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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES  
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# HOUSE OF LORDS

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

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

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# House of Lords

Thursday 9 September 2021

11 am

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Oxford.

## Sports Participation in Schools Question

11.06 am

Tabled by **Lord Bassam of Brighton**

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to Team GB's success at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, what steps they plan to take (1) to raise sports participation levels in schools, and (2) to provide additional funding to support this.

**Lord Watson of Invergowrie (Lab):** My Lords, I beg leave to ask the Question standing in the name of my noble friend Lord Bassam of Brighton.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education and Department for International Trade (Baroness Berridge) (Con):** My Lords, the Government are, along with noble Lords, extremely proud of the success of Team GB at the recent Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics. We are committed to raising school sports participation by investing through the primary PE and sport premium and funding to open school sports facilities. On Monday, I had the pleasure of visiting a new freeschool—Coombe Wood School, in Croydon—which puts health and fitness at the heart of its educational approach.

**Lord Watson of Invergowrie (Lab):** My Lords, I pay tribute to all our Olympians and Paralympians in Tokyo; not all returned with a medal—though of course many did—but all returned, I think I can safely say, with the enduring respect and admiration of those of us watching at home, in recognition of the clearly tremendous efforts they put into training over years. This is surely a *carpe diem* moment for the Government to ensure that participation levels in sports increase in all schools, but particularly primary schools. Habits gained at an early age are more likely to be carried into adult life. In June, the Secretary of State announced, in respect of the PE and sport premium for primary schools, to which the Minister has just referred, that underspends for the two pandemic years could be carried forward into this academic year but must be spent by the end of it. Why should such a limit be imposed when primary schools need additional resources to increase and maximise sports participation levels?

**Baroness Berridge (Con):** My Lords, the PE premium is in fact a ring-fenced grant that normally has to be spent within the academic year that it is given. This was an exceptional relaxation, and we are keen that those pupils whom it was intended to benefit have the benefit of that money, and therefore it should be spent by the end of this academic year.

**Lord Moynihan (Con):** My Lords, I totally echo the words of congratulations to Team GB and ParalympicsGB. Critical to the future improvement of sports participation in schools is teacher training. Some student teachers get as little as six hours of training on PE, and there are many examples about resulting problems with teacher confidence and competence when it comes to delivering a minimum 60 minutes of sport and physical activity a day. How do the Government propose to tackle that?

**Baroness Berridge (Con):** My Lords, in relation to the spending of the premium, a survey was done by the department in 2019, and we are aware that schools are spending a proportion of it on scaling up their workforce. Over 97% of those who teach PE have the relevant level 4 qualification, but I will take my noble friend's comments back to Minister Gibb in relation to the reform of PE that he announced to my noble friend's Select Committee back in July.

**Baroness Blower (Lab):** My Lords, I add my congratulations to those already expressed by noble Lords. There are sports facilities that stand unused when schools are not in session. Can the Minister look to putting in place arrangements by which all schools in the maintained sector—including of course academies and free schools—are required, and where necessary funded, to make sure that those sports facilities are available to their communities?

**Baroness Berridge (Con):** The noble Baroness is correct that 39% of sports and recreation facilities in England are on school premises. That is why, over the last two years, we have invested over £11 million to enable those facilities to be used for extra-curricular activities for pupils and by communities. We have seen nearly 100,000 community users benefit from that, as well as nearly a quarter of a million pupils in extra-curricular formats.

**Lord Holmes of Richmond (Con):** My Lords, I add my congratulations to the athletes of Team GB and ParalympicsGB. Beyond sports participation, does my noble friend the Minister agree that the stories of Olympic and Paralympic athletes, and their ability to act as role models, should, alongside the Olympic and Paralympic values, run through our education system like a golden thread of possibility? Would she also agree to further consider how we can make even more use of our Olympic and Paralympic athletes and their stories, to drive potential right through our education system?

**Baroness Berridge (Con):** My noble friend is correct; these stories are inspirational, and your Lordships' House benefits from the presence and participation of people like my noble friend and the noble Baroness, Lady Grey-Thompson. I am pleased that, on Monday, the Youth Sport Trust announced precisely this: it will have a programme of events, to make sure that Olympians and Paralympians can tell their stories in our schools.

**Lord Addington (LD):** My Lords, we found out in 2012 that it is incredibly difficult to translate the excitement of the Games into greater participation. We also know from experience that, when people leave education—at 16, 18 or 21—if that is where their sporting activity is, they tend to stop. What positive steps are the Government taking to make sure that, before they leave school, people are playing sport in amateur structures outside, which will lead to a continuation of activity?

**Baroness Berridge (Con):** I have outlined to noble Lords the increase in the extra-curricular participation that we have funded, by way of premises being open. On 16-plus, as part of Ofsted's inspection of FE it considers personal development. The matters that the noble Lord refers to are of course part of our overall emphasis, through health and well-being, on active participation for adults.

**Baroness Sater (Con):** I, too, add my congratulations to Team GB and their great achievements at the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Given our shared ambition to leave a legacy post Games, does my noble friend the Minister agree that it is now time to make sports, and physical activity, a higher priority in schools, given that it fosters long-term physical, emotional, social and positive well-being, and to consider making PE a core subject?

**Baroness Berridge (Con):** I agree with my noble friend, and that is why, back in 2017, as a result of the sugar tax, we doubled the PE and sport premium for primary schools to enable them to do just that. In fact, when looking at the number of hours per week on average in our schools, PE has the third highest number of hours after English and maths and it is the only foundation subject in the national curriculum that is mandatory at key stages 1, 2, 3 and 4.

**Lord Campbell of Pittenweem (LD):** My Lords, I count it a privilege to be able to associate myself with the expressions of congratulations to both the Olympic and Paralympic teams. I hope that I can easily persuade the Minister and the House to reflect on the fact that, for most of the members of these teams who are not medallists, the fact of selection and participation in the Olympic Games will be the high point of their sporting careers. The British Olympic Association has a saying: "Once an Olympian, always an Olympian." Would that not be a very effective saying to use in the encouragement of sports in schools?

**Baroness Berridge (Con):** I can only agree with the noble Lord. It is pleasing to note that 20% of the athletes we sent to Tokyo are alumni of the DCMS 2010 initiative of funding School Games, so we are seeing that graduation from participating in School Games to being an Olympian. I agree with the noble Lord that everybody who participated, particularly in the difficult circumstances this time round, deserves our congratulations.

**Lord Polak (Con):** Speedy access to a defibrillator saves lives. A decade ago, the budding sportsman Oliver King, aged 12, suffered a cardiac arrest during a swimming lesson and, sadly, passed away. It happened at my old school, King David High School in Liverpool, in the pool where I learned to swim. Oliver's dad, Mark King, has campaigned for 10 years, via the Oliver King Foundation, for defibrillators to be in all schools. I attended a meeting a few days ago with the Secretary of State, along with Mark and the charitable and legendary former Liverpool player Jamie Carragher. Surely legislation is not needed. Can my noble friend the Minister assure me that defibrillators will be placed in all schools urgently?

**Baroness Berridge (Con):** I am moved to hear of my noble friend's experience. I think that those of us who watched the Euros were aghast at the events there, which showed us that the speed with which Christian Eriksen was resuscitated is vital in such circumstances. I can assure my noble friend that all new free schools and refurbished schools—the 100 schools we have announced—will have AEDs as standard, and we encourage all schools to have them as part of their first aid equipment. In health education at secondary school, students are taught how to use that equipment, as well as how to perform CPR.

**Lord Hunt of Kings Heath (Lab):** My Lords, given the noble Baroness's obvious commitment to school sports, can she tell me why, since 2010, 215 school playing fields were sold off? Will she put a stop to the practice?

**Baroness Berridge (Con):** My Lords, on school playing fields, there is a policy only to permit; the Secretary of State has to give consent. There is a variety of circumstances in which the policy allows playing fields to be sold, but there is a recommended allocation which every school should have, and the department benefits from the advice of the School Playing Fields Advisory Panel on any suggestion. But the policy is to retain land within the school estate wherever possible.

**Lord Caine (Con):** My Lords, I refer to my interests in the register. In my part of the country, the West Riding of Yorkshire, and across the whole of the north of England, rugby league plays a huge role in communities. But for most young people, especially those from less well-off backgrounds, entry into the sport is predominantly through schools. Can my noble friend therefore assure me that support for rugby league in schools remains a priority for the Government?

**Baroness Berridge (Con):** In the *School Sport and Activity Action Plan*, flexibility is given to schools to deliver what is appropriate for their communities. To develop that plan, which will be updated this year, we have a forum where the department takes advice. I can assure my noble friend that the Rugby Football League is part of that forum and makes its views clear to the department.

**The Lord Speaker (Lord McFall of Alcluith):** My Lords, the time allowed for this Question has elapsed.

## Net-Zero Emissions: Planning and Building Regulations *Question*

11.17 am

*Asked by Lord Whitty*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to align England's planning system and building regulations with (1) the net zero emissions target, and (2) other environmental goals.

**The Minister of State, Home Office and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (Lord Greenhalgh) (Con):** Through our current programme of planning reform we will ensure that the planning system continues to play an effective role in supporting progress towards net-zero emissions and delivering meaningful change for our environment. In addition, the future homes standard will ensure that new homes built from 2025 will produce at least 75% less carbon emissions than homes delivered under current regulations.

**Lord Whitty (Lab):** My Lords, I thank the Minister, but the fact is that the carbon assessments in the present system are not biting or binding. Construction and building use between them account for nearly 40% of carbon emissions. There are two things which might actually bite. First, in regeneration projects of housing or offices, demolish and rebuild means the release of embedded carbon, the carbon cost of rubble disposal and then the carbon cost of complete rebuild with carbon-intensive products such as steel, glass and concrete. Developers, local authority planners and architects should be required to first assess the relative carbon effects of the option of retrofitting to higher-grade efficiency standards. Secondly, building regulations should prescribe and enforce the use of energy efficiency and water-efficient systems and appliances in all new build and retrofit. Can the Minister include this in the reform of the planning system?

**Lord Greenhalgh (Con):** My Lords, I point out that the current approach is biting. We have achieved a growth in our economy of 78% while cutting emissions by 44% over the past three decades, which is something to celebrate and something that successive Governments can be proud of. We also recognise the benefits of retrofit ahead of demolition. Reuse and adaptation of existing buildings can make an important contribution to tackling climate change, and the National Planning Policy Framework already encourages this.

**The Lord Bishop of Oxford:** My Lords, I thank the Minister for his Answer. As your Lordships may be aware, the Church of England has declared a climate emergency and is aiming for net zero by 2030. In the diocese of Oxford, we are stewards of 470 parsonages and many other buildings. We have a lot of work to do, and a lot of investment is required to bring those

buildings to net zero. Two things are preventing us making progress; we clearly need to spread the work over a decade. The first is knowing the Government's plans for home heating and the second is the help and support that will be available from government for those changes. The system needs to be simple and sustainable and to carry confidence. When will we know the way forward?

**Lord Greenhalgh (Con):** Well, we are shaping the way forward through building regulations, and there will be further movement on that this year as we move towards the future homes standard in 2025. We welcome the fact that the Church is doing its bit to recognise the climate emergency. I point out that at least 74% of councils are also working towards that, but more will follow as we respond to the consultation following the publication of the White Paper.

**Baroness Eaton (Con):** Can my noble friend give an assurance that the planning system will continue to support and protect the environment?

**Lord Greenhalgh (Con):** I can give my noble friend that assurance. Existing environmental protections will continue to be upheld and mandatory biodiversity net gain will lead to wider environmental benefits.

**Baroness Hayman (CB):** My Lords, I declare my interests as set out in the register. In June this year, the Climate Change Committee recommended that all government policy, including planning decisions, should be subject to a net-zero test, yet last week the Government announced that they would not be reviewing the outdated airports national planning policy statement, so we risk the approval of infrastructure projects which clash with our climate and environmental commitments. Will the Government remedy that situation by including a net-zero test in the planning Bill?

**Lord Greenhalgh:** My Lords, I point out that our proposed outcomes-based system of integrated assessment will provide the Government with a mechanism to reflect their environmental ambitions, including wider net-zero commitments, in the planning process.

