10 schools are now rated good or better by Ofsted and we have opened 390 free schools with 300 more on the way, bringing dynamism and energy into the sector.

However, there remains a second important gap between different parts of our country. While some areas such as London have raced ahead, others have been left in cycles of low productivity and low performance. This impacts on our economic performance but it also holds back social mobility. I know this all too well. My academy trust is located in Norwich—here I declare an interest—which is one of the most deprived areas of England. It has the fewest outstanding schools and the lowest participation rates in further education in England. Almost unbelievably, Norwich was rated 323rd out of 324 in the social mobility index in England. Our reforms need to do more to lift up such parts of the country. It is not good enough that 62% of our new free schools are in London and the south-east and only 20% in the north. We intend to shift the focus specifically to these left-behind areas and encourage more high-performing sponsors to take on schools in these places.

This links closely with today's debate. Another vital component of good education and social mobility is good parenting. I wholeheartedly support the premise of this debate and the efforts of my noble friend Lord Farmer in this area. He finished by asking whether other government departments are taking forward the policies in the strengthening families manifesto. He will be glad to hear that I am here to discuss the policies of four government departments that are leading the way. We have heard many contributions today and I will cover as many as I can. For all others I will write.

I start with parental conflict. The noble Lords, Lord Farmer and Lord Suri, recognised the devastating impact parental conflict can have on families. As they rightly point out, recent evidence shows that children exposed to frequent, intense and poorly resolved conflict can experience a decline in their mental health and suffer poorer long-term outcomes. To address this, the Department for Work and Pensions will be launching a new reducing parental conflict programme to help local areas improve their support for families. This will be available to families whether parents are together or separated. It is vital to reduce conflict in both circumstances, as children will feel the impact in both.

On the point of the noble Lord, Lord Farmer, on the family stability indicator and why it does not sit alongside the other parental indicators produced by the Government to address the causes of family disadvantage, the *Improving Lives: Helping Workless Families* publication announced nine new national indicators. In publishing them, we responded to evidence which tells us that the quality of relationships within a family had a greater impact on child outcomes than the structure of the family. I hope that responds to the point of the noble Lord, Lord Morrow. We will, however, continue to collect data on family breakdown to support policy development.

My noble friend Lady Eaton and the noble Baroness, Lady Walmsley, rightly spoke about the importance of relationships and sex education in schools to the mental

health of children. We want to ensure that all pupils are taught about healthy and respectful relationships, including the core knowledge that all children need to form safe and positive relationships.

That brings me to the point of the noble Lord, Lord Nash, about smartphones in the classroom. We have strengthened teachers' powers to enforce discipline on phone use in the classroom and to promote good behaviour. However, there is more to do with parents and we will continue with that.

Family hubs have been a constant theme in the debate today. I thank the noble Lord, Lord Farmer, for his attention to family hubs and the importance of working closely with charities and local businesses that will help children in need. The noble Baroness, Lady Walmsley, also raised important points about the effect of inequality on families and social mobility. The noble Lords, Lord Mawson, Lord Bird, Lord Popat and Lord Hunt, also spoke about the impact of poverty. The Government recognise the serious impact poverty has on families. The proportion of people in absolute poverty, though, is at a record low and there are 200,000 fewer children today in poverty than in 2010. The noble Lord, Lord Hunt, is right to say that I do not have the brief to overhaul the universal credit system. However, concerns are being listened to and there are already opportunities for shorter payment times and direct payments to landlords. I welcome the Prime Minister's comments in the other place yesterday, which acknowledged the value of stable and strong families and the support that family hubs offer.

On the points of the noble Lord, Lord Hunt, about Sure Start centres, we know that councils are rethinking their children's centre services as part of wider service reform and we are seeing successful innovation emerging. The noble Lord, Lord Farmer, spoke of Isle of Wight Council and Barking and Dagenham. I know of Newcastle City Council, which, in 2010, implemented a new integrated early help and family support model focusing on the 30% most deprived areas in the city. This is already showing dividends. The take-up of places for two year-olds has increased from 76% in 2015 to 92% this year. Leeds City Council began a similar initiative in 2015 and has already received recognition from Ofsted.

Councils have a duty to improve the well-being of young children in their area and to reduce inequalities. I hope that we will encourage other local authorities to consider these case studies when reviewing their own provision. The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Oxford talked about Oxfordshire's children's centres. The work of the councils, Churches and voluntary sector in this area is an excellent example of what collaboration can achieve.

My noble friend Lady Eaton made a point about the Armed Forces covenant and family hubs. I will look into this with my noble friend in the Ministry of Defence and write to her separately. Similarly, I will follow up with my noble friend at the Home Office the point made by my noble friend Lord Wasserman about police and crime commissioners.

A final area to touch on is my own experience as an academy sponsor. I have extended the school day in all of my schools by three hours a week. This has been



[LORD AGNEW OF OULTON]

warmly received by parents. The initial driver was to improve education, but it has also helped in ways that I had not anticipated.

The noble Baroness, Lady Walmsley, and the noble Lord, Lord Hunt, talked about support for adoptive families. Children who have left care can remain vulnerable and may have high levels of need, putting pressure on adoptive families. The Adoption Support Fund, which was launched in May 2015, has provided almost £60 million for therapeutic support to more than 25,000 children, and from May 2018 the parents of previously looked-after children will have access to information and advice from a trained, designated teacher in their child's school and from the virtual school head.

Children from less-advantaged backgrounds are already behind in their learning by the time they start school. The Government want to close the gap and high-quality learning from the age of two can help with this. The primary focus of free early learning places for two year-olds is to improve outcomes for children. Imposing conditions on parents, as suggested in the strengthening families manifesto, may reduce the number who take up their offer of an early learning place, particularly in those families who are hardest to reach but may benefit the most. There is always a difficult balance to be struck between allowing families to have control over their own affairs and the point at which the state needs to intervene. Parents have a vital role to play in their child's development. Evidence suggests that aside from maternal education, the home learning environment is the single biggest influence on a child's vocabulary at the age of three. That is why we will use a £5 million evidence-based trial on home learning environment support programmes in the north of England that will focus on early language and literacy.

My noble friend Lord Shinkwin and the noble Baroness, Lady Walmsley, spoke about the impact of parental relationships on children's mental health. This Government recognise the value that family relationships play in promoting positive mental health. We have invested record levels of spending on mental health, including more than £11 billion in the last financial year. Our forthcoming Green Paper setting out our vision for children and young people's mental health will discuss the importance of families in promoting positive mental health. The noble Lord, Lord Alton, was right to say that it is vital to consider inter-parental relationships as part of this.

The noble Earl, Lord Kinnoull, spoke about the importance of families having regular access to a family doctor or healthcare professional. The Government aim to foster positive family relationships through the healthy child programme. This is offered to every family, not only those in crisis. It includes a programme of screening, tests, immunisations, developmental reviews and information and guidance to support families with children from birth to five years old. For young mothers who are particularly vulnerable, the Family Nurse Partnership offers intensive and structured home visiting which is delivered by specially trained nurses from early pregnancy until the child is two years old. This early support for parents and children is key to preventing mental health issues developing in

childhood and adolescence, and my noble friends Lady Stroud and Lady O'Cathain were absolutely right to point out the importance of fathers and grandparents in this regard. We know this work is building on strong foundations, including work done in many areas by the voluntary and social sectors. I echo the point of the right reverend Prelate about the voluntary sector working with government provision.

The noble Baroness, Lady Walmsley, and the noble Lord, Lord Hunt, spoke about support for prisoners and their families. Families can have a major impact here. Positive family relationships have been identified as an important factor in reducing reoffending. We are therefore making family relationships a fundamental part of prison reform, alongside improving opportunities for education and employment. As many of you will agree, it is not just prisoners who suffer because of their incarceration. Anybody's child or partner entering custody has a profound impact on the whole family. Recent research indicates that in an average year, an estimated 200,000 children in this country are affected by parental imprisonment. We are committed to providing opportunities for children to have access to their parents in prison by creating as hospitable a visitor environment as possible, helping with the establishment and development of positive relationships.