**The Lord Speaker (Lord McFall of Alcluith):** I call the noble Lord, Lord Berkeley. No? I call the noble Lord, Lord Oates.

**Lord Oates (LD):** My Lords, does the Minister recognise that the decision in 2016 to scrap the zero-carbon homes scheme was a catastrophic mistake, and can he tell us the amount of carbon that has been emitted from the 1 million substandard homes that have been built since that time?

**Lord Greenhalgh (Con):** My Lords, I point to the considerable progress we have made in cutting carbon emissions while building more homes. We have a plan to further reduce that. Our work on a full technical specification for the future homes standard has been accelerated, and we will consult on it in 2023. This

[LORD GREENHALGH]

year, we are introducing an interim uplift in Part L standards that will deliver a meaningful reduction in carbon emissions. This is the stepping stone to ensure that our future homes reduce their carbon footprint and we hit our targets.

**Baroness McIntosh of Pickering (Con):** My Lords, the water companies are committed to achieving net zero by 2030. To be able to do so, they need the tools to do the job. In ending the automatic right to connect, it is essential that sufficient sustainable drains are built. Will my noble friend ensure that the Government adopt the necessary building regulations to facilitate this?

**Lord Greenhalgh (Con):** My noble friend is an inveterate champion of sustainable urban drainage, which is far better than the use of grey infrastructure. Of course, we will reflect the desire to see sustainable planning and urban drainage solutions where practicable.

**Baroness Blake of Leeds (Lab):** My Lords, I declare my interests as set out in the register. Last month, the *i* newspaper reported that homes in the UK heat up twice as fast as the European average during heatwaves. As a result, demand for air conditioning units has increased, which in turn uses energy and increases emissions. Can the Minister outline what steps the Government are taking to address this, especially considering that temperatures are expected to rise in the coming decades?

**Lord Greenhalgh (Con):** My Lords, above all, we recognise the need to move away from fossil fuel heating to meet our commitment to net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. We are approaching that by continuing to set performance-based standards rather than mandating a solution. We are making progress to achieve that and we will continue to come up with ideas that drive progress in this area.

**Lord Bird (CB):** Could we also insist that the Government, as well as putting an enormous effort into zero-emissions reduction, look at all the industries that need to be supported so that they can counter the worst effects of what is happening with the climate?

**Lord Greenhalgh (Con):** I think we are well positioned to take that on board, because the number of people in low-carbon industries has increased considerably and we are seeing a reduction in emissions.

**Baroness Sheehan (LD):** My Lords, two Liberal Democrat Secretaries of State for Energy and Climate Change quadrupled our renewable electricity output, making us a world leader in offshore wind. With only 52 days to go before COP 26, why are the Government not saying a categorical no to projects such as the Cumbrian coal mine, which will move us backwards and torpedo our international credibility, not least in persuading China and India to stop their investment in coal?

**Lord Greenhalgh (Con):** My Lords, I am not surprised that the Cumbrian coal mine has been mentioned. As noble Lords will know, on 11 March the Secretary of State called in the planning application for a coking coal mine in Cumbria. The Secretary of State's published letter calling in the application set out his reasons for doing so. The application having been called in, a public inquiry overseen by an independent planning inspector is currently under way to consider the proposal. Once the inquiry is closed, the inspector will prepare a report and recommendation and the case will come before Ministers. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to comment on the details of the application.

**Lord Billimoria (CB):** My Lords, the built environment is responsible for around 43% of total carbon emissions and the planning system has a central role to play in addressing its environmental impact. As president of the CBI, I ask the Minister whether he agrees that it is absolutely essential to business that there is consistency and alignment across planning, net zero and building safety. Furthermore, although business supports the Government's vision for a streamlined, faster process for planning decisions, surely he would agree that more needs to be done and set out so that planning can incentivise greener homes, greener buildings and a low-carbon energy network.

**Lord Greenhalgh (Con):** My Lords, I would agree with what the noble Lord said: it is important to join up government and we are making progress in this area. How we intend to do this will be outlined imminently as we respond to the consultation on the *Planning for the Future* White Paper and set out our legislation in this Session.

**The Lord Speaker (Lord McFall of Alcluith):** My Lords, all supplementary questions have been asked and we now move to the next Question.

## Artists and Musicians: Working in Europe *Question*

11.28 am

Asked by **Baroness Kennedy of Cradley**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have (1) to reduce the red tape, and (2) to improve access, for artists and musicians based in the United Kingdom seeking to work in Europe.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Baroness Barran) (Con):** My Lords, the Government want our creative and cultural industries to be able to tour abroad easily. We have moved at pace to provide clarity. This includes publishing traveller summaries for individual member states and sector-specific landing pages to make relevant guidance easily accessible on GOV.UK. Nineteen member states have confirmed that they allow some visa-free and permit-free short-term tours, and we are actively encouraging the remaining member states to match the UK's generous rules.

**Baroness Kennedy of Cradley (Non-Affl):** My Lords, the lack of any deal for the creative industries in the Brexit negotiations has caused considerable anger, especially for the many thousands of British musicians who rely on touring Europe for a large part of their income. What work has been done specifically with the eight EU member states that the Government identified earlier in the summer that will require musicians to use visa and work permits to perform? Does the noble Baroness agree that the UK risks losing its dominant position in the European live music market if this situation remains unresolved?

**Baroness Barran (Con):** Formal approaches have been made by officials and DCMS to the eight states to which the noble Baroness refers. Ministers are also working closely with the sector to amplify each other's lobbying efforts. I cannot accept her final assertion that we will lose our place in the world, given the talent of our artists and the work that we are carrying out.

**Baroness Merron (Lab):** My Lords, in addition to the member states that do not allow visa-free touring for UK musicians and performers, there are numerous complications to access the countries that allow it. With more travel now taking place as Covid restrictions lift, will there be a transition fund to support our live entertainment sector similar to that provided to the fishing industry? Can the Minister indicate what assessment has been made of the implications for our UK music and performance sector resulting from the restrictive arrangements for touring in the EU?

**Baroness Barran (Con):** The noble Baroness is right to say that the situation is more complex than previously and that is why we remain disappointed that our initial ambitious approach was not accepted by the EU. She will be aware that we have given a total sum approaching £2 billion to support our creative sector during the pandemic. We are looking at a range of issues for further support and approaches, including proposals for a creative export office.

**Lord German (LD):** I declare my interest as chair of the trustees of the Parliament choir. Can the Minister distinguish between talks and negotiations? Talks are what are referred to in the government statement as speaking to countries, including clarifying what happens in the EU withdrawal agreement. However, negotiation is needed here to reduce the red tape and create a frictionless trade for those parts of our economy that are so strong in exporting our artistic examples. How many countries have the UK Government engaged with in negotiation, with the aim of removing red tape such as cabotage, carnets and permits currently strangling our industry?

**Baroness Barran (Con):** I am not sure whether I have the exact precision of the noble Lord's use of language but we have set out that we now have clear guidance around short-term touring with 19 member states. However, we are also focused on the outcomes and achieving ease of movement for our artists, including

existing successes such as clarifying, for example, that touring artists and support staff will not be double charged for social security contributions.

**Lord Cormack (Con):** My Lords, have not the Proms wonderfully illustrated this summer what an international language music is? Can we make it plain that we in this country are prepared to admit any European musicians, just as we welcomed Haydn and Mozart in the 18th century?

**Baroness Barran (Con):** My noble friend is absolutely right and already we have announced, for the reasons he set out, generous criteria for European musicians performing here.

**Lord Hannay of Chiswick (CB):** My Lords, does the Minister share the frustration that many in this House feel at not getting from the Government any estimate of the damage being done by the failure to negotiate a deal at the time we left the European Union? If she does, can she give us some figures, first, for the number of British musicians, artists and others who were able to travel unimpeded in 2019 and, secondly, for those who have been able to travel in 2021? Perhaps I may discourage reference to Covid because I have just spent some time in France, where its festivals were going at pace.

**Baroness Barran (Con):** I accept the noble Lord's reservation about referring to Covid but the most important reason for the damage done in the past 12 months has been Covid. As for bands, I am not sure about the noble Lord's musical tastes but I am informed that bands such as Jungle and Jake Bugg are already booking European tours; festivals are starting; we are both emerging; and established bands will be performing in, for example, Croatia and Spain.

**Lord Strasburger (LD) [V]:** My Lords, the creative arts sector was completely omitted from the EU trade deal, despite being the UK's largest sector after financial services. The Government should urgently be fixing this gaping hole in their trade agreement. Instead, they are overselling their meaningless mitigations that do little to reduce the catastrophic impact on British performers and companies. Can the Minister please explain why the Government are still painting the signs while the wheels are coming off?

**Baroness Barran (Con):** The Government are doing anything but painting the signs and I should like to put on record our thanks to our officials who have been working tirelessly to sort these issues out.

**Baroness Altmann (Con):** My Lords, the Society of London Theatre estimates that the live entertainment sector was worth more than £11 billion in gross value-added—four times as valuable as the US market for British artists. Given that the sector faces such significant new operational and financial burdens as a result of the trade and co-operation agreement, will my noble friend consider providing extra support, particularly for the smaller and emerging artists who are so

[BARONESS ALTMANN]  
disproportionately disadvantaged by the different red tape and work permit requirements that each country imposes?

**Baroness Barran (Con):** As my noble friend will have heard, we have already given unprecedented support approaching £2 billion to the sector. We are working tirelessly to make sure that the practical advice works for the sector and we thank it for its co-operation and feedback on that. We are exploring the options for a creative export office.

**The Earl of Clancarty (CB):** My Lords, does the Minister agree that it is clear from industry that any one of a number of concerns, whether visas, permits, carnets, CITES or cabotage, may by themselves make touring impossible through costs, red tape or, in the case of cabotage, the sheer impracticalities involved, as things stand? The department's August announcement was misleading. This matter urgently needs to be sorted out through further discussions with the EU.

**Baroness Barran (Con):** We are keen and our aim is to make touring completely accessible once more to all artists who wish to tour. Our belief is that the best way to do that is through bilateral agreements with individual member states, which is what we are doing.

**Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (GP):** My Lords, I follow on from the questions of the noble Lord, Lord German, and the noble Earl, Lord Clancarty. The noble Lord, Lord German, asked about talks and negotiations. I am not going to draw a line between them but will pick up on the point about cabotage. Are any active talks or negotiations—however they are described—going on, on either a bilateral or an EU-wide basis, to deal with the issue of cabotage?

**Baroness Barran (Con):** The noble Baroness will be aware that during our negotiations with the EU we pressed for a special derogation from the cabotage restrictions. We are working closely on the issue with the Department for Transport, which recently issued a call for evidence. We are working with the department and the sector to resolve the issue.

**The Lord Speaker (Lord McFall of Alcluth):** My Lords, the time allowed for this Question has elapsed. I call the noble Lord, Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale.

## EU Borders: Refugees from Afghanistan *Question*

11.39 am

*Asked by Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with the European Union about refugees from Afghanistan who may have a right to settle in the United Kingdom being processed through EU borders.

**Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale (Lab):** My Lords, I beg leave to ask the Question standing in my name on the Order Paper and, in doing so, draw attention to my entry in the Lords register.

**The Minister of State, Home Office (Baroness Williams of Trafford) (Con):** My Lords, the UK has committed to resettle up to 20,000 at-risk individuals through the Afghanistan citizens' resettlement scheme, in addition to relocating those who supported our Armed Forces or the UK Government in Afghanistan through the Afghan relocations and assistance policy, or ARAP. We continue to work with EU partners to co-ordinate our response to Afghanistan and support those most at risk.

**Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale (Lab):** My Lords, I am grateful for that response but it does not really answer the Question. We all know that, over recent years, significant numbers of potential Afghani refugees have come through Europe to relocate either in other European countries or, if they felt that they had a connection to here, here in the United Kingdom. I would be very concerned if there was any suggestion at all that the Government's more difficult relationship with the European Union might inhibit safe passage for those who have a right to come to the United Kingdom to move perhaps from the eastern European border to here in order to be processed suitably. Will the Government guarantee that there will be discussion with the European Union to ensure that not only are there processes in place in Pakistan and in neighbouring countries but, where potential Afghani refugees have come to the European Union in order then to move to the United Kingdom, there will be a system in place to allow them due consideration?

**Baroness Williams of Trafford (Con):** One thing I can assure the noble Lord of is that today the Home Secretary is meeting EU Commissioner Johansson and that migration, including the provision of safe and legal routes, is also being discussed today at the G7. An EU resettlement forum, also attended by the US and Canada, is also due to take place on 27 September. Finally, let me say to the noble Lord that anyone who makes a journey to Europe should claim asylum in the first safe country that they reach.

**Lord Kerr of Kinlochard (CB):** In our mid-August debate, I asked—without getting an answer then or since—about the fate of the 3,200 Afghan asylum seekers already here in this country. They are unable to work, they have to subsist on £5 a day and most of them must be traumatised by events back home. They are stuck in this limbo of a backlog of asylum cases that is now longer than ever before. Clearly, it is now as impractical to send them back as it would be immoral to do so. Clearly, they need to be given permission to stay. Clearly, their cases should now be approved en bloc. Can the Minister tell us when that will happen?

**Baroness Williams of Trafford (Con):** The noble Lord talked about a mid-August debate—I do not recall, but I may have misheard him. On asylum seekers, I certainly agree with him on several fronts,



including that asylum applications should be expedited as quickly as possible. However, I do not agree that we should grant asylum to people en bloc because we need to be very sure that the people we welcome here are not a threat to this country.

**Lord Dubs (Lab):** My Lords, in discussions with the European Union, are the Government seeking to distinguish between those Afghans who left after the Taliban takeover and those who fled the Taliban before the takeover and reached Europe some time ago? Surely they should all be treated equally.

**Baroness Williams of Trafford (Con):** Again, as I said to the noble Lord, Lord Kerr, every asylum application should be treated on its merit. If a person left Afghanistan some time ago, before the Taliban takeover, and their application is in the system, that application will be treated on a case-by-case basis. Clearly, others came through Operation Pitting and the ARAP scheme. I repeat: anyone who finds themselves in Europe should claim asylum in the first safe country that they reach.

**Lord Paddick (LD):** My Lords, can the Minister clarify two of the answers that she has just given? The Government maintain that all refugees must claim asylum in the first safe country they arrive in and that they will seek to return any asylum seeker who travels to the UK, particularly through EU countries that the Government consider safe. Is the Minister really saying that, if those Afghans who helped the British forces are unable to fly back to the UK and have to travel by land through EU countries, they will be refused entry to the UK because they travelled through EU countries?

**Baroness Williams of Trafford (Con):** Let me clarify: no, that is not the case at all. If anyone has been accepted through the ARAP scheme or Operation Pitting, they can go to a VAC or be processed in any country in the world, so I am absolutely not saying that. What I am saying is that if someone is not coming through a legal route, they should claim asylum in the first safe country that they reach.

**Lord Rosser (Lab):** I think that the answers to the last few questions show the difficulties since the Government have not yet outlined the full details of the Afghan citizens' resettlement scheme, confirmed when it will begin or confirmed how many people are expected to join it. We are seeing some of the difficulties arising from that. The Government's responsibility to Afghan citizens who have worked closely with our troops over the past 20 years extends beyond giving them the basic right to settle in the UK. The Home Office and other departments must surely support their integration into British life by beginning to help them to find permanent accommodation. In their Statement on Afghanistan this week, the Government said:

"Years before this episode, we began to fulfil our obligation to those Afghans who had helped us".—[*Official Report, Commons, 6/9/21; col. 21.*]

Can the Minister say how many evacuated Afghans are currently being housed in hotels and other temporary accommodation, and how many are now in permanent accommodation?

**Baroness Williams of Trafford (Con):** The noble Lord raises the issue that many of the people who have now arrived here are still in quarantine; many of the people whom we have flown here will be in quarantine until tomorrow, I think. He is absolutely right that it must be a prime consideration that those people can eventually be found permanent accommodation.

## Health and Social Care Statement

*The following Statement was made in the House of Commons on Tuesday 7 September.*

"Mr Speaker, with permission I will make a Statement on the Government's plans for health and social care. Our National Health Service is the pride of our whole United Kingdom, and all the more so after it has been there for us during the worst pandemic in a century, treating almost half a million patients, administering more than 88 million vaccines and saving countless lives. The inevitable consequence of this necessary and extraordinary action is that Covid has placed massive pressures on our NHS. As we stayed at home to protect the NHS, thousands of people did not come forward for the treatment they needed. Like those who suffered from Covid, these are all people we know: your aunt who needs a new hip, your neighbour who has problems with their heart and needs a pacemaker, or your friend at work who thinks that they should get that lump or cough checked out. So we must now help the NHS to recover, to be able to provide this much needed care to our constituents and the people we love, and we must provide the funding to do so now.

We not only have to pay for the operations and treatments that people decided not to have during the pandemic; we need to pay good wages for the 50,000 nurses who will enable that treatment and who can help us to tackle waiting lists that could otherwise expand to 13 million over the next few years. We now need to go beyond the record funding we have already provided, and we need to go further than the 48 hospitals and 50 million more GP appointments that are already in our plan. So today we are beginning the biggest catch-up programme in NHS history, tackling the Covid backlogs by increasing hospital capacity to 110% and enabling 9 million more appointments, scans and operations. As a result, while waiting lists will get worse before they get better, the NHS will aim to be treating around 30% more elective patients by 2024-25 than it was before Covid.

We will also fix the long-term problems of health and social care that have been so cruelly exposed by Covid. The Labour Party certainly failed to tackle them. But having spent £407 billion or more to support lives and livelihoods throughout the pandemic—from furlough to vaccines—it would be wrong for me to say that we can pay for this recovery without taking the difficult but responsible decisions about how we finance

[BARONESS WILLIAMS OF TRAFFORD]

it. It would be irresponsible to meet the costs of this permanent additional investment in health and social care from higher borrowing and higher debt.

So from next April we will create a new UK-wide 1.25% health and social care levy on earned income, hypothecated in law to health and social care, with dividends rates increasing by the same amount. This will raise almost £36 billion over the next three years, with money from the levy going directly to health and social care across the whole of our United Kingdom. This will not pay for pay awards for middle management; it will go straight to the front line at a time when we need to get more out of our health and social care system than ever before. It will enable radical innovation to improve the speed and quality of care, including better screening equipment to diagnose serious diseases such as cancer more quickly; designated surgical facilities so that non-urgent patients are no longer competing with A&E; faster GP access to specialists, so people do not have to wait months to see someone in hospital to find out whether something is wrong; and new digital technology so that doctors can monitor patients remotely in their homes.

We will do all this in a way that is right, reasonable and fair. Some will ask why we do not increase income tax or capital gains tax instead, but income tax is not paid by businesses, so the whole burden would fall on individuals, roughly doubling the amount that a basic rate taxpayer could expect to pay, and the total revenue from capital gains tax amounts to less than £9 billion this year. Instead, our new levy will share the cost between individuals and businesses, and everyone will contribute according to their means, including those above state pension age. So those who earn more will pay more, and because we are also increasing dividends tax rates, we will be asking better-off business owners and investors to make a fair contribution too. In fact, the highest-earning 14% will pay around half the revenues. No one earning less than £9,568 will pay a penny, and the majority of small businesses will be protected, with 40% of all businesses paying nothing at all.

Although Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have their own systems, we will direct money raised through the levy to their health and social care services. In total, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will benefit from an extra £2.2 billion a year and, as this is about 15% more than they will contribute through the levy, it will create a union dividend worth £300 million.

However, we cannot just put more money in; we need reform and change. We need to build back better from Covid. When the Covid storm broke last year, 30,000 hospital beds in England were occupied by people who could have been better cared for elsewhere and who wanted to be better cared for elsewhere. That is 30,000 out of 100,000 hospital beds in our NHS, costing billions. Those beds cannot be used by people needing cancer care or hip operations, making it harder than ever to deal with the growing backlog in our NHS.

Too often, people were in hospital beds because they or their relatives were worried about the cost of care in a residential home, and that same fear kept

many others at home without any care at all. This anxiety affects millions of people up and down the country: the fear that a condition such as dementia, one of nature's bolts from the blue, could lead to the total liquidation of their assets, their lifetime savings and their home—the loss of everything, however great or small, they might otherwise pass on to their children—while sufferers from other diseases, who have to be in hospital for the majority of their treatment, have their care paid for in full by the NHS.

Governments have ducked this problem for decades. Parliament even voted to fix it, yet that 30,000 figure is an indictment of the failure to do so. There can be no more dither and delay. We know we cannot rely solely on private insurance because demand would be too low for insurers to offer an affordable price, and a universal system of free care for all would be needlessly expensive when those who can afford to contribute to their care should do so.

Instead, the state should target its help at protecting people against the catastrophic fear of losing everything to pay for the cost of their care, and that is what this Government will do. We are setting a limit on what people can be asked to pay, and we will be working with the financial services industry to innovate and to help people insure themselves against expenditure up to that limit.

Wherever you live, whatever your age, your income or your condition, from October 2023 no one starting care will pay more than £86,000 over their lifetime, and no one with assets of less than £20,000 will have to make any contribution from their savings or housing wealth—up from £14,000 today. Meanwhile, anyone with assets between £20,000 and £100,000 will be eligible for some means-tested support. This new upper capital limit of £100,000 is more than four times the current limit, helping many more people with modest assets.

As we fix this long-term, long-standing problem in social care, we will also address the fears that many have about how their loved ones will be looked after by investing in the quality of care, in carers themselves, and by integrating health and care in England so that older people and disabled people are cared for better, with dignity and in the right setting. My right honourable friend the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care will be bringing forward a White Paper on integration later this year.

You can't fix the Covid backlogs without giving the NHS the money it needs; you can't fix the NHS without fixing social care; you can't fix social care without removing the fear of losing everything to pay for social care; and you can't fix health and social care without long-term reform. The plan that this Government are setting out today—the plan I am setting out today—will fix all of those problems together. Of course, no Conservative Government ever want to raise taxes, and I will be honest with the House: I accept that this breaks a manifesto commitment, which is not something I do lightly, but a global pandemic was in no one's manifesto. I think that the people of this country understand that in their bones and can see the enormous steps this Government and the Treasury have taken.

After all the extraordinary actions that have been taken to protect lives and livelihoods over the last 18 months, this is the right, reasonable and fair approach, enabling our amazing NHS to come back strongly from the crisis; tackling the Covid backlogs; funding our nurses; making sure that people get the care and treatment they need, in the right place, at the right time; and ending a chronic and unfair anxiety for millions of people and their families up and down this country. I commend this Statement to the House.”

11.46 am

**Baroness Smith of Basildon (Lab):** My Lords, yesterday we saw in the House of Commons quite an extraordinary sight. The very day after an outlined policy announcement on social care, the Government rushed through a vote for a 10% increase in national insurance contributions that will not even be used for that purpose until 2023.

There is a no doubt that addressing social care is a critical and complex issue, and one that is expensive to address. However, what we heard in the Prime Minister's Statement was not the oven-ready plan he promised two years ago. The danger for the Prime Minister—and, unfortunately, for the country—is that this now feels like an impetuous decision made for political reasons when there are so many who are willing to work across parties, professions and interests to find a consensual way forward. Despite the usual hyperbole, we did not hear a plan for dealing with a system crumbling under strain; nor did we hear a guarantee that this money will go into social care.

Despite this measure being flagged as a social care policy, the Prime Minister announced that, for at least the next three years, the bulk of the money raised by the levy will be spent on the NHS to “clear the waiting list backlog”. Yet the Secretary of State for Health seemed very uncertain that this would work. Waiting lists were already at record highs even before the pandemic struck, and our health and social care services had been left weakened and exposed when the virus hit.