In November 2016, the Government committed to investing £100 million annually to strengthen the front-line prison service, with 2,500 additional prison officers by the end of 2018. Recently published figures show that from October 2016 to August 2017, there has been a net increase of 1,290 new prison officers. With that net increase, prison governors should be able to manage more flexible and frequent access for visits. In order to enable families to visit prisoners, the assisted prison visits scheme provides financial assistance to prisoners' close relatives, partners or sole visitors who meet qualifying rules on income. The scheme currently receives approximately 85,000 requests for assistance each year, covering some 250,000 visitors. This year, 64,000 claims were successful.

The noble Lord, Lord Farmer, asked about the family test. Operating the family test is a department responsibility, and all policymakers are encouraged to think carefully about new policies that may affect family relationships.

In closing the debate, I reiterate the Government's commitment to supporting families. As the noble Lord, Lord Parekh, emphasised, we recognise that they are an essential pillar to our society. We will continue to seek challenge in how we can better deploy the available resources for them. I thank you all for your kindness in making me feel welcome. I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in the debate and I look forward to future occasions when I can contribute further.

6.17 pm

**Lord Farmer:** My Lords, I congratulate my noble friend the Minister on his maiden speech and on giving us such an encouraging government response to the debate. It is clear that he will make a huge contribution to government in his role at the Dispatch Box.

The debate has been excellent, with a lot of constructive contributions. I thank all noble Lords who have contributed. I make the point that I made at the beginning: the family manifesto that has been produced is an ongoing work. It is progressive and rolling, and I am sure that your Lordships' involvement today will be both a great help in continuing the thinking behind the manifesto and a challenge to the Government as they read *Hansard* for what was said today. A lot was added to the debate; I do not have the time to go over individual contributions, but I want to mention the word "counterculture"; I think the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Oxford used it. We have been living in an age that is focused on the individual. To repeat what I said at the beginning, it will take a couple of Governments at least to turn around this culture on the individual and focus it more on the family unit as the basic social unit.

I thank all noble Lords. There have been a lot of additions. We have had emphasis on military families. We have a new Secretary of State for Defence today. We will be knocking on his door and talking to him about how to look after the peculiar pressures military families are under.

I come back to the Minister and thank him for his news about what is going on in DWP on parental conflicts and for the fact that a policy will be developed reducing that. I am also very encouraged by Prime Minister's Questions yesterday, when she said she was all for family hubs. If that is coming from the top we might get somewhere. Talking about family hubs, I mention the criticism of Sure Start children centres from the noble Lord, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath. I tried to touch on that; the Minister also did. Apart from the fact that money is scarce, there is the whole idea of joining in with the community, as we heard from the noble Lord, Lord Bird, and using voluntary organisations, but also of developing Sure Start children centres into a family hub for children aged zero to 19, in particular for the category of children in need. Families can go there to find out where to go for the problems they may have.

I do not have much time. I again thank all noble Lords for an excellent, constructive debate. It had a lot of ideas in it. I am quite encouraged by the current mood in government to recognise that families are very important to strengthen. We cannot go on having the record we have in OECD countries and, as we heard earlier, our record in Europe. It is appalling. We need to refocus our minds and hearts on strengthening family relationships. It will be to the benefit of the whole of society. I beg to move.

*Motion agreed.*

## Commonwealth Summit 2018

### *Question for Short Debate*

6.22 pm

*Asked by Lord Chidgey*

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they will ensure that the programme for the Commonwealth Summit in London in 2018 includes a People's

Forum and a Parliamentary Forum, the outcomes of which are recorded in the final communiqué, as has been the case for similar summits in the past.

**Lord Chidgey (LD):** My Lords, allow me first to offer your Lordships my apologies. This debate, tabled in June, was scheduled to take place in early September, at the end of the Summer Recess. Unfortunately, due to illness, it was postponed until today, some two months later. The good news is that in those two months a good deal of organisational and administrative progress on the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2018 has taken place, which this debate can now reflect on. I declare my interests as co-chair of the all-party groups for the Commonwealth and for Africa, the former chair of the Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit, and the president of the National Liberal Club Commonwealth Forum.

There have been a number of debates and Oral Questions in your Lordships' House on the Commonwealth and connected issues over the past year, but I called this debate specifically to concentrate on the importance of parliaments in the process. Over the last two decades or so the importance of strengthening democracy in developing countries, of capacity building and of monitoring Governments held to account by parliaments has been recognised, first in the millennium development goals and now in sustainable development goal 16. Parliamentary forums have been included in international meetings on aid and development effectiveness—for example, at the fourth high-level forum in Busan, where I had the opportunity to present the parliamentary communiqué to the final plenary session of the high-level forum.

Similar procedures were followed at high-level meetings on global partnerships for aid and development—sponsored by the UN—in Dhaka, Bangladesh, Mexico City and Nairobi, and in other meetings. Considering the engagement of parliaments helped to establish that the strength of parliamentary capacity in a developing country was an important indicator in monitoring aid and development effectiveness.

Over time, there was a gradual acceptance in the development and aid community that parliaments as well as Governments had a key role to play in the process. Institutions such as the UN stopped referring to Governments as the custodians of democracy. Instead, they began referring to parliaments as having the authority of a mandate from the people. NGOs, donor Governments, development institutions and parliamentary organisations now work together more readily on projects for strengthening democracy for the benefits that this can bring.

The forthcoming London CHOGM provides a golden opportunity for our Parliament to be at the centre of activities to reinforce parliamentary democracy throughout the Commonwealth, by example and through opportunity. The all-party parliamentary group on UN global goals found on a study visit to New York in July an intense interest in synergy between the UN's sustainable development goal 16 and the objectives of the London CHOGM, and liaison has now been established.

Dialogue is now taking place between the various all-party groups, particularly those for the Commonwealth, for sustainable development goals and for Africa. We are

[LORD CHIDGEY]

engaging with the Royal Commonwealth Society, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK Branch, as well as civil society, in support of the aims of the London CHOGM, the Commonwealth goals and the UN global goals.

Since this debate was first scheduled in June, there has been progress on a wide front; for example, a two-day conference organised by the Commonwealth Round Table and round tables from the CPA in preparation for a parliamentary forum in London in March 2018.

At the last CHOGM, in Malta in 2015, the final communiqué reaffirmed a commitment to the values and principles of the Commonwealth charter. It acknowledged that all human rights are equal, indivisible, interdependent, interrelated and universal. It urged promotion and protection of all human rights and freedoms. Given that such objectives are a major plank in the Government's ambitions for the London CHOGM, it will be interesting to hear their views on progress so far.

The Malta communiqué observed that good governance and respect for rule of law are vital for stable and prosperous societies and require efficient, effective and accountable public institutions. It called for continued efforts by member states to ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. The role of parliaments and parliamentarians in monitoring and scrutinising the Executive was clearly promoted and supported. Have the UK Government plans to assess progress so far as part of their preparations for the London CHOGM?

In their preparations for the London CHOGM, the Government have set out four forums: business, people's, youth and women's. The business forum recognises that shared values, regulatory systems and language bring the potential of increasing intra-Commonwealth trade and reducing costs. The City of London Corporation is expanding its capacity to promote UK trade and investment opportunities across Commonwealth member states. As founding partners of the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council, the corporation has been commissioned to deliver the business forum. The Lord Mayor hosted the Commonwealth Trade Ministers' inaugural dinner at Mansion House as part of two days of discussions as a precursor to the 2018 CHOGM.

The people's forum is organised in partnership with the Commonwealth Foundation and provides the single largest opportunity for civil society to engage with leaders and influence Commonwealth policy. It provides a potential platform for parliamentarians to make the case for strengthening democratic institutions, as in the Malta CHOGM communiqué, there being no parliamentary forum as such at the London CHOGM.

At the 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in London in December 2016, the opening address stated that the CPA,

"provides a unique platform for inter-parliamentary dialogue ... on how to strengthen parliamentary democracy Commonwealth-wide and discuss ... innovative approaches on how to do so".

The Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, the noble and learned Baroness, Lady Scotland, said:

"Thanks to Commonwealth Parliamentarians coming together, law reform and progressive social and economic development are accelerated. Exchanges of knowledge and expertise lead to institutions of governance being strengthened".

The 2018 CHOGM draws on the Malta CHOGM and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in December 2016 with the theme "Towards a Common Future". Within that theme there are four principal areas of focus. These include "A Fairer Future", which highlights the democratic values and principles set out in the Commonwealth charter, our collective commitment to the rule of law and human rights, good and honest governance, and tackling gender inequality. The Commonwealth has a proud history of taking action to promote and protect democratic principles. By upholding and promoting those principles, we can promote a fairer future for all citizens and members of the Commonwealth, and provide an essential platform for sustainable development.

The UK branch of the CPA has come forward with the initiative of holding a Commonwealth Parliamentarians' Forum prior to the CHOGM summit, in late February 2018. From its excellent concept note, it is clear that there will be a huge opportunity to highlight the prospect of a global Britain and a 21st-century Commonwealth. The aim is for some 150 parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth to engage in the summit agenda themes at the forum. It is hoped that they will then be in a stronger position to press for these priorities at home. This CPA UK initiative is aimed at maintaining momentum through the UK's two years as chair-in-office of the Commonwealth until 2020, with the belief that effective parliamentary engagement will support better sustainable development outcomes across the Commonwealth.

I opened this debate by describing similar international gatherings under the auspices of the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, where parliamentary engagement continued through the forum to the closing plenary session and into the final communiqué. I noted how important it was that, over time, civil society and parliaments have moved from competition to co-operation in the space for strengthening democracy. To maintain this very positive development, there needs to be the strongest possible link between the Commonwealth Parliamentarians' Forum and the forums at the Commonwealth summit. Parliamentarians and members of civil society must be able to work together—prior to, during and after the summit—in influencing, scrutinising and monitoring the implementation of the national strategies and policy decisions that evolve.

6.32 pm

**Baroness Berridge (Con):** My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Chidgey, for securing this debate, and declare an interest as the co-project director of the Commonwealth Initiative for Freedom of Religion or Belief and co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on that subject.

Last Wednesday, the all-party group launched a new report, *Article 18: From Rhetoric to Reality*. At that event my noble friend the Minister highlighted



the Government's commitment to freedom of religion or belief and promised to "take this commitment further". Last Shrove Tuesday the Prime Minister said:

"We must reaffirm our determination to stand up for the freedom of people of all religions to practise their beliefs in peace and safety. And I hope to take further measures as a government to support this".

So I trust that my noble friend the Minister will outline how the Government will use the Commonwealth summit to take this commitment forward.

The Commonwealth is a mixed picture when it comes to upholding Article 18, and the problems are not restricted to one faith or country. Pew research from April 2017 shows high levels of government restrictions in India and Pakistan and medium levels in Kenya. It is sobering to note that the same research highlights high and rising social hostilities based on religion here in the UK, shown especially in levels of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism.

Two of the Commonwealth's most populous states are witnessing increasing problems. In India there were 316 attacks on Christians in the first five months of 2017, compared with 365 incidents in the whole of 2016. In Nigeria, according to the International Crisis Group, recurring violence between the Muslim Fulani and Christian settlers resulted in more than 2,500 deaths in 2016. This is the reality for too many young people growing up in the Commonwealth. According to Aid to the Church in Need, about 15,000 children have become orphans in conflicts relating to religious intolerance.

Violations of Article 18 can of course be barriers to education—one of the key sustainable development goals that the Government are committed to achieving. According to the Hindu American Foundation and the Aurat Foundation in Pakistan, around 1,000 young Christian and Hindu girls are kidnapped, forcibly converted and raped each year. This has led to many Christian and Hindu families being too afraid to send their young girls to school. On 27 August this year in Punjab, classmates beat a Christian boy, Sharoon Masih, to death after they had initially bullied him for being a Christian and told him not to drink from the same glasses as Muslims.

More than 60% of the Commonwealth is under 30 years old and the Prime Minister stated on 19 September that,

"we will put young people at the heart of the Commonwealth".

But it seems that too many young people are growing up in the Commonwealth without their Article 18 rights, while thinking that those who hold no faith or a different faith to theirs are somehow other. Can my noble friend the Minister please assure this House that the UK will ensure that freedom of religion or belief is in the summit communiqué as a priority for the Commonwealth, under the Fairer Future theme? It is important that freedom of religion or belief comes under this theme as it highlights its role in building an equitable and prosperous future across the Commonwealth, and that freedom of religion or belief is valued as an inherent good in its own right rather than being subsumed into a wider counterextremism agenda.

While this is a Heads of Government meeting, it is vital that the resource of parliamentarians is harnessed, as the noble Lord, Lord Chidgey, outlined. There are many MPs who are champions of human rights and freedom of religion or belief within the Commonwealth. In Pakistan, the NGOs Asia Foundation and Pattan—financed by the Canadian Government—helped to resource parliamentarians to engage in debate and legislation around religious freedom. As a result, religious freedom caucuses were established in two provincial assemblies—in Punjab and Sindh—to promote interfaith harmony and highlight issues affecting minorities. Through my own involvement in a panel of international parliamentarians, I have seen representatives of the National Assembly of Pakistan form a model of an all-party group within their assembly. It is important that this best practice is spread across the Commonwealth.

It is also important that freedom of religion or belief is on the parliamentary forum's agenda in February, and that that forum feeds directly into the communiqué. Her Majesty's Government rightly spend UK taxpayers' money on parliamentary training through the laudable auspices of CPA UK and CPA International. While the UK chairs the Commonwealth between 2018 and 2020, it is important that this training should become increasingly professionalised and linked, where possible, to the very best the academic world has to offer. This is one of the reasons why the Commonwealth initiative I outlined is based at Birmingham University. Surely, to make full use of the ongoing CPA training a parliamentary forum should become a feature of future Commonwealth summits. Will my noble friend outline whether Her Majesty's Government are speaking to the Government of Malaysia, which will host the 2020 summit, to press for a parliamentary forum as part of the next Commonwealth summit?

I have no doubt of my noble friend's personal commitment to the issue I have outlined. I hope that the Commonwealth summit and our chairmanship will see more reality than rhetoric on Article 18, which is what so many young people in the Commonwealth need to ensure a fairer future.

6.38 pm

**Lord Judd (Lab):** My Lords, if there was any need to have the relevance of the Commonwealth pointed out, it was underlined powerfully by the noble Baroness who has just spoken—but then, she always speaks powerfully.

I am particularly grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Chidgey, for having given us this opportunity because he is a lifelong champion of the Commonwealth. All of us in this House, and any intelligent person in our society, are concerned about global security. The world is totally interdependent and we have to work out ways in which we can handle effectively the governance of that reality. The Commonwealth has an important part to play.

Of course, international terrorism is part of that global reality of interdependence. If we are to look at the causes and underlying reasons that lead to abominations such as international terrorism, for a start we have to face up, just as an indication, to the size of the global refugee problem.

[LORD JUDD]

We touched on this in an earlier debate this afternoon and I do not apologise for repeating one point that I made in that debate: there are 65.6 million totally displaced people in the world; there are 22.5 million people who are refugees; and there are 10 million people who are stateless. How on earth can we have a hope of a stable, secure world while that social reality with all its dangerous consequences still exists? The Commonwealth contains very many of the people to whom I have just referred.

The issue of refugees is one to which we have to face up. I do not think it altogether encouraging that in the agendas so far the issue of refugees, with its massive significance within the Commonwealth, is not spelled out specifically and clearly enough as an objective for the Commonwealth to tackle together. I would like some reassurance from the Minister this evening, and I will take this opportunity to say how glad I am to see the Minister handling the issue of the Commonwealth, as I know he is deeply committed.

Then there is the issue of climate change. We played a very big part in the success of the Paris conference. The Commonwealth summit is a great opportunity to generate more momentum and more commitment to the objectives of the Paris agreement. Can the Minister tell us a bit more about the meaningful package on climate finance? What are we doing within the Commonwealth to generate support for that? On disaster preparedness and risk reduction, what is being done within the Commonwealth to tackle the issue of humanitarian aid to help less advanced countries meet their role within the overall situation? If we are going to remain committed to low-carbon prosperity, would this not be an ideal opportunity to see a strengthened commitment coming from the Commonwealth conference?