Where would that leave both the NHS and social care services? To me, this feels just a bit too close to the Prime Minister's Brexit bus tactics. Remember: Brexit was going to deliver £350 million a week to the National Health Service. Already, care sector experts and leaders are critical of using the NHS as a political fig leaf to break a manifesto commitment and make the introduction of a deeply controversial tax palatable, as well as using it to cover up many mismanagements and misjudgments during the handling of the pandemic. If the Prime Minister's tactic of a rushed vote was to avoid scrutiny, it has failed. On an issue of this magnitude, scrutiny is essential. It is not just about holding the Government to account; it is about trying to get the best policy outcomes.

At the election, the Government promised to ensure that no one needing care would have to sell their home to pay for it. Can the Minister repeat that commitment today? The cap benefits those who live in the most expensive parts of the country or have the most expensive houses, but someone who has a house worth £100,000, for example, will still have to pay £86,000 for their care, even with the cap. That cap does not include the

associated care home living costs, which are not covered by the cap and often far exceed the personal care costs of residential care.

The Chancellor's explanation yesterday, which I hope that Minister will not attempt today, was that people needing to raise money for care need not sell their homes while they are still alive because they can get a loan that is then repaid when their estate is sold after their death. That is nothing new. Deferred payments were already available. Did anyone really think that this was what the Government's promise of not selling homes meant?

I think that most people understand that good services cost money, but it is the unfairness of these tax rises that is wrong, especially with the lack of a proper plan or guarantees. Two and a half million working families face a double whammy: a national insurance tax rise and a £1,000 per year universal credit cut which even the Government's own analysis has said will have a catastrophic impact. So many of those who kept us going through the pandemic—the medical teams, the care workers, the shop workers, the cleaners, some of the lowest paid workers—will be paying more, but they are the ones who will benefit the least.

The Government have not listened to warnings or proposed alternatives for supporting social care, nor have they addressed the rising demand. Conservative Governments in the years prior to the pandemic have cut the social care budget by £8 billion. At present nearly 300,000 people are on local authority waiting lists for adult social care services in England because of the funding pressures and delays in assessments for social workers. Yet we heard absolutely nothing yesterday about the role of local government. It would be helpful if the Minister could say how much funding will be provided to support local government in delivering social care. She must understand that despite being on the front line, it is concerned that the NHS will absorb the extra money and that the social care allocation will be swallowed up by the cap costs.

The Association of Directors of Adult Social Services has said that a chronic shortage of care workers means that more than one in 10 people assessed as needing care in their own homes were instead offered care in residential facilities, often against their own wishes. This is a stark reminder of why we need the investment now. A well-thought-out plan would, as we have repeatedly said, involve a real reform of services that allows people who wish to do so to stay in their homes for longer. There is nothing in the Prime Minister's Statement about how we use technology, how we improve home adaptations, how we build and adapt more lifetime homes and how we support care workers. Can the Minister tell us whether there has been any engagement with charities and campaigners who deal with these issues every day of their lives, with the national forum, with policy makers, with service users or with carers?

It is a huge frustration that the long-promised White Paper on reforming social care and integrating it with healthcare has again been kicked into the long grass. All Ministers have said is that it will be published later this year. Would it not have been logical—a response to this would be appreciated—to publish the

[BARONESS SMITH OF BASILDON]

White Paper, set a timetable to consult and then discuss and engage in order to provide a transformative plan that includes how we support an army of unpaid family carers, how we ensure that working-age adults with disabilities have more control over their lives and how we tackle the workforce crisis and support care workers? Instead, we have an unfair funding plan, no reforms and no guarantees.

None of us underestimates the scale of the challenge this issue presents in funding and providing the proper services the country needs. Unfortunately, the fear now is that in the Government's rush, they have missed that opportunity to seize the real prize for the British people. There is a better way to do this.

**Lord Newby (LD):** My Lords, according to the Prime Minister, the package of proposals in this Statement represents

“a project of our era equivalent to the creation of the NHS and the welfare state.”

How, then, do the proposals measure up to this challenging claim?

Taking the spending side first, the Statement covers three separate but related areas. First, there is the implementation, at last, of something like the Dilnot proposals for placing a cap on the contribution that individuals need to make towards their social care. This principle was legislated for by the coalition in 2014 and its implementation is long overdue. Secondly, the Government are making a major investment of about £10 billion per annum for the next three years in the NHS to deal with the backlog of elective procedures. Undoubtedly this is necessary, but not necessarily sufficient. Yesterday, the Prime Minister failed to give any assurances about the rate at which the backlog of procedures would be reduced. Can the Minister today give any further indication of timescale on this?

Thirdly, the Government claim to be making more resources available to state-funded social care beyond Dilnot. This is arguably the most pressing problem of all, with 112,000 vacancies, massive staff turnover rates and providers teetering on the edge of financial viability. Sadly, the Statement was almost silent on the substance. Instead, all details about the future of social care are yet again pushed back into the long-promised White Paper, for which no publication date has been set, as the noble Baroness pointed out. Can the Minister confirm that there will be no immediate increase at all in funds available for social care, not a penny? If so, how does she expect care homes and domiciliary care providers to survive over the coming months? Over the whole three-year period covered by the Statement, exactly how much additional central government funding will flow into adult social care provision unrelated to the Dilnot reforms, bearing in mind that the current annual cash shortfall is somewhere in the range of £6 billion to £14 billion?

After the first three years, the proceeds of the levy are supposed to go increasingly towards social care. However, given that, on the basis of previous experience, overall NHS spending in future is likely to be greater than that currently budgeted for, there will undoubtedly be pressure for this additional level of NHS funding to

continue, even after the pandemic catch-up is more or less complete. What assurance can the Government give that over the medium term, the bulk of the revenue raised by the levy will go to social care, as promised? When later this year does the Minister expect the White Paper to be produced? We have heard so many assurances that it is almost here, nearly here or will soon be here. We are a bit sceptical.

The Government document states that they want to “make care work a more rewarding vocation”.

How will these announcements allow care providers and local authorities to increase the wages of the many thousands of care workers stuck on zero-hours contracts and the minimum wage? Do the Government really believe that offering a few training courses will solve the recruitment and retention problem in this sector? The Government say that they will

“ensure that the 5.4 million unpaid carers have the support and respite that they need”.

How much additional funding over the next three years will now be available to fulfil this promise?

The Government say that they will move towards equalising the amount paid by self-funders and those funded by local authorities. Do they plan to do this by reducing the amount paid by self-funders or by increasing the amount paid by local authorities? If it is the latter, where will the money come from?

I turn to the new hypothecated health and social care levy. Many people are indignant that a major manifesto promise has been broken, but why are they surprised? For this Prime Minister, a promise is not a binding commitment; it is simply a holding position, until it becomes easier to do something else. More surprising than a broken promise is that the Treasury has agreed to introduce a hypothecated tax—something that it normally never countenances, because of all the inflexibilities that it brings. Why has a new, unprecedented, hypothecated tax been introduced here? The obvious reason is that the Government know that they will have ever-growing demands for future spending in health and social care, for which tax rises will be required, and they see this tax as a vehicle for doing that in future. Can the noble Baroness confirm that, for this Parliament at least, there will be no more increases in the levy?

All in all, does this Statement amount—as the Prime Minister claims—to the equivalent for our age as the creation of the NHS and the welfare state? For those trying to run a care home, act as an unpaid carer or subsist on a minimum income, such a boast will ring hollow. Beveridge, Attlee and Bevan must be turning in their graves.

**The Lord Privy Seal (Baroness Evans of Bowes Park) (Con):** I thank the noble Lord and the noble Baroness for their comments, but I am slightly surprised that they have not welcomed our announcement of a new £36 billion package to help tackle NHS backlogs, reform adult social care and bring the health and social care system together on a long-term, sustainable footing. That is a hugely significant amount of money to help our precious NHS and to solve a problem that all across this House have acknowledged for many years.

We have indeed held many discussions throughout the year with leading members of the sector, specifically on reform, and will of course continue to do so. We have committed to spending an additional £5.6 billion on social care in England, across the next three years. As the noble Baroness rightly says, the deferred payments agreement remains in existence to enable people to use the value of their home, if they need to, without selling it. Both the noble Baroness and the noble Lord asked why this involves national insurance. To raise the sums needed for this significant investment in the NHS and to reform social care, only a broad-based tax, such as VAT, income tax or NICs, is able to do so. NICs already ring-fence funds for the NHS and successive Governments have increased it, so there is precedent for our belief that this is the best and fairest way.

The noble Lord is absolutely right: the levy will be ring-fenced for health and social care. HMRC will send funds to the health bodies in all four nations of the UK and, by 2023, to social care funding bodies, such as MHCLG, which will deliver it through local authorities. As I say, part of the reason for using NICs is that the more you earn, the more you pay. I am sure noble Lords are aware that a typical base-rate taxpayer, earning £24,100, will contribute roughly £180 a year, whereas a typical higher-rate taxpayer, earning £67,100, will contribute £715 a year. The highest-earning 14% of people will pay around half the revenues. The 6.2 million lowest earners will be kept out of the levy. The use of NICs also means that the cost of the levy will be shared between individuals and businesses; however, 40% of all businesses will pay nothing extra.

The noble Lord asked about tackling the backlog in the NHS. We will spend £2 billion this year, which is double our previous commitment to tackle the backlog. In addition, we plan to spend more than £8 billion in the following three years, from 2022-23 to 2024-25. On the waiting list, we do not know how many people who did not come forward for help from the NHS during the pandemic will now seek treatment, so plucking numbers out of the air about the size of the waiting list is not helpful. But I can certainly assure both the noble Lord and the noble Baroness that the funding announced will deliver 9 million more checks, scans and procedures until 2024-25. This is a significant investment and, over the next three years, will be the biggest catch-up programme in NHS history.

The noble Baroness asked about local government. She is aware that, in 2021-22, we have provided councils with access to over £1 billion of additional funding for social care, on top of the significant funding provided to help the sector. In the spending review, we are also committed to ensuring that local authorities have access to sustainable funding for core budgets. This announcement includes funding to enable local authorities to move towards paying providers a fair rate for care, which should drive up the quality of adult social care services, improve workforce conditions and increase investment. The funding package covers the costs to local government of implementing the charging reforms, including the cap, the increased capital limit moving towards paying a fair rate for care, which I just mentioned, and associated implementation costs.

The noble Lord asked about self-funders. As he knows, under the current system, individuals who fund their care often pay more than individuals who are funded through their local authority for equivalent care. Under this new system, self-funders will have a choice to ask their local authority to commission their care on their behalf, which means that individuals fully funding their own care could choose to benefit from the market power of local authorities. We will be publishing a consultation document on the details of these proposals next month.

On other issues, we are investing more in supported housing and exploring other innovative housing solutions to support more people to live independently, as the noble Baroness said. As part of the additional £5.4 billion of investment announced, we will fund an extension to the established disabled facilities grant to enable more people to live independently in their own homes.

On the integration work, the House will be looking at the Health and Care Bill shortly, before Christmas, when it begins its passage through this House. That is laying the groundwork for reform, and we will see an improved oversight of how social care is commissioned and delivered. It will facilitate a greater integration between health and care services, on which these reforms build. As we have said, we will work further with the sector and more broadly to coproduce a comprehensive national plan for supporting and enabling integration between health and social care, but I am afraid that I cannot go any further than saying that the White Paper will be published later this year.

Finally, the social care workforce has worked incredibly during this pandemic. Our investment of £500 million across three years will deliver new qualifications, progression pathways and well-being and mental health support, which is critical. We will continue to support the fantastic 5.4 million carers to have the support, advice and respite they need.

**Lord Ashton of Hyde (Con):** I remind noble Lords that there will no doubt be lots of questions for the Leader, but the *Companion* is clear that they should be brief. This should not be the occasion for a separate debate, which I am sure will come later.

12.07 pm

**Lord Hunt of Kings Heath (Lab):** My Lords, I shall be brief—

**The Deputy Speaker (Lord Brougham and Vaux) (Con):** The noble Baroness, Lady Brinton, is taking part remotely and I invite her to speak.