On human rights, there is so much that can be said. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's 2016 publication dealing with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights stated:

"The authorities in many countries actively persecute LGB&T people. Consensual same-sex relations remain criminalised in 75 jurisdictions, including the majority of Commonwealth countries. Even in countries where consensual same-sex relations are legal, many people still face violence and discrimination because of their sexual orientation or gender identity".

What are we doing at this meeting of Commonwealth heads to face up to that reality and generate a genuine commitment?

Then there are all the issues of effective justice, security sector reform to ensure that what happens in the security sector is not counterproductive, and all that is necessary in education, health and employment.

I shall finish with one reference. We should also see the Commonwealth conference as a great opportunity to generate real commitment and action on conflict resolution and pre-emptive diplomacy. What is the Commonwealth doing about the ugly situation which is developing within the Cameroons?

6.45 pm

**Baroness Hayman (CB):** My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Chidgey, on obtaining, at last, this important debate and endorse what he said about

the importance of parliamentary democracy and of strengthening that within the Commonwealth. I know from my own visit to the Sierra Leonean Parliament—I have visited twice, but once was a CPA mission to run a workshop on strengthening the committee function—how underresourced some Parliaments are and how difficult it is for individual MPs to hold their Executive to account. We cannot overestimate the importance of putting resource into that sort of capacity-building.

However, that is not the main thrust of what I want to say in my brief contribution today. I should declare an interest as the vice-chair of the All-Party Group on Malaria and Neglected Tropical Diseases. I want to speak this evening about the opportunity that CHOGM offers to make an extraordinary advance in the fight against malaria globally. I thank the Minister in particular for his courtesy in agreeing to meet me and a group from Malaria No More, which has been putting forward the plans and the proposal to have a focus on malaria at CHOGM next year.

Much has been said in the planning for CHOGM about the importance of ensuring its relevance to the individual citizens of the Commonwealth, particularly young people. I believe that a determined focus on malaria next year, and an active programme throughout the two-year leadership that follows, would fulfil that desire. Ninety per cent of the 2.4 billion Commonwealth citizens live in countries affected by malaria. That represents a third of the world's population, but two-thirds of the world's malaria burden.

Within the Commonwealth, we have a range of experiences in malaria. We have the countries for which malaria is a distant memory, but which are donors, the homes of scientific advance or the homes of businesses that are involved in producing new diagnostics, new medicines and, hopefully, new vaccines; the countries that have enormously high burdens of malaria, such as Nigeria and India; those that have recently eliminated malaria, such as Sri Lanka; and the countries that have ambitious plans to eliminate it, particularly Malaysia.

The Commonwealth represents the breadth and weight of the malaria burden, and some of the best examples of the determination, science and innovation that will help us to defeat it. It is a disease that kills people but also causes school absenteeism and poor productivity, and it is a barrier to economic development and fostering trade links. This disproportionate burden, its intersection with social and economic issues, and the sheer ambition to eliminate the world's oldest disease make it a fitting choice for the Commonwealth's next grand challenge.

The UK is a global leader in the fight against malaria. UK innovation, through firms such as GSK and through academic institutions of excellence in Liverpool and London, has had a major role in cutting deaths from malaria by over 60% since 2000, saving some 6.8 million lives. It has been calculated that every £1 spent fighting malaria delivers £36 of economic and social benefits. Yet, despite fantastic progress, a child still dies every two minutes from malaria, and a disease that costs \$1 to diagnose and treat will kill 500,000 people this year. We also know that if we do not keep up the investment in fighting malaria, we could see all those hard-won gains disappearing.

The proposal for a focus on malaria at CHOGM has brought together a range of our Commonwealth allies, global civil society, business, global health institutions and philanthropy to support what could be a really innovative and exciting development. Given the UK's leadership on malaria across scientific research, business innovation, development programmes and investment in the Global Fund, which made it clear at a meeting in Westminster this week how much it supports this proposal, we are extremely well placed to convene partners on this vital issue.

The collective power of the Commonwealth to galvanise action on the world's biggest challenges has been demonstrated through the successful efforts to end polio. Putting the world on a path to end malaria is a fitting choice for the Commonwealth's next great challenge. I hope the Minister will give us some encouragement that we may find a place for that focus at next year's conference.

6.50 pm

**Lord Mendelsohn (Lab):** My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Chidgey, on introducing this debate and on his exemplary work in the Commonwealth. I thank him for his truly excellent speech, which perfectly made the case for a parliamentary forum and for strengthening parliamentary participation to help parliamentary democracy and the capacity-building that the Commonwealth so desperately needs. I congratulate the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association on holding a Commonwealth conference before the Commonwealth summit, which will be a useful prelude if a forum can be established.

The evolution of this extraordinary organisation into a free association of nations encompassing a family of 53 nations and one-third of the world's population spread across six continents is a story of a remarkable institution that is not looking to the past but is firmly engaged in defining the future. The Commonwealth summit has accordingly reached a high level of expectation and is well placed to exceed that, not least if it addresses the issues that have been raised in this debate and are to come.

I am pleased that the Government are deeply committed to the summit's success and that the Minister is strongly committed to it. There is much that denotes the progress and development taking place across the Commonwealth, and it is important to expand our participation and co-operation with it. There is progress and reform, not least to fulfil the promise of the 1 billion young people across the Commonwealth. There is progress and development in areas such as health and education. With this year's theme of a peacebuilding Commonwealth, much can be achieved. The Commonwealth's work on counterextremism and establishing a unit to deal with it also shows some good progress.

While there is clear progress on good governance and universal standards, that does not mean that all standards are where they should be. There are different circumstances and stages across the Commonwealth, and occasionally some setbacks. However, ambition, stronger institutions, greater co-operation, dialogue and open exchanges will bring inclusivity, prosperity

and opportunities for all. In that regard, the reforms to the secretariat are also to be welcomed. Indeed, I welcome the articulation by the noble and learned Baroness, Lady Scotland, of a very forward-looking vision. There are many excellent staff in the Commonwealth Secretariat, not least the great ambassador for the Commonwealth, the deputy secretary-general Josephine Ojiambo.

While there is some way to go to develop trade on a fair and secure basis across the Commonwealth, there is much promise. The projection that trade across the Commonwealth will reach £1 trillion by 2030 illustrates that opportunity. I look forward to the business forum and to being able to participate in it. I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Marland, on his work, which has been truly outstanding.

The Queen's "Commonwealth canopy" was launched at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Malta in 2015. This network of forest conservation initiatives, which involves almost all the countries of the Commonwealth, is to be welcomed, and I hope the Commonwealth summit will be able to mark all countries in the Commonwealth being committed to it, marking Her Majesty the Queen's service to the Commonwealth while conserving indigenous forest for future generations.

I have an interest to declare: I am the president of the Commonwealth Jewish Council, which was established in 1982 to support and develop Jewish communities in Commonwealth countries, and to cultivate constructive relationships to help further the goals of the Commonwealth. We have a number of substantial communities and pockets of small communities across the Commonwealth. In some 37, we embrace the organised communities, and there are much smaller outlying groups of Jews across a further half a dozen countries.

The Commonwealth Jewish Council demonstrates a particularly strong connection between Jewish communities and the Commonwealth by its commitment to values. Indeed, at its heart, the Jewish tradition has always seen as one of its great contributions its history of thought and participation in society. The Commonwealth values, which are set out so well in the charter of 2013, chimes with that tradition and how we can help work towards a sustainable world, a redistributive world and a fair, peaceful and ideal world.

In that regard, I have a few observations from my journeys and I hope the Minister will be able to address these. In recent times, many of the communities have been hit hard by events, such as Hurricane Irma. Indeed, our work in some of those communities hit by that and in the wider society will be needed for some time. Much can be achieved by the Commonwealth countries having a means of creating systems for support in such circumstances, and I hope that may be considered during the Commonwealth summit. That would be for the benefit of all.

I also wish to raise frozen pensions, which many people who have lived and worked in Britain but have now chosen to live in the Commonwealth suffer from. I hope the Minister might provide an update on the Government's thinking on this matter.