**Baroness Brinton (LD) [V]:** I declare my interest as a vice-president of the Local Government Association. My noble friend Lord Newby asked, but the noble Baroness did not answer, so I ask again whether she will give an undertaking from the Dispatch Box to guarantee that social care will receive the bulk of the revenue raised by the levy, in the medium term, regardless of whether the NHS has completed the backlog of waiting lists. Otherwise, this is no reform to social care at all, however delayed.

[BARONESS BRINTON]

These proposals do nothing to help the current problems in the social care sector. The noble Baroness referred to the extra £1 billion to local government, but all the experts say a minimum of £4 billion a year is needed to help solve them. Can the Minister confirm that, given the current severe crisis in staffing and funding in our care homes, there will be funding on top of that £1 billion at least to start to remedy the problems in social care?

**Baroness Evans of Bowes Park (Con):** As I said in my opening remarks, we are committed to spending an additional £5.4 billion across the next three years. This will end the risk of unpredictable care costs and include at least £500 million to support the social care workforce.

**Lord Hunt of Kings Heath (Lab):** My Lords, can I ask the noble Baroness about the people currently paying their way in care homes? Are they to get no credit whatsoever for the fees they pay up to October 2023? Is it not grossly unfair if the clock starts only when we reach that point?

**Baroness Evans of Bowes Park (Con):** This has been an intractable issue. If all parties had managed to deal with it better, people in the situation the noble Lord mentioned—for whom we have a lot of sympathy—would have been helped. Unfortunately, that is not the case. We have announced a package that will begin with the new cap in October 2023.

**Lord Lansley (Con):** My Lords, I very much welcome the additional resources for the NHS and social care, but will the Government increase and accelerate the resources for social care? Everyone in the NHS knows that only by increasing the capacity in local authority-funded social care can they relieve the pressures on the NHS. The House will recall that we legislated in the Care Act 2014 for a Dilnot-style plan. It is now more than 10 years since he submitted that plan to me as Secretary of State. We should bring it into force, and we can and should do so by April 2022.

**Baroness Evans of Bowes Park (Con):** I am afraid I have already set out the timescale on which we are doing this. This is a complex area and, as I said, the new cap will come in in October 2023. As I said, the funding in this package covers the cost to local government of implementing the charging reforms, including the cap, the increased capital limit moving towards paying a fair rate for care and the associated implementation costs. We will be working closely with local authorities to make sure that we can implement this to the benefit of all our citizens.

**Baroness Walmsley (LD):** My Lords, can the noble Baroness say how much additional employers' NICs will be paid by struggling care home providers in respect of their staff? Could that not be sufficient to make them go under?

**Baroness Evans of Bowes Park (Con):** I do not believe so, no. As we have said, the levy will be shared between individuals and business. The largest 1% of firms will pay around 70% of the total business contributions, with the smallest 40% paying nothing extra.

**Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick (Non-Aff):** My Lords, in Northern Ireland the money given directly through Barnett consequential normally goes into the central pot in the Department of Finance. There is money with this new health and social care tax because it is a UK-wide tax, so what guarantees can the Minister give your Lordships' House that the money allocated to Northern Ireland will go directly to the health and social care budget?

**Baroness Evans of Bowes Park (Con):** That is exactly what we intend to happen. In fact, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will benefit from around 15% more than is generated for their residents, which will be equivalent to around £300 million every year on average. As a total, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will benefit from an additional £2.2 billion each year on average. We intend to put the money directly into the health services across the nations, as the noble Baroness said.

**Lord Lipsey (Lab):** My Lords, as I think I was the first person to propose a cap on care costs in the minority report to the royal commission in 1999, it would be churlish of me not to welcome the fact we are now getting one, albeit a mere 22 years after I first proposed it. It is disappointing that the Government have concentrated their sole attention, practically, on government, state-funded—which means national insurance-funded—care and have apparently paid no attention whatever to the great role that the private sector can play in helping richer people to afford their care in later years.

**Baroness Evans of Bowes Park (Con):** The noble Lord will be well aware that historically there has been very low demand for social care insurance products and insurers have actually withdrawn products from the market. We believe that there will now be certainty about costs faced by individuals. We hope that more financial products will come on to the market to enable individuals to plan for their future care needs. We intend to work with the financial services industry to innovate and help people insure themselves against expenditure up to the limits.

**Lord Forsyth of Drumlean (Con):** My Lords, of course everyone welcomes the extra money for the health service. The last big additional sum given to the health service was some £20 billion, which is more than the entire spending on social care. Social care is in immediate crisis; it needs the money now. There are 1.5 million people not getting the care they need and care has been rationed by local authorities that have not got the costs. How will the Government cope with this? The importance of having a settlement for local government to deal with that is there. How do the

Government expect this money to get to social care in three years' time, given what we know will be the pressures on the National Health Service? How will that money be ring-fenced? If it is not, the most vulnerable people in our country—that includes half the budget going to people of working age—will suffer.

**Baroness Evans of Bowes Park (Con):** I can certainly reassure my noble friend that the levy will be specifically ring-fenced for health and social care. As I said, HMRC will send funds to the health bodies in all four nations of the UK and by 2023 to social care funding bodies such as MHCLG, which will deliver through local authorities. In the up-and-coming three years, £5.4 billion will be provided to support social care.

**Lord Shipley (LD):** My Lords, I remind the House of my registered interests. In 2016, the Government introduced the social care precept and council tax payers have had to pay up to 15% more over the past five years than they otherwise would have done. Council tax is a regressive tax, so would the Minister please confirm that this practice of increasing council tax bills will now stop as a result of this new funding proposal?

**Baroness Evans of Bowes Park (Con):** I can certainly say to the noble Lord, as I again said in my opening remarks, that we are committed to ensuring that local authorities have access to sustainable funding for core budgets and we will do so in the spending review.

**Lord Walney (Non-Aff):** My Lords, how are the Government factoring into the calculations the urgent need for an increase in the basic pay of care workers to increase the quality and availability of care?

**Baroness Evans of Bowes Park (Con):** Obviously the noble Lord will know that the vast majority of the workforce is employed privately. Local authorities, as part of the fair rate for social care, will be working with that sector to help improve conditions and pay rates as part of the overall involvement further in the system.

**Baroness Manzoor (Con):** My Lords, I very much welcome this announcement. It is a very pragmatic way forward in the circumstances we find ourselves in, particularly when one looks at the past 18 months. Health inequalities have increased significantly and this will go some way to addressing that. However, it is imperative that one looks at the relationship between acute care and social care. Could my noble friend assure me that this will be looked at immediately, with a view to these budget allocations being ring-fenced accordingly?

**Baroness Evans of Bowes Park (Con):** I thank my noble friend. As she will well know, the Health and Care Bill, which will come to your Lordships' House shortly, lays the groundwork for that. We are certainly doing much more work on integration. As I said, a White Paper will be published this year. We will be looking at creating the right incentives for integration

and prevention, as well as working with the NHS—both hospitals and primary care—social care providers and other partners to ensure that they are working to deliver effective care in people's homes and communities.

**Lord Scriven (LD):** My Lords, the plan for health and social care says that a

“workforce that is rewarded and feels valued is essential for high quality care”.

The Care Workers Charity, which provides cash support for care workers in desperate financial need, paid out more than £2.2 million last year. How will the Government's plan deal with this pay crisis in social care within the next three years?

**Baroness Evans of Bowes Park (Con):** As I mentioned to a noble Lord earlier, the vast majority of care workers are employed by private sector providers, which ultimately set their pay, but local authorities are going to work with them to determine a fair rate of pay based on local market conditions. This investment of £500 million across three years will deliver new qualifications, progression pathways, and new well-being and mental health support. We are going to provide support to professionalise and develop the workforce by providing hundreds of thousands of training places and certifications for care workers, so we are putting in a lot of investment. We understand the importance of the social care workforce and the fantastic job it has done, particularly in the incredibly difficult times of the pandemic.

**Baroness Blake of Leeds (Lab):** My Lords, I declare my interests as set out in the register. As the leader of the second-largest metropolitan local authority in the country until earlier this year, I ask the Leader of the House what direct conversations she has had with leaders in the sector, particularly from a local government perspective. If she is not able to tell me directly who she has spoken to, I offer my services to arrange for her to come and visit the leaders in the sector, so that she can fully understand the pressures they have been under over the last several years—before Covid—and what they have gone through during the pandemic to protect the most vulnerable in our society. I concur that without the necessary investment in local government, the National Health Service will fall over; it will be on its knees. It is just not good enough to ignore the needs of local government to provide the services that the most vulnerable people deserve. It is not just older people but all age groups.

**Baroness Evans of Bowes Park (Con):** I completely recognise the passion the noble Baroness has spoken with, and I thank her for all her work. I would absolutely be happy to take her up on her offer and listen and talk to people. The most useful person for people to talk to is probably the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government. He will have had a huge number of conversations about this, and they will be ongoing. I thank the noble Baroness for her offer and look forward to taking it up.

**Baroness Altmann (Con):** My Lords, I am sorry to say that I cannot see how this solves the social care crisis. Can my noble friend explain how this extra money will actually address the discrimination that there is against those who have dementia, relative to those who have cancer, how it will improve staffing levels or the level of pay, and how the Government have decided that nothing needs to be contributed out of pensions income or buy-to-let income to something that is clearly a social insurance need across the economy?

**Baroness Evans of Bowes Park (Con):** What will help the people my noble friend has talked about is the fact that, under these plans, we will now cover all care costs for anyone with assets under £20,000, which is up from the current level of £14,000. Importantly, she will know that, currently, anyone with assets over £23,350 faces paying their care costs in full. The new £100,000 limit is four times higher than that, which means that many thousands of people will now be eligible for further state support under our plans.

**Lord Grocott (Lab):** What significance should the House attach to promises made by the Prime Minister?

**Baroness Evans of Bowes Park (Con):** I am sure the noble Lord will make his own judgment on that. I repeat that the Prime Minister was perfectly honest about it in his Statement. He said that

“no Conservative government ever want to raise taxes”,—[*Official Report*, Commons, 7/9/21; col. 155.]

which is absolutely true, but he wanted to be honest and accept that this will break a manifesto commitment. I am sure that even the noble Lord would agree that, having provided more than £400 billion of support for jobs and livelihoods, businesses and public services at the start of the pandemic, we have particular challenges around our public finances. And that was not in our manifesto.

**Lord Cormack (Con):** My Lords, do not the questions asked in the last 20 minutes or so illustrate the need for a thorough debate in your Lordships’ House? I say with great respect to my noble friend that the point raised by my noble friend Lord Forsyth needs addressing in detail. Can she give the House an assurance that, when we come back in October, an early, full-day debate will be devoted to these issues?

**Baroness Evans of Bowes Park (Con):** I can say to my noble friend that the Health and Care Bill will come to this House when we come back, which will allow a lot of debate on this subject matter. He will be pleased to know that, now we have returned, we have many more opportunities for Back-Benchers to put down the titles of debates they would like to bring before the House. I am sure he will take advantage of that.

**Baroness Barker (LD):** My Lords, can the Leader of the House explain why employers in freeports are exempt from paying the levy for some employees?

**Baroness Evans of Bowes Park (Con):** I am afraid I will have to get back to the noble Baroness on that.

**Lord Foulkes of Cumnock (Lab Co-op):** My Lords, under cover of this announcement, the Government broke another manifesto promise by abandoning the triple lock on pensions. With the costs of energy and food projected to rise substantially, how are pensioners who depend on the basic pension going to survive?

**Baroness Evans of Bowes Park (Con):** I am sure the noble Lord will understand that, given the statistical anomaly that has led to average wage growth being 8%, it is just not fair to raise pensions by this figure. For one year only we are moving to a double lock and increasing pensions by the higher of inflation or 2.5%. We will then return to the triple lock. Since the triple lock was put in place in 2011, the state pension has increased by 3% a year; it is now at its highest level relative to earnings for 34 years. The number of pensioners in absolute poverty has fallen by more than 200,000 in the last decade. I do not dispute that this will impact some people, but I think that, for one year, in the light of everything the country has gone through, it is fair and people will agree with it.

**Lord Brownlow of Shurlock Row (Con):** My Lords, clearly many people welcome the hypothecated levy and the intended ring-fencing of those resources, but can my noble friend the Leader assure me that these resources will not end up being more waste in the NHS and social care, of which there clearly is too much today?