[LORD MENDELSON]

Finally, I am encouraged by the expansion of the Commonwealth with Mozambique and Rwanda joining in recent years. South Sudan and the Gambia are in discussions about joining. On the 100th anniversary of the Balfour declaration, I hope that the conditions will soon present themselves for Israel to join the global family. I look forward to participating in all the events around the Commonwealth summit in 2018 and believe that the great potential of this family of nations has so much to fulfil. Next year we will see much more clearly and in all dimensions the vast opportunities ahead.

6.57 pm

**Lord Loomba (Non-Affl):** My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Chidgey, for securing this important debate today.

The Government are to be applauded for including in the forthcoming Commonwealth summit “A Fairer Future”, covering the democratic principles that emphasise the importance of good governance, human rights and the rule of law to which we all subscribe, and a more prosperous future for all Commonwealth citizens. These are primary principles on which we should all strive to build better lives for all citizens regardless of their country of origin, their gender, religion or social status. Certainly, with an estimated population of nearly one-third of the world’s total population, the Commonwealth is well placed to act as a global player and catalyst for change.

I commend the Government for putting together an agenda for the four forums, as we have already heard from the noble Lord, Lord Chidgey: civil society, youth, women and business. These forums will get to the heart of core issues that have a deep impact on all of us today. I will focus on the women’s forum, which is very close to my heart. It is also deeply integrated into the other three forums.

I hope that the issue of modern slavery will be high on the agenda for the women’s forum, as it affects so many women in so many countries. It is imperative that we start to ensure that countries and societies are well placed to root out this evil and stop it from taking hold and devastating the lives of innocent and vulnerable women. Many other women’s issues are long-standing and can often be traced back to age-old, historical attitudes that have no place in our modern world.

While there may be some way of alleviating the situation of many women today who suffer injustice, inequality and sexual harassment, there is a section of women who find themselves even more burdened, discriminated against and lacking opportunities. These women are widows—women who, through no fault of their own, become victims of physical, psychological and sexual exploitation. They are often ostracised and deprived of fundamental freedoms and human rights, often leading to modern-day slavery. I declare my interest here as founder and chairman trustee of the Loomba Foundation, which recently published the *World Widows Report*, which has revealed that there are over 258 million widows and 584 million of their children around the world. Many of them are suffering from poverty, illiteracy, diseases such as HIV/AIDS and malaria, conflict and injustices. Sadly, their numbers

are increasing because of conflict in different countries. All these issues feed into the United Nations sustainable development goals, but the ability to achieve them by 2030 is a mammoth challenge.

Can the Minister tell us what strategies the Government can form to help the most impoverished and disadvantaged women and girls, including widows, so that they are empowered, able to earn money, become self-reliant and lead a life of dignity and, likewise, so that their children are educated, provided with skills training to enable them to get jobs or start their own business, gain economic independence and break the shackles of poverty?

7.02 pm

**Lord Parekh (Lab):** My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Chidgey, on securing this debate and introducing it with such charm and erudition. Anything that is done to improve the role and functioning of the Commonwealth is to be greatly welcomed, especially if it brings it closer to the people who live within it. We have learned this lesson particularly painfully in the case of the European Union, which has become increasingly detached from the people and therefore no longer commands—as it should—the loyalties, sentiments and affections of its people. The Commonwealth, however, is increasingly setting up people’s forums and parliamentary forums, which are intended to draw people into its own working and give them a certain stake in and emotional commitment to it. I greatly welcome this and I very much hope—as the Question set out—that the final programme of the summit will include a people’s forum and parliamentary forum.

These forums do two things. First, they provide networks across countries and, therefore, make the Commonwealth a genuine reality. Secondly, they bring people into direct contact with policymakers and the people in power, so that the people in power are able to listen to those who would suffer from the consequences of their actions.

I welcome all this, but I want to say something briefly about why the Commonwealth is so important. It has to be dusted and taken off the shelf where it has been lying ever since we joined the European Union, and I want to say something about the consequences of having neglected it for so long and now having to dust it down. It is a most valuable organisation with 52 members and 2.4 billion people, half of whom are under 25, so the future belongs to them. Rwanda and Mozambique are already members, although they were not part of the British Empire. There will be trade within the Commonwealth worth £1 trillion by 2020. The UK exports £60 billion-worth of goods to various Commonwealth countries and the combined GDP of the Commonwealth is no less than \$10 trillion. That is the organisation we are talking about. This organisation somehow fits in with the British character and is naturally close to Britain: first, because it is an association of nation states and has no intention of seeking ever-increasing union; secondly, because it is an association left behind by Britain as part of its legacy, and therefore Britain can take a kind of parental pride in it without hammering that home too often; and, thirdly, because

Britain has the largest economy of the Commonwealth and therefore is able not only to command respect but to feel a certain sense of pride and superiority. Therefore, there is no doubt that the Commonwealth remains an organisation close to Britain's history and traditions.

I want to explore why many of the opportunities that the Commonwealth offers have not been fully tapped and mention three or four in passing. It would be a wonderful idea to have a Commonwealth university. Just as there is in India, for example, Nalanda University, which includes people who were part of the Buddhist empire, a Commonwealth university would include students and faculties drawn from within the Commonwealth. Those students would be able to study together and get to know each other. Likewise, just as the European Union has its own newspaper, I cannot see why there cannot be a Commonwealth newspaper and TV channel, whose job it would be to get each country interested in the affairs of the others.

As Britain is short of doctors, there is no reason why a delegation from here could not go to India, advertise, recruit, say, 100 doctors and bring them here for two years. That would meet Britain's need and that of the Indian doctors as they would be given two years of training before they have to go back to India. There is no reason why in our times of need we cannot draw upon Commonwealth countries in this way.

Likewise, I think exporting democracy is a silly idea but we could export concepts such as the rule of law or human rights, which can easily be grasped. That kind of concept can easily be cultivated, and Britain has an important role to play in that regard.

While saying all this, I want to alert us to the dangers that we face if we are not careful about how we conduct our relations with the Commonwealth. There is a fear in Commonwealth countries of being used after Brexit. Some of our Ministers have talked about using the Commonwealth for this or that purpose, as if it is an instrument to be used. I do not think that is a particularly good idea or particularly useful rhetoric.

I share a thought that I picked up when I was talking to an Indian diplomat. There is a certain degree of unease at Britain's claim to be the sole spokesman of the Commonwealth at the European Union or other places, as if Britain is saying, "Look, if you want to know the Commonwealth, we are the conduit through which it speaks". I do not think that is a good idea, certainly not as regards countries such as India, Canada and Australia, which have their independence and pride.

Likewise, I think that readjusting trade will not be easy because trade, like any kind of business, requires decades to settle in. Therefore, if Britain expects to pick up trade in India or elsewhere, it should not expect that to be easy. Britain's obsession with reducing immigration at any cost will also stand in the way. It will not be easy to rejuvenate the Commonwealth when people start coming in and we say, "No, there are too many of you. You can't come in". So some difficulties arise from Britain's attitude as well as the context in which we are likely to rejuvenate the Commonwealth. It is dangerous to expect a smooth sailing.

7.09 pm

**Lord McNally (LD):** My Lords, it is a pleasure and a delight to follow the noble Lord, Lord Parekh; I may return to some of his remarks later. I thank my noble friend Lord Chidgey for a speech that was delivered with the authority which comes from his long experience of the Commonwealth. When you ask a question, it is always good when half the question is already answered. Interestingly, we received a good briefing from the City of London, which he referred to, and which explained how the corporation is getting behind the idea.

I will make one comment as background to this debate. There is a newsreel clip which will be shown many times between now and the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting next year. It is of the young Princess Elizabeth, in South Africa on her 21st birthday, pledging that her whole life, whether it be long or short, shall be devoted to the service of the British people and what is now the Commonwealth. Thankfully, the caveat about "long or short" has proved unnecessary, so the meetings in the spring of next year will be a celebration—as the noble Lord, Lord Mendelsohn, indicated—and a thanks for a promise so magnificently honoured for the last 70 years that have followed that pledge of service. In South Africa Her Majesty referred to the "imperial family". Thanks in no small part to the Queen's leadership, that "imperial family" has transmuted and transformed into a Commonwealth of Nations.

This debate calls for the meetings planned for next year to be more than Heads of Government meetings. We have already had indications that they will not be. Yesterday I attended a meeting in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Room here in Westminster Hall to hear about what the CPA was planning for next year. I was much encouraged to hear of work already in hand for meetings of parliamentarians as part of the programme, as well as other ideas about young people and communities, which have been referred to. This is all excellent news. I hope that the Chambers of both Houses and Westminster Hall can be used for such meetings. This building has much symbolism throughout the Commonwealth, and I think the groups covered by this debate today would welcome the opportunity to speak and take part in events in the mother of Parliaments.

Education has always been part of the cement which holds the Commonwealth together. I have the honour, along with the noble Lords, Lord Judd and Lord Luce, of being a patron of the Council for Education in the Commonwealth. Earlier this year the CEC held a very successful conference in Namibia and is already planning a series of seminars and lectures that look forward to the 20th Commonwealth Education Ministers' meeting in Fiji in February 2018. They will be looking at the skills required for the jobs of tomorrow and the financing of higher education and early childhood education, and will feed those ideas into the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

The Commonwealth is at its best when it focuses on real problems and brings shared experience and expertise to a problem. It runs into problems when we start to lecture or patronise each other. I remember when I

[LORD McNALLY]

was a Minister at the Ministry of Justice attending a meeting of Commonwealth Justice Ministers, and my brief had me advocate no longer using the death penalty. This ran me into quite choppy waters with the representatives of Commonwealth countries that still retain the death penalty. It was a useful reminder that although we have many shared values, there is still a diversity of views on many issues in the Commonwealth.

I return to what the noble Lord, Lord Parekh, said. I thought I might be the only one to be the party pooper. If I have any advice to Ministers about the coming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, it is on the need for some deft diplomacy and to resist trying to turn it into a showcase for the new, shiny, post-Brexit global Britain. Almost all Commonwealth countries are members of their own regional economic co-operation organisations. They will not take kindly to some kind of PR stunt through which the British Government try to package the Commonwealth as some ready-made alternative to our EU membership.

We must remember that it is the Commonwealth of which Britain is a proud and active member, not the British Commonwealth, and that next year we are hosting a conference, not a durbar. I trust the Minister to use his influence over some of his more exuberant colleagues to get the balance right. With that Gypsy's warning, I look forward to a Heads of Government meeting where real work will be done and where we can say a heartfelt "Thank you, Ma'am" to Her Majesty, putting in place a programme of work that plays to the Commonwealth's strengths as we grapple with the multifaceted problems of the 21st century.

7.15 pm

**Lord Taylor of Warwick (Non-Affl):** My Lords, I too thank the noble Lord, Lord Chidgey, for securing this timely debate. I am also delighted to follow the noble Lord, Lord McNally, who made such powerful points.

It was Henry Ford who said:

"Don't just find fault, find a remedy".

We have all attended conferences and summits which have been more talk than walk and more activity than action. That is why it is vital that there be real outcomes from the next Commonwealth summit, encompassing the findings of the people's forum and the parliamentary forum. It is essential because there are compelling facts about the Commonwealth, as the noble Lord, Lord Parekh, reminded us. It makes up nearly one-third of the world's population, and trade within the Commonwealth is projected to be worth \$1 trillion by 2020. It has a shared history, yet is so diverse. Every four years, the Commonwealth Games present an attractive window through which that good news is viewed. Furthermore, the summit itself is an important marker of the issues and future direction of the nations that the Commonwealth oversees.

But more than the facts, the Commonwealth is a family. My father came to Britain in the late 1940s after serving as a sergeant in the British Eighth Army in the Second World War. As a Jamaican, he was a member of the Commonwealth and, in coming to England, he did not see himself as travelling to foreign parts. He was coming home—to the motherland.

Sadly, although he was a qualified accountant, the only job he could get was as a toilet cleaner at a factory in Birmingham. However, his fortunes changed when Warwickshire County Cricket Club discovered that he could play cricket. The headline in the local *Sports Argus* was, "Warwickshire sign Jamaican immigrant", but the following year, in 1949, when he scored 121 not out against Leicestershire, the headline read, "Warwickshire saved by local Brummie Taylor".

His story and that of many immigrants to Britain from the rest of the Commonwealth builds upon that concept of family and belonging, so it was a personal joy and honour for me, 54 years after my father had left Jamaica to live in England, to visit Jamaica myself to open a new orthopaedic hospital in Kingston. The hospital staff were rather surprised when I mentioned that I lived near Kingston, so I had to clarify that I meant Kingston upon Thames.

Although the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting is essentially a political and diplomatic event, it should recognise that the various faith groups in the Commonwealth have a role to play in its future. In Britain, as in other Commonwealth countries, there are Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and other faith communities that are networks of leadership and expertise. There needs to be more of a partnership between government and such groups in tackling issues such as terrorism, migration, human rights, poverty and equality.

In Britain alone, there are about 5,000 black-majority churches. Black churches attract thousands of people to each service. The congregations are mainly from Africa and the Caribbean. I have had the honour of being a keynote speaker at many of these churches, including at a major church congress in Lagos, Nigeria. Many of these faith groups are made up of professional people. They are part of the wider Commonwealth diaspora who live and work in Britain and are waiting in the wings to help with the ongoing problems articulated in this debate. Will the Minister indicate whether the Government have a strategy to embrace the potential contribution of these faith groups?

As we know, the CPA UK will be hosting the first ever Commonwealth parliamentary forum next year. The people's forum will be CHOGM's platform for civil society groups across the Commonwealth to engage with leaders and influence society. The parliamentary forum's main themes are very much about the future, as we have heard. They will encompass gender, youth and diaspora engagement. I understand that the CPA UK will soon be meeting with the head of programmes of the people's forum to discuss their respective agendas.

There will also be a parallel Commonwealth business forum and youth forum at the time of CHOGM. I know the CPA is keen that the parliamentary forum effectively influences discussions at CHOGM, but more importantly that it has a long-term impact beyond it in holding member states to account on their objectives. I, along with the CPA UK, am keen to hear the Minister's views on how this can be done effectively.

By listening to the voices of the people as well as the parliamentarians, we can ensure that the summit will be about value and not just volume.



7.20 pm

**Lord Cashman (Lab):** My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Chidgey, on initiating this debate and his eloquent introduction. I refer your Lordships to my register of interests, in particular as an officer of the All-Party Group on Global LGBT Rights.

I wish to record my thanks to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, my noble and learned friend Lady Scotland, who has placed human rights at the forefront of her tenure and presided over a culture shift so that LGBTI rights are no longer an afterthought to be discussed in the shadows.

I also want to recognise the extraordinary work of the Maltese Government, who hosted CHOOGM meetings in Valetta. I thank them for their inclusive and positive outcomes, not least in the people's forum, which for the first time explicitly listed LGBTI issues in its agenda and discussions. The work of civil society, LGBTI activists, the Commonwealth Equality Network and others has ensured that LGBTI issues are once again on the agenda and must be maintained in the forums and summit here in Windsor and London in 2018.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Prime Minister Theresa May, who in her speech to the PinkNews Awards gave a commitment to undo the negative legacy of colonialism and, as she stated on Commonwealth Day, to reaffirm the shared values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

As others have said, the Commonwealth is a family of nations, but for us LGBTI people it is not a family where we are treated equally or with dignity. As my noble friend Lord Judd said, in 36 of the 52 states of the Commonwealth homosexuality is criminalised and same-sex relationships are banned. Although this was imposed by Great Britain during its colonial past, these countries cling desperately to this colonial heritage and are increasingly defending it and advocating further repression, often citing culture or religious belief as an excuse. All too often, organised religions and religious leaders condone such repression or acquiesce with their silence. This is unacceptable and it is shameful. As an atheist I will always defend religion and belief, but never the right to impose them upon another, especially when such imposition diminishes the rights of another human being.

The discrimination meted out against LGBTI people attacks not only their liberties and freedoms and that of their families but their health and the health of others. One startling example in a report prepared for the Human Dignity Trust is that the HIV infection rate among men who have sex with men in the English-speaking region of the Caribbean is one in four, whereas in the non-English speaking region it is one in 15. The difference is that the former criminalise homosexuality, except the Bahamas, and the latter do not.