**Baroness Evans of Bowes Park (Con):** My noble friend is certainly right; this is a huge amount of investment going to where it is greatly needed. But he is absolutely right that, seeing as taxpayers—all of us—are being asked to contribute more, it is also reasonable to expect health and social care providers to ensure the money is well spent. We will work with them to ensure that happens.

**Lord Campbell of Pittenweem (LD):** My Lords, I wonder whether the Leader of the House can help me with some puzzlement. As I understand it, the Government have produced what they regard as a solution to the problem of social care, but later this year the Government will produce a White Paper on the topic of social care. Can she tell us of any previous occasion when any Government have produced the solution before they have produced the White Paper? These are the politics of Lewis Carroll.

**Baroness Evans of Bowes Park (Con):** As I have said, there will be consultation on the detail of the local authority elements and further White Papers on integration. This is a long-running and complex programme, and we will continue to talk to people and consult as we continue developing it.

**Baroness Wheatcroft (CB):** My Lords, the noble Baroness, Lady Altmann, asked why income from pensions and buy-to-let property was not covered by these proposals. I wonder whether the Leader can answer that.



**Baroness Evans of Bowes Park (Con):** I said at the outset that only a broad-based tax such as VAT, income tax or NICs could raise the sums needed for this kind of investment, and we believe that NICs is the fairest way to do that.

**Baroness McIntosh of Pickering (Con):** My Lords, historically, no Government have imposed a percentage increase on national insurance contributions because it hits the very people—the NHS and local government—who are delivering health and social care. For what reason have the Government changed the position on this?

**Baroness Evans of Bowes Park (Con):** As I have said, the reason we went to NICs is that we believe that is the fairest, as the higher your earnings, the more you contribute; I gave some figures to show that. As I said, the highest-earning 14% of people will pay around half of revenues, and 6.2 million of the lowest earners will be kept out of the levy.

## Standards in Public Life

### *Motion to Take Note*

12.28 pm

*Moved by Lord Blunkett*

That this House takes note of standards in public life.

**Lord Blunkett (Lab):** My Lords, I am very pleased to be able to introduce this important debate on standards in public life. There are no saints in your Lordships' House, nor down the Corridor. If there were they would not declare it, on the grounds that they were saints. I am no exception, so I want to make it clear that I would not be in your Lordships' House if the noble Lord, Lord O'Donnell, in his capacity as the Cabinet Secretary, had not undertaken a thorough investigation into allegations against me. Therefore, procedures and processes are really critical to getting this right, and to the debate today.

On Monday evening the noble Lord, Lord True, who is winding up this debate, talked about people being careful not to throw stones when they live in glass houses—but you see we are in a glass house. We are accountable and on the public platform, whether as Peers, Members of Parliament or those in senior positions in public life outside. That is why this debate is so important for that transparency that makes it possible for people to trust those in whom they have placed trust.

Thirty years ago the noble Lord, Lord Hennessy, who I hope is recovering from his illness, floated the “good chap” theory. This goes back to Renaissance civic virtue, which I fear was challenged by Machiavelli; in other words, none of us is going to avoid making mistakes at some point in our lives, and therefore we need to countervail the overriding issue of power with the procedures and practices that make people trust us.

I was thinking of avoiding talking about the debates on 17 June, 1 July and Monday this week and at Questions yesterday, but I have to draw attention to a couple of points that were made on Monday evening, when in his short intervention the noble Lord, Lord Wallace, reminded us of Lord Acton and how absolute power corrupts absolutely. The noble Baroness, Lady Noakes, as she did in her speech on 18 August, gave us an insight into one part of—I stress only one part—of the Conservative Party when she suggested, and I hope I am not maligning her, that all power, once a party is elected, should lie with the Prime Minister. This is a complete misunderstanding of our constitution. There must always be a separation of party and government and one of the biggest issues to have emerged over recent months is the failure of the governing party to always be careful not to confuse the two. This is true of private emails, it is true of taking private planes and not declaring them and it is true of the appointments, as described at yesterday's Question Time, of non-executive directors to departments. We all have to be very careful that we understand the responsibility that we carry as public representatives, as appointees to key posts or as Ministers of the Crown.

This afternoon's debate is not about individual issues, although I know that noble Lords will be raising them, but about a functioning democracy and the example that we set to those dysfunctional regimes and states across the world that we often describe as “failing states”. How can you rail against corruption and the misuse of power elsewhere if you are not incredibly careful that you always demonstrate that you understand the importance of avoiding that misuse in your own country—not only politicians but all those who have a responsibility in public life, whether they are public servants, working in the Civil Service, serving as elected representatives in the devolved Administrations and in local government or who are appointed to undertake key tasks?

In the excellent publication *Standards Matter 2*, the Committee on Standards in Public Life rightly spells out the direction of travel, and I hope that its final report will be even more robust about the way in which appointments to a whole range of areas of our life are made.

I am very fond of quoting Antonio Gramsci, because I think hegemony is something we should be very wary of—the idea of winner takes all, which in some regimes across the world means literally that. The consequences are horrendous for the population and for the probity and morality of the functioning of those countries.

So, on appointments to whatever post, it is crucial that we are reassured, as I hope the Minister will reassure us, that this is constantly under review and that steps will be taken to avoid what appear to be—because appearance really matters—unfortunate moves towards the hegemony not just of the ruling party but of which particular line individuals took on the issue of Brexit. This issue that was raised at Questions yesterday. It cannot be right for Ministers to stand at the Dispatch Box and remind us, as the noble Lord, Lord True, did yesterday, about who voted which way in the referendum.

[LORD BLUNKETT]

On the Ministerial Code and the role of the independent adviser, it is of course absolutely fundamental that there is proportionality. We need to have in place mechanisms that put things right which are not cliff-edge or immediate actions that would be disproportionate to the problem that we are addressing. On appointments outside government once people have left, it is important again that there is proportionality: people should be able to earn a living, but it should be transparent, and any suggestion that they are taking with them the power to influence decisions should be overcome.

Ironically, with the issue of Greensill Capital and the former Prime Minister, while there were many questions to be raised—including about the placement of individuals in the Westminster and Whitehall system, and the interplay between that and business—the system actually worked, because the lobbying by the former Prime Minister was not successful. However, the transparency that would have made that clear much earlier would have helped both David Cameron and those who were accused of actions around him to be able to defend themselves, and those who could not because they are no longer with us, such as the late Lord Heywood, would not then have been traduced in a way that I found very unpleasant.

Lobbying that is not successful often highlights the lobbying that is—for example, on the allocation of public contracts—and people need to be reassured. I say to the noble Lord, Lord True, that I think constant reassurance on this and a willingness to investigate, as I was investigated 16 years ago, is really important for public trust.

However, it is also crucial to ensure that we recognise that we are making progress. When there was no register of interests, either in the Commons or in the Lords, all kinds of things went on that we did not know about, including major loans to Prime Ministers to save their historic homes that were never repaid or, for that matter, the gift of a smallholding by a band leader to one of my personal Labour Party heroes. Now that we have a register, we have moved on a little. Ironically, of course, the public are even more sceptical, because they now read about the register and take to heart the idea that something new is happening that they should be wary of.

In the end, of course, every time we take a step to ensure that our procedures and processes, our openness, the register and the reassurances that I am seeking today are very clear, the more we will ensure people's confidence in our democracy. When we stop caring, the public will stop caring, and when the public stop caring, as we saw under Donald Trump and as we are in danger of seeing here, anything goes—and once anything goes, everything has gone. So, in building trust in politics, in an independent Civil Service and in the actions and probity of those whom we appoint to a range of interests and responsibilities across the country, and in reassuring ourselves that we have the mechanisms in place to hold their feet to the fire, we are doing everyone a service.

So this afternoon I thank everyone who is preparing to take part in this debate. Above all, I appeal to the Members on the Benches opposite to persuade their Ministers that it is in everyone's interests, including theirs, to get it right for the future.

12.39 pm

**Lord Wallace of Saltaire (LD):** My Lords, this is the third occasion this week on which the House has considered related aspects of the Government's disregard for the advice of different bodies on the standards of public life. The noble Lord, Lord True, was a close adviser to John Major when the Committee on Standards in Public Life was set up and, we must assume, then agreed with his reform to strengthen propriety and ethics in government. I hope he will not now deny that there is a real problem of declining propriety in this Government. Our Prime Minister seems to think that the rules which govern our constitutional democracy do not apply to him.

The Minister and other Conservatives dismiss concerns on a number of grounds. The noble Lord, Lord True, has told us several times that the Government's overwhelming majority in the 2019 election allows them to behave as they wish. Another argument is that only the metropolitan liberal elite worries about such fine distinctions on the rules of political behaviour and that most people accept that Governments share the spoils of office with their friends. I remind the Government Benches that their apparent majority in December 2019 rested on 43.5% of the popular vote.

I also remind them that one prudent rule for any democratic Government is that they should refrain from actions that they would strongly oppose if they were taken by a Government of a different colour. We can all imagine the raucous opposition that Conservatives and the Conservative press would create if a Labour Government or—even worse—a left-of-centre coalition dominated by metropolitan liberals bent the conventions of constitutional propriety. This Government will not be in power for ever—unless they manage to bend constitutional financial rules a lot further.

Constitutional democracy is not a contest, as the noble Lord, Lord Blunkett, said, in which the winner takes all and the losers have to swallow whatever humiliation is inflicted on them. It is about limited government, checks and balances on executive power, the rule of law, transparency and respect for minorities as well as for the majority currently in power. The new book of the noble Lord, Lord Norton of Louth, *Governing Britain*, spells this out very well and I recommend it to all on the Conservative Benches.

The debates that surrounded the drafting of the US constitution set out these principles well. In Britain, our constitution has evolved through a series of understandings about limits on executive power. If those in government throw over those understandings, they undermine our unwritten constitution and threaten to slide from good government to corrupt and authoritarian government.

Standards matter, too, and the CSPL sets out a number of concerns about current shortcomings, such as a lack of transparency in many public appointment processes and the limited independence of the Prime Minister's officially titled independent adviser on the Ministerial Code. I particularly noted the reference in paragraph 35 to the implications of the massive growth in government outsourcing and the opportunities for

corruption that it has opened up—as we may have seen in the management of the Covid pandemic. Other CSPL reports have focused on the regulation of electoral finance and the importance of the Electoral Commission. Careful regulation of money in politics is vital to the maintenance of an open, democratic system. The weakening of limits on campaign spending in the USA has clearly damaged the quality of American democracy; we need to avoid the same happening here, and the forthcoming Elections Bill threatens to do that.

The Minister has adapted remarkably easily to the transition from John Major's style of ethical government to the rule-bending populism of Boris Johnson. I nevertheless hope that he will reassure the House that he remains committed, personally as well as on behalf of the Government, to the seven principles of public life, to ethical standards, to transparency and public accountability in appointments, and to maintaining broad public trust in government. The Prime Minister likes to speak about the UK as a beacon of democracy for the world; it is the Minister's responsibility to ensure that that beacon does not get dimmer.

12:44 pm

**Lord Young of Cookham (Con):** My Lords, I compliment the noble Lord, Lord Blunkett, on his choice of subject and the way he introduced it. He demonstrated that this topic is best discussed in your Lordships' House, rather than the other place. My experience there was that the exchanges resulted in the political currency being debased, as each party tried to portray its rivals as the more corrupt and the collective reputation of politicians was further tarnished. Here, we are an offshore island to the mainland of political controversy. We benefit from Cross-Benchers, not least the chairman of the Committee on Standards in Public Life; and the politicians taking part are, for the main, men and women whose reserves of partisan venom have been drained by the passage of time—although the noble Lord, Lord Wallace of Saltaire, still had a drop or two left.

Each speaker approaches this issue from their own perspective. In 1997, I thought I had the least attractive job in public life as Secretary of State for Transport, charged with privatising the railways in a Government with no majority. Then I became chairman of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges in 2001, charged with enforcing the Code of Conduct for MPs, sitting in judgment on my colleagues and friends, and occasionally bringing their careers to an end. That was not why I became a Member of Parliament. My first point, from that experience, is to welcome the trend of removing politicians from decisions about their conduct and pay; I believe that process has further to go. There are now voting lay members on the committee I used to chair, but perhaps they could go further and have an independent chairman.