This trend echoes across countries where they criminalise and repress. People are driven away from health support, prevention and cure and pushed underground. Recently in Tanzania, we have seen the arrest, detention and misrepresentation of a group of people solely on the basis that they wanted to legally challenge the Tanzanian Government's restrictions

on access to HIV clinics. I express the deep concern of the All-Party Group on Global LGBT Rights as well as my own about the ongoing actions against these people.

There are human rights, health and economic consequences arising from inequality and discrimination against LGBTI people. The positive case for equality is made by the organisation Open for Business, working with global corporations. The case is made also in the five standards of conduct which was recently published by the United Nations Human Rights Office in collaboration with the Institute for Human Rights and Business to support the business community in tackling discrimination against LGBTI people. The Commonwealth should work closely with the UN and the European Union on this issue and recognise the economic benefits that flow when equality flourishes.

I look forward to hearing from the Minister how the Government propose to ensure that LGBTI discrimination is addressed within the forums, as there is connectivity between all four as well as a need to address the multiplicity of discrimination. There is a pressing and urgent moral case to end the discrimination faced by LGBTI people and the UK Government can place this at the centre of the summit and the forums of CHOOGM in 2018. The Government should lead by example and apologise to the Commonwealth countries for these negative laws which we imposed on them. They should explain that we wish to work with the Commonwealth and the UN to lead in the decriminalisation of homosexuality worldwide. Further, they should work to end the discrimination that blights and destroys the lives of bi, transsexual and intersex people.

The task is not too great. It is not neo-colonialism. It is the decent and just thing to do—and, as a country, we should have the courage and the guts to do it.

7.26 pm

**Lord Hussain (LD):** My Lords, I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the gap. I, too, thank my noble friend Lord Chidgey for securing this debate.

In order to bring a common peace, prosperity and future, this summit should include efforts to minimise the prospects of any war between member states and to protect human rights in their respective countries. In this respect I draw your Lordships' attention to the continuing warlike situation between two nuclear nations—India and Pakistan—in the Kashmir region. If one goes on the internet and types the words “cross-border firing” one will find that over 90% of the incidents listed in the past two years refer to India and Pakistan. This could lead to a full-scale war at any time.

The core issue between these two countries is Kashmir. The people of Jammu and Kashmir were promised a plebiscite or a referendum by the United Nations nearly 70 years ago. That was agreed by India and Pakistan. That is the very right we provided to the Scottish people and the British people enjoyed that right over Brexit. Kashmiris asking for the same right are met with live bullets, detention, torture, rape and disappearances, with thousands of mass graves identified by international human rights organisations.

[LORD HUSSAIN]

As both countries are members of the Commonwealth, will Her Majesty's Government use their good offices to bring both countries, with which we have friendly relations, round the table to resolve the Kashmir issue through negotiations, and to bring to an end any prospect of a war as well as the suffering of the Kashmiri people?

7.29 pm

**Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab):** My Lords, I, too, thank the noble Lord, Lord Chidgey, for initiating this debate and for his tenacity in ensuring that it has eventually taken place. We have been waiting some time for it—but of course what he has been able to do is ensure that this important issue remains on the agenda.

Earlier this year, the noble Baroness, Lady Anelay, set out how the Government would take a fresh look at CHOGM's format, working in partnership with the secretariat, political parties here and wider Commonwealth parliamentarians, as well as with business, non-governmental bodies and civil society. We have now seen the fruits of this thinking, with the Government setting out four key themes—prosperity, security, sustainable futures and fairness—they want reflected not only in the Heads of Government meeting but in the youth, business, women's and civil society fora. These themes of course embrace the United Nations' 17 sustainable development goals and 169 targets aimed at resolving issues such as poverty, ill health and inequality, with the specific commitment to leave no one behind.

To deliver on these, we need to nurture and develop all aspects of civil society. That is why the summit's fora will be so critical to the success of CHOGM. I welcome the initiative of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in developing the parliamentary forum. I also attended the meetings in the CPA's rooms. However, what I argued for and what I am hoping for is that the association should not restrict itself simply to the role of parliamentarians.

The ingredients of a thriving democracy are not limited to Parliaments and parliamentarians. Civil society organisations such as churches and trade unions have been and remain an important part of democratic life and are frequently the only guarantor of human rights in society. At Malta, the Commonwealth reaffirmed its commitment to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to support the empowerment of women and girls. The Leaders' Statement also recognised the economic potential that can be unlocked by tackling discrimination and exclusion. Yet in the Commonwealth many women, disabled people and too many minorities are discriminated against and denied access to their fair share of goods, services and opportunity. Economic growth has the potential to be the engine to drive change, but growth without jobs, inclusion, healthcare, education and human rights will not deliver for the many. Can the Minister tell the House whether practical support will be given by the Government to ensure that trade unions, women's associations and other civil society groups will have their voice heard in all the fora of the summit?

As we heard from my noble friend Lord Cashman, LGBT rights remain a major source of division among Commonwealth members. We do not have the right or the opportunity to force states to decriminalise, but we can work with them so that they understand the economic as well as the human rights issues involved in making necessary changes. I also agreed with the Prime Minister when she said at the PinkNews Awards last month that the anti-gay laws were a legacy of Britain's colonial past, so the UK has a special responsibility to help change hearts and minds. She committed to ensuring that these important issues are discussed at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. I welcome that commitment, but I hope that the Minister can tell us whether steps will be taken to ensure that this and other equality and human rights issues, as my noble friend also suggested, will be on the agenda of the youth, business, women's and civil society fora. There are connections here and it is important that these rights are considered in a broad context.

My noble friend also referred to last week's Commonwealth equality network of activists and non-governmental organisations, which met in Malta to discuss how to reverse the oppression of gay people in too many Commonwealth countries. Can the Minister tell us about its outcome and how it can be fed into the summit?

As we have heard, good governance and respect for the rule of law are vital for stable societies. The Commonwealth agreed to make anti-corruption work a priority, committing to strengthen efforts to tackle corruption, including through increased transparency and co-operation among law agencies. Can the Minister update the House on how that will be addressed in the summit, what has happened since the UK's anti-corruption summit and how that can be made a priority on the CHOGM agenda?

The noble Baroness, Lady Berridge, summed up about how we ensure that the innovations we have seen being developed for the forthcoming CHOGM will continue in the future, not only for the next CHOGM but on an ongoing basis. We want to see a family of nations with democratic and human rights, and access to all public services, fully enshrined for the future.

7.36 pm

**The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon) (Con):** My Lords, I join other noble Lords in thanking the noble Lord, Lord Chidgey, for his tenacity—as it has been called by some—and his commitment to this important agenda. I am greatly privileged to answer a debate of this nature. From the contributions we have seen across the Chamber, it is clear that we all align ourselves with the unity behind not just the virtues and values of the Commonwealth but its purpose.

As several noble Lords have alluded to, next year the UK will have the deep honour and privilege of welcoming the Commonwealth family; I use the word deliberately. I assure all noble Lords—particularly the noble Lords, Lord McNally, Lord Parekh and Lord Taylor—that when we talk about family, we can all

personally account for the strength of the family and at times perhaps need look no further than your Lordships' Chamber to see the great wealth of the Commonwealth. The noble Lord, Lord Taylor, talked about his family experiences and the diaspora of communities here in the UK. Again, that is a huge opportunity to demonstrate the strength of everything that defines the family that is the Commonwealth when we look at our own country, and indeed the city of London, in terms of its diversity and depth and the richness of its diaspora. I often joke with my children about the great heritage of the Commonwealth, as they are products of the Commonwealth who can claim heritage from Australia, the UK, India and Pakistan. I will come on to the point made by the noble Lord, Lord Hussain, but there are family ties on the issue he raised. That issue is a pertinent and important one: he mentioned Kashmir and the bilateral relations between India and Pakistan. For such as the Commonwealth—he mentioned the United Nations as well—provide a huge opportunity for the United Kingdom to play its part in making sure those two countries, which share so much in terms of culture, community, faith and language, can join together and resolve something that ensures and upholds the rights of all citizens, irrespective of what region or part of the Commonwealth they belong to.