On the Ministerial Code, again, we need to go further. Gordon Brown appointed an adviser on ministerial standards in 2008, a post now held by the noble Lord, Lord Geidt, but he can suggest areas for

investigation only privately to the PM. This falls short of what is required—namely, full discretion to launch inquiries, as with the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, along with the ability to publish findings in full.

Related to that are decisions on pay and allowances. Again, these decisions should be distanced from beneficiaries. Here, I make a suggestion which will not be greeted with acclaim. Normally, your Lordships' House is ahead of the other place on internal reform—televising proceedings and having iPads in the Division Lobby—but on pay and allowances I would argue that we lag behind. In 2010, the other place contracted out decisions on both to IPSA. It was a baptism of fire, as the organisation was set up at speed and made mistakes. Your Lordships decided not to join, and I understand why, but now we are the only national body that fixes its pay and allowances. IPSA has been up and running for over 10 years; it has authority, credibility and experience of fixing pay and allowances for parliamentarians. The annual controversy over MPs' pay has been largely defused.

I happen to think that our present system of allowances is our Achilles heel, generating bad publicity and unfair on those who do not have a home in London, but we are too terrified to risk controversy and change it. We should follow the other place and contract out. To those who think that IPSA would dress us in hair-shirts, the evidence points otherwise. Since I joined this House in 2015, our allowance has gone up from £300 to £313, or by 4.3%. Over the same period, that of MPs has risen from £67,060 to £81,932, an increase of 22.2%.

I move on to what I hope is safer territory to make a final point. While there are no grounds for complacency, I believe standards in public life here are among the highest in the world. Nicolas Sarkozy, the former President of France, has been sentenced to three years in jail, two of them suspended, for corruption. Silvio Berlusconi, the former Prime Minister of Italy, was convicted of tax fraud in an Italian court and sentenced to four years' imprisonment. Jacob Zuma, former President of South Africa, is now in prison for contempt of court and facing trial for corruption. Ex-President Trump was impeached twice, and he and his company face a range of civil and criminal actions while, in 2018, the ex-President of Brazil, Lula da Silva, was the front-runner for the presidency, even though he was in jail serving a 12-year corruption sentence. So yes, we can do better; but we are not bottom of the class.

12:49 pm

**Lord Kerr of Kinlochard (CB):** I am indebted to the noble Lord, Lord Blunkett, for securing this debate and for the way he introduced it. We are also indebted to the noble Lord, Lord Evans of Weardale, for providing us with the agenda for the debate in his June report, which the noble Lord, Lord Blunkett, referred to. I cannot really share the sunny optimism of the previous speaker. I speak from the perspective of an ex-public servant and I fear that there is a huge amount of evidence around that standards are slipping. The report of the noble Lord, Lord Evans, cites a good deal of evidence; I will just touch on three points and then add two thoughts of my own.

[LORD KERR OF KINLOCHARD]

First, to me it is shocking and, in the words of the report by the noble Lord, Lord Evans, it is not “sustainable” that most public servants now have “no confidence in the regulation of the Ministerial Code.”

That is very dangerous, and the report says it is unsustainable. The noble Lord, Lord Geidt, must be given the ability to instigate his own investigations.

Secondly, so must ACOBA, the committee chaired by the noble Lord, Lord Pickles, which currently can only advise when advice is sought. We can see someone occupying a senior position in the Cabinet Office while being paid a salary by a financial company and joining it immediately on leaving the Cabinet Office without having any contact with ACOBA; that absolutely cannot be right. The rules need to be made enforceable in employment contracts of officials and in arrangements with Ministers.

Thirdly, another recent case reveals that special advisers can be double-hatted as non-executive directors in departments. That is absurd. The concept of the non-executive director was to help Whitehall by bringing in the expertise of senior businesspeople who knew how useful to a CEO was the challenge provided by a strong board. The position is not meant for chums; it is meant for challenging. Clearly, there is a need to bring the non-executive directors into the scope of the regulated appointments.

All these changes are clearly necessary and urgent, but will they be sufficient? Here are my own thoughts. The tone from the top seems to be the problem. It is not just about overruling the watchdog or a casual insouciance about the rules on financial disclosure; it is more fundamental. Standards in public life will continue to slip if there is a continuing failure to see that the public servant is most loyal when he has the courage to challenge what he believes would not work or would be improper. I am no fan of the French cabinet system, but at least their cabinets do not just consist just of political chums. The administrative experience is also imbedded in the cabinet. We risk getting the worse of both worlds.

Finally, what happened to personal responsibility? We have seen the issues of the building standards for Grenfell, the Post Office and Horizon, the Kabul embassy guards, and no ministerial resignations. Noble Lords will remember Peter Carrington, who was in no way responsible for the Falklands. It was not he who paid off HMS “Endurance” or refused Cabinet discussion of the Ridley plan, but Peter Carrington resigned because it happened on his watch. That is the right tone from the top and it sets the right standard in public life.

12.54 pm

**The Lord Bishop of Oxford:** My Lords, it is a great privilege to take part in this debate and to follow the noble Lords who have spoken. I thank the noble Lord, Lord Blunkett, for his leadership and introduction. I learned a great deal from the noble Lord while Bishop of Sheffield.

I suggest that improving standards in public life is a three-cornered stool. One leg of that stool is being neglected in the public conversation. It is right that we have the highest possible principles and standards. The Nolan principles have stood the test of time and I support their application to people and their extension to areas of technology. They are the first important leg. The second leg is the way in which we hold one another to account on those principles, which is where I guess that the majority of this debate will be focused. Others are better qualified to speak on this than me. Those ways need to be thorough and consistent with the Nolan principles.

There is an important third leg to this stool, which I want to call formation and support. How do we intentionally grow a community of diverse public servants who are ethically formed and equipped, and have the inner capacity to be honest, open, objective, accountable and selfless? How do we form boards and cultures which are able to work in those ways? They do not simply happen. How do we offer ongoing support and learning to those who exercise high public office and have to cope with greater and greater complexity, pressure and temptation?

According to the great biblical tradition, there is one central insight on leadership in communities which is foundational and counter to much contemporary teaching on leadership. It is that the exercise of leadership in communities is very, very, difficult. The greater the power and authority we are given, the more our character is tested. Part of our humanity is that we are fallible; politicians fall short and so do churches and Church leaders. Being honest about our fallibility creates a much better climate for public discourse. Remember the biblical stories of Abraham and Sarah, of David, Ahab and Jezebel and of Peter. Last Friday the Church remembered Gregory the Great, a Pope in the 7th century. Gregory’s *Pastoral Rule*, his legacy to all the centuries, is a masterpiece on the complexity of leadership and the need to balance the inner and outer life. For centuries, translated by King Alfred, it was the foundation of good government in Europe.

So, what are the ways in which this Government and Parliament can recognise the need for this formation and support and develop it? First, is it possible to make a similar investment in training and support in the Nolan principles as the recent welcome investment in relationships and conduct in the workplace? Secondly, is it possible to ensure confidential networks of support across government departments, especially for those in senior roles, given the stresses and strains they carry? We need to nurture and look after our leaders. Thirdly, is it possible to build formation and training on ethical principles into every team and board so that, year by year, we tend to and grow this aspect of our common life?

12.58 pm

**Lord Puttnam (Lab):** My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Oxford, although in all honesty I would have preferred to have been book-ended by Conservative Peers, as it is to members of their party that most of my remarks, rather like those of the noble Lord, Lord Blunkett, are

necessarily addressed. I find it deeply regrettable that so few Conservative voices have chosen to contribute to the subject which, as a young man, I thought was synonymous with everything the party stood for.

I hope the Minister will offer the House some form of explanation as to when the subject of standards in public life became so far removed from his Government's concerns. I also hope he will acknowledge that his party, many of whom over the past quarter of a century I have had the opportunity to befriend, listen to and respect, have found themselves at a point where their Government gets "nil points" in all seven categories of the Nolan principles.

It was to address a self-inflicted parliamentary crisis that Sir John Major, a man for whom I have nothing but respect, helped encode what most believed to be a self-evident set of standards to be followed by those pursuing careers in political and public life. It was not a particularly complicated set of standards, and, with our traditional sense of complacency, most of us believed that, with the odd tilt of the tiller, we could retain, or gain, the sense of self-respect that we had always believed ourselves to enjoy. We were horribly wrong. How often have I heard wiser voices than mine in this House warn against the dangers of the slippery slope? Where standards in public life are concerned, the present Government have taken us careening down the Cresta Run.

Little over a year ago, I had the honour of chairing a special committee of this House, compiling a report entitled *Digital Technology and the Resurrection of Trust*. I had originally intended the title to read, "The restoration of trust", but the evidence that our committee received was so damning that, in our judgment, nothing less than a "resurrection" of trust would be sufficient to regain broad public confidence. At several points in the report, we made particular reference to the Committee on Standards in Public Life as being the most appropriate body to support, and even help to deliver, a number of our unanimous recommendations.

So far, the pandemic has prevented the House debating that report. Of course, it is possible that differing views might surface, but our report was published six months before the horrifying Trump-inspired spectacle that occurred in Washington on 6 January. I sincerely believe that many of our conclusions precisely anticipated those events. We argued that, far from being outdated, the Nolan principles were more relevant in a digital environment than ever. I will go further: anyone who believes that our fragile form of western parliamentary democracy can withstand a barrage of duplicity, deceit and obfuscation—most especially when its principal source is from within our own Government—is a danger to themselves and to the very best of everything that this House has ever represented.

The Government's claim, reiterated by the Minister at the conclusion of Monday evening's debate, that the Prime Minister—particularly this Prime Minister—should have sole responsibility for setting the standards and making public appointments is rather like offering Basil Fawley sole responsibility for developing closer relationships with our European friends and neighbours.

In conclusion, I have no idea how long I will be around, but, with all the force and energy that I can possibly muster, I beg those many decent Conservative Peers and Members of another House with a concern for the principles of parliamentary democracy to do what they know they will have to do sooner or later: muster the courage to say to the Prime Minister, "In God's name, go. Go before you destroy the last sliver of self-respect that our party can call its own".

1.02 pm

**Lord Clement-Jones (LD):** My Lords, it is a huge pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Puttnam. I commend his *Digital Technology and the Resurrection of Trust* report to all noble Lords who have not had the opportunity to read it. I thank the noble Lord, Lord Blunkett, for initiating this debate.

Like the noble Lord, Lord Puttnam, I will refer to a Select Committee report, going slightly off track in terms of today's debate: last February's *Artificial Intelligence and Public Standards* report by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, under the chairmanship of the noble Lord, Lord Evans of Weardale. This made a number of recommendations to strengthen the UK's "ethical framework" around the deployment of AI in the public sector. Its clear message to the Government was that

"the UK's regulatory and governance framework for AI in the public sector remains a work in progress and deficiencies are notable ... on the issues of transparency and data bias in particular, there is an urgent need for ... guidance and ... regulation ... Upholding public standards will also require action from public bodies using AI to deliver frontline services."

It said that these were needed to

"implement clear, risk-based governance for their use of AI."

It recommended that a mandatory public AI "impact assessment" be established

"to evaluate the potential effects of AI on public standards" right at the project-design stage.

The Government's response, over a year later—in May this year—demonstrated some progress. They agreed that

"the number and variety of principles on AI may lead to confusion when AI solutions are implemented in the public sector".

They said that they had published an "online resource"—the "data ethics and AI guidance landscape"—with a list of "data ethics-related resources" for use by public servants. They said that they had signed up to the OECD principles on AI and were committed to implementing these through their involvement as a

"founding member of the Global Partnership on AI".

There is now an AI procurement guide for public bodies. The Government stated that

"the Equality and Human Rights Commission ... will be developing guidance for public authorities, on how to ensure any artificial intelligence work complies with the public sector equality duty".

In the wake of controversy over the use of algorithms in education, housing and immigration, we have now seen the publication of the Government's new "Ethics, Transparency and Accountability Framework for Automated Decision-Making" for use in the public sector. In the meantime, Big Brother Watch's *Poverty Panopticon* report has shown the widespread issues in

[LORD CLEMENT-JONES]

algorithmic decision-making increasingly arising at local-government level. As decisions by, or with the aid of, algorithms become increasingly prevalent in central and local government, the issues raised by the CSPL report and the Government's response are rapidly becoming a mainstream aspect of adherence to the Nolan principles.

Recently, the Ada Lovelace Institute, the AI Now Institute and Open Government Partnership have published their comprehensive report, *Algorithmic Accountability for the Public Sector: Learning from the First Wave of Policy Implementation*, which gives a yardstick by which to measure the Government's progress. The position regarding the deployment of specific AI systems by government is still extremely unsatisfactory. The key areas where the Government are falling down are not the adoption and promulgation of principles and guidelines but the lack of risk-based impact assessment to ensure that appropriate safeguards and accountability mechanisms are designed so that the need for prohibitions and moratoria for the use of particular types of high-risk algorithmic systems can be recognised and assessed before implementation. I note the lack of compliance mechanisms, such as regular technical, regulatory audit, regulatory inspection and independent oversight mechanisms via the CDDO and/or the Cabinet Office, to ensure that the principles are adhered to. I also note the lack of transparency mechanisms, such as a public register of algorithms in operation, and the lack of systems for individual redress in the case of a biased or erroneous decision.

I recognise that the Government are on a journey here, but it is vital that the Nolan principles are upheld in the use of AI and algorithms by the public sector to make decisions. Where have the Government got to so far, and what is the current destination of their policy in this respect?

1.07 pm

**Baroness Donaghy (Lab):** My Lords, I thank my noble friend Lord Blunkett for initiating this debate. I was a member and acting chair of the Committee on Standards in Public Life about 20 years ago. We undertook the first review of the seven principles and set up a number of codes for Ministers and spads, as well as looking at the issue of lobbying, among other things. I am pleased that the current chair, the noble Lord, Lord Evans of Weardale, is present today—I can only guess at the challenges of the current role and, for what it is worth, I am confident that no one could carry it out as well as he can. This reminded me that the late Baroness Maddock was a member of the Committee on Standards in Public Life at the same time as me. I want to pay tribute to her work and say how much she is missed.

On the same floor in Great Smith Street was the commissioner for Civil Service appointments—then the noble Baroness, Lady Prashar—who is present today. Also on the same floor was the Commissioner for Public Appointments, whose responsibilities had not then been filleted, or, as I would call it, “Grimstoned”, compared with the current occupant of the post. It is

fair to say that the challenges were the same then and the pressures as great. I first ask the Minister: will he restore and strengthen the role of the Commissioner for Public Appointments—perhaps de-Grimstone it?

Turning to the recent Committee on Standards in Public Life appointment, I want to emphasise that I am not saying that a former member of the Bullingdon Club is not fit to be a member of the Committee on Standards in Public Life. No doubt, he has paid his debt to society. However, I am concerned about the standard of applicants who failed if he was the best. I appreciate that, if you interview people on Zoom—other remote devices are available—you cannot spot whether they are wearing an ankle tag, but surely some diversity is called for.

The Institute for Government has said that the Ministerial Code and the role of independent adviser were no longer working, and I agree with that. However, the Institute for Government and Transparency International, of which I am a long-term admirer, have both called for the Ministerial Code to be embedded in statute. I prefer to accept the recommendation on this of the Committee on Standards in Public Life. The Prime Minister is responsible, and it is his or her integrity that is under the spotlight. The committee offered some sensible suggestions about sanctions and the independent adviser's powers. Are the Government minded to accept them?

On Greensill Capital, I welcome the statement from ACOBA that lobbying the Government unfairly to benefit a new employer on leaving office is “inappropriate and unacceptable”. I think that the noble Lord, Lord Pickles, is doing the best he can with tools which have been woefully inadequate for decades.

My interest in the Greensill affair centred on what I believe to be the disgraceful treatment of Lady Heywood, the widow of Sir Jeremy, who would have brought distinction to this House had it not been for his untimely death. She sensed, quite rightly, that her husband was being lined up as a scapegoat. Lady Heywood described the Boardman inquiry as a “travesty of process”. She was repeatedly denied requests since late April for her late husband to have representation and was included only one week before publication, where Mr Boardman read out his conclusions to her. She said:

“I am horrified that I have to be here to try and defend my husband against what has been a fabricated attack on him and an absolutely horrible process.”

Let us be clear: Jeremy Heywood, Lord Heywood, was implementing government policy decided by Ministers. Lady Heywood's name is listed under

“List of interviewees and other meetings”

in the Boardman report—the *Report of the Facts*. It implies much more than the reality. She did not have a proper opportunity to ensure that her husband was defended. I shall not comment on the suitability of the author to conduct the inquiry, but, having looked at the 150-page report closely, I want to say that the blurred lines of accountability at the centre of government could not be clearer.

1.13 pm

**Baroness Stowell of Beeston (Con):** My Lords, it is a great privilege to follow the noble Baroness, Lady Donaghy, for whom I have huge respect. I also commend, as others have done, the noble Lord, Lord Blunkett, for calling this debate.

Standards are not a topic that those of us in public life like to discuss. If I am being charitable, I think that is because we sometimes fear being accused of throwing stones while we live in glass houses, but the cynical side of me recognises that, sometimes, the less said, the better, because we do not necessarily want people to be reminded that we are here to uphold standards and to be held to account for that.

However, we have to acknowledge that our privileges as legislators and decision-makers on matters which affect other people do not come without responsibility. Part of that is upholding standards which people have every right to expect of us. Obviously, that includes not breaking formal rules, but people's expectations of us are sometimes hard to codify. "No rules were broken" cannot be an excuse when it is obvious that we have fallen short in our conduct. That is why, as public figures, we have to meet another test in meeting expectations and that is in how we hold one another to account on behalf of the public. That includes in a debate such as this.

Before I go on to my main point, I should say in respect of your Lordships' House that we have done a lot in the past 10 years to improve the sanctions regime here, but, as noble Lords will know from other debates, because we are an unelected House, I believe that we still have further to go. I know that the noble Baroness, Lady Donaghy, is a member of the relevant committee. I hope that this is a subject it will revisit.

As my main point today, I want to make a positive case for why any of us as public servants should, just as the code requires of us under the heading of "Leadership", uphold standards and promote them. The simple reason is that these standards help promote behaviours and social norms which bond us together as a society. Behaviour which we associate with good character is particularly important for us to see among those who obtain or are given the power to lead or to make decisions which affect everyone else—that was mentioned earlier by the right reverend Prelate. It helps stimulate the confidence necessary for us to comply with and follow what is asked or requested.

In a complex world where people are increasingly angry and distrustful, and asked to take on trust complex solutions, we look for simple motives. But we can judge people's motives only through the actions that we see on display. Leaders need to promote the importance of common standards of behaviour and social norms for us to tackle some of our biggest and most difficult problems, because that is the only way we can bind everybody in. What we must not do if we are to be successful in meeting that challenge is weaponise or politicise the standards in public life that people have every right to expect of us. We must uphold and promote by example those standards to make sure that, together, we meet people's expectations and serve them better.

1.17 pm

**Lord Hunt of Kings Heath (Lab):** My Lords, I am grateful to my noble friend Lord Blunkett for instituting this debate and for the measured terms in which he introduced it. I agree with the noble Baroness, Lady Stowell, about the collective and individual responsibility for leadership in standards. Of course, one has to reflect that standards at Westminster can permeate the whole of public life. Therefore, we need to be very cautious about how we conduct ourselves here as well as in government as a whole.

We know that concern about public standards is not new. Lord Nolan's committee was a response in part to the cash for questions affair, and we know that party funding and expenses were a major concern in the 2000s. However, I have to say that, since 2010, the litany of poor behaviour by Ministers and ex-Ministers seems to be have been off the scale. Rather like the noble Lord, Lord Kerr, I have deplored the near-contempt that many Ministers have shown towards their officials in failing to understand that constructive criticism is partly what they are there to do to enhance the quality of decision-making.

I pay tribute to all those members of the various regulatory bodies that have been established over the past 30 years, but I am afraid that they have proved flimsy in the face of the behaviour of some Ministers and former Ministers. My noble friend Lord Blunkett referred to the "good chap and chapess" theory. The problem is, what happens if the Prime Minister is not a good chap? How far can we have confidence in a system where the Prime Minister himself, who has overall responsibility for standards in public life, is clearly a man who over the years has had a default position of carelessness with the truth and no concern whatever about upholding standards? This is the problem we have with all the recommendations that I have seen so far for improving the situation.

I pay tribute to the noble Lord, Lord Evans, and his committee and to the other committees. I think the recommendations that have been put forward should be implemented, beefing up the current system, with the independent adviser being able to initiate investigations and publish the outcome of those investigations. The Institute for Government has suggested that the Ministerial Code should set out the sanctions that might be applied for different breaches. We are going to hear from the Committee on Standards in Public Life shortly, but there are other very useful recommendations on business appointments, transparency, and lobbying and public appointments where it said that the commissioner ought to be given more powers to uphold the integrity of the process. The scandal of the Government's determination to put one person into Ofcom to do over the BBC and completely traduce the system of appointments is one of the most disgraceful acts I have ever seen any Government do.

Next week we have another debate, in the name of the noble Lord, Lord Norton, on the training of Ministers, which I think will be interesting. He wants it to be training in decision-making; I am afraid I think it has to be training in integrity, ethics and understanding what the Ministerial Code means and how they ought to behave, including their attitude

[LORD HUNT OF KINGS HEATH]  
towards officials. Will this do in the face of a Prime Minister who has no concern whatever about those standards? I doubt it.

I am afraid that, in the end, I reach the conclusion that, while it may be against our political tradition, if it goes on like this, it will have to be outsourced to the courts or an independent body. We cannot trust the person who is responsible for the Ministerial Code to oversee it properly and effectively, and our democratic institutions and public life generally suffer hugely because of it.

1.22 pm

**Lord Foulkes of Cumnock (Lab Co-op):** My Lords, I shall start with a surprise and say how pleased—indeed, delighted—I am that the noble Lord, Lord True, will reply to this debate. He will be relieved to hear that I am not going to have a go at him or indeed his Government. However tempted I am, I am leaving that to others—and, as we have seen, they are doing it much more eloquently and effectively than I could have done.

As my noble friend Lord Blunkett said in his brilliant introduction to this debate, the seven principles of public life apply not just to the UK Government but to local government and now, of course, to the devolved authorities, to which I am going to turn. When the Scottish Parliament was set up many said that it should not copy the outdated traditions of Westminster. That was understandable, but, sadly, on breaches of the seven principles the SNP Government have not just copied us here but seem to be after the gold medal—if there was a gold medal—for doing this.

It has not always been the case. The Labour First Minister Henry McLeish resigned over a small muddle in his office expenses, and the Tory MSP David McLetchie, who was much respected but is sadly no longer with us, resigned because he took a taxi via his office to go to the Scottish Parliament. They were honourable resignations, but we have not had any from the SNP.

Coming to the SNP, the notorious Salmond/Sturgeon duo is the prime example. It has been well chronicled, but the allegations of an organised conspiracy against Alex Salmond continue. Indeed, astonishingly, the former ambassador Craig Murray—I am not his greatest fan—was sentenced to eight months in prison not for naming the complainers, which would have been a clear contempt, but for so-called jigsaw identification from which, it was claimed, they might be identified. Nicola Sturgeon says that she told everything to the parliamentary committee of inquiry in the eight hours of evidence that she gave. But Jackie Baillie MSP, one of the most effective members, if not the most effective member, of that committee, rightly contends that the Scottish Government deliberately withheld vital information from it. There was no transparency there.

Then there is the scandal of the secret £12 billion deal with two Chinese companies which was signed by Nicola Sturgeon in March 2020 in private, withheld from Parliament and the public, and which then mysteriously fell through six months later. There was no transparency