As we have heard, next year, attendees will include Heads of Government, foreign Ministers, civil society leaders, businesspeople and, perhaps most importantly, young people from every corner of the Commonwealth. I have been greatly inspired by meeting all the Commonwealth networks for young people. Let us not forget that 60% of the Commonwealth is under 30. Regrettably, I do not think there is anyone in your Lordships' House at this time who can claim to be part of that cohort. That provides a huge opportunity and we must engage directly with the youth. Therefore, we have shared with our partners that official delegates from across the 52 nations should also include at least one individual from that particular age group to ensure, as the noble Lord, Lord Collins, said, we set the agenda not just for April or for the two years that the United Kingdom is in the chair, but to attract the youth so we can truly address what the noble Lord, Lord Judd, said about the global nature of the world we live in. It is right that we engage with the youth directly on this important issue.

The members of the Commonwealth cover more than a quarter of the world's land mass. As we heard from the noble Lord, Lord Mendelsohn, and others, trade adds up to incredible amounts. It will grow to \$1 trillion by 2020. The Commonwealth is home to more than 2 billion people. These figures show its immense global potential for influence and demonstrate why it is important to the UK. It is about not just our strong cultural and personal ties, which some noble Lords alluded to, but the common future, a common partnership and common hopes for all Commonwealth members and more. I noted the words of the noble Lord, Lord Mendelsohn, in this respect. If we have 52 nations today it will certainly be more by the time of the summit. We need to look to the future to ensure that we really make the Commonwealth representative of the world as it is today.

We have seen the tremendous impact the Commonwealth has when it acts as one. We are all aware of the important work it did historically, looking back to recent history in South Africa, with its transition from the great injustices of apartheid to a free and democratic society. We see how Heads of Government came together in Malta in 2015 to press for ambitious climate change targets. I assure the noble Lord, Lord Judd, that that remains a priority at this Heads of Government Meeting. There is the important pillar of sustainability. Let us not forget the UK's work, with other nations, following the impact of the hurricanes—I was in the Pacific Islands when the hurricanes hit—and the importance of working together. In that regard, I pay tribute to the Commonwealth Secretariat, in particular to its Secretary-General, the noble and learned Baroness, Lady Scotland, for the co-ordination and co-operation we saw with Governments across the Pacific and the Caribbean. I also pay tribute to her recent work brokering a political agreement in Zambia. This demonstrates the strength of the Commonwealth at its best.

We want next April's summit to drive further progress towards realising the Commonwealth's true potential. We are pleased that all member states and Heads of Government have agreed that the summit will focus on four common challenges. At a reception for Commonwealth leaders held recently during the UN General Assembly in New York, my right honourable friend the Prime Minister, Mrs May, outlined these challenges and opportunities. They are: how to make the compelling case for free trade and promote higher living standards around the world; how to address new security challenges, including cyberterrorism and online extremism; how to mitigate the effects of climate change, in particular—as the noble Lord, Lord Judd, drew attention to—on small and vulnerable states; and, as we heard from many noble Lords, the importance of human rights and how to protect the values we all share to create a fairer, freer and more tolerant Commonwealth.

We hope the theme of the summit, "Towards a Common Future", encapsulates our ambitions. We want the summit to revitalise the Commonwealth and to build that brighter future. Preparations are under way. We are already working closely with member states, the Commonwealth Secretariat and, importantly—to reassure the noble Lord, Lord Collins, and my noble friend Lady Berridge—with civil society groups to put together a programme for the summit that will strengthen the prosperity and security of all Commonwealth countries.

I have had the great pleasure and privilege of representing the UK and meeting with our Commonwealth partners across the world. In recent months I have travelled to India, Bangladesh and Ghana. As I alluded to, I visited the Pacific Islands, including Fiji, and Australia, which is hosting the next Commonwealth Games in Brisbane. We are delighted that we shall host the ones after that in Birmingham. It is an opportunity to bring our country together. My interactions with government leaders and young people in all of these countries have strengthened my belief that the Commonwealth has a powerful role to play in the modern world.



[LORD AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON]

To turn to some of the fora talked about, and to directly answer the Question before us, there will be a people's forum. This will be the biggest meeting of Heads of Government that the UK has ever hosted. However, we believe the Commonwealth, as the noble Lord, Lord Collins, so articulately put it, is not simply a collection of member states and a secretariat. It is so much more. A fundamental part of the Commonwealth is its people-to-people links, as we know from the extraordinary contribution the Commonwealth diaspora makes to British society. We see the Commonwealth's strength and uniqueness as being in many organisations. That is why it is at the centre of this particular event.

The people's forum is the single largest gathering of civil society representatives from across the Commonwealth. I say to the noble Lord, Lord Collins, and others that I wish to work with Members in this House and the other place to ensure that we get those representative voices at the people's forum as we develop the programme. I would be pleased to meet noble Lords in that respect.

Alongside the people's forum, as we have heard, there will also be a business forum. I join the noble Lord, Lord Mendelsohn, in paying tribute to my noble friend Lord Marland for organising it. There will be a women's forum. I assure noble Lords, particularly the noble Lord, Lord Loomba, that women's issues will be front and centre. It is not just about the education of young girls but the empowerment of women, and we will be looking to work together in that respect.

Our co-operation with the CPA is already part and parcel of our thinking. I assure noble Lords that I have already met not just CPA UK but the international CPA, and I am delighted that we will be playing a key part in the February event. I have noted the suggestion made by the noble Lord, Lord McNally—to whom I always listen very carefully, not least because I was his Whip once upon a time—about how we might perhaps use this Chamber for events.

Various issues were raised around the freedom of religion and belief. My noble friend Lady Berridge will know that this is very much part and parcel of our thinking. The fairness pillar within the Commonwealth summit allows us to develop this further. My noble friend also talked about how to ensure a continuation with Malaysia at the parliamentary forum and CHOGM. Malaysia has indeed put itself forward and we will be looking during our two years in the chair to ensure that continuation of key themes in the summit.

The noble Lord, Lord Judd, talked about refugees and asked where we were on that. It is a timely opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to the

values we share across the Commonwealth. I will write to the noble Lord in response to his letter—my letter is on its way, I assure him.

We heard from the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, about health and education. We had a very constructive meeting on the issue of global malaria. As we have heard, malaria is a key issue for many Commonwealth citizens. We are working with member states and the Commonwealth Secretariat to examine the options for the summit agenda. I will keep the House updated as this takes shape. I assure the noble Baroness that the UK has already pledged £1.1 billion to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria over the next three years.

I have already mentioned issues around climate change. The important issue of LGBTI rights was mentioned by the noble Lords, Lord Judd, Lord Cashman and Lord Collins. We are committed. We have heard the words of the Prime Minister. I assure noble Lords that the Foreign Secretary and I are equally committed to combating discrimination in all its guises, including violence against LGBTI people, throughout the Commonwealth. We used every opportunity at the previous CHOGM in Malta to highlight our belief that the Commonwealth must stand up for human rights, including the rights of the LGBTI community. The detailed forum programmes are still being developed but we are confident that LGBTI issues will be a substantive area of discussion.

There were a couple of other questions. The noble Lord, Lord Mendelsohn, asked about pensions. He will be aware that this issue has followed various Governments around for the past 70 years. The UK state pension is payable worldwide but is uprated abroad only when there is a reciprocal legal requirement to do so. Currently there are no plans to review this.

It was a great honour to be appointed Minister for the Commonwealth, particularly at such an important time for the organisation and the UK's relationship with it. This is not about the UK's role alone but about an equal partnership of 52 nations and—who knows?—more in the future. We want this CHOGM summit to be a milestone event in Commonwealth history—a chance to truly demonstrate how the Commonwealth can help mitigate the major challenges: the issues of security, climate change, fairness and equality for all its citizens, and the important elements of human rights and fairness. We will continue to work in close partnership with the Commonwealth Secretariat, member states and our partners across civil society to ensure that it is a great success. When representing the UK abroad, as I have the honour to do, I often say that the great strength of our nation is its diversity. The same is true of the 52 members of the Commonwealth.

*House adjourned at 7.49 pm.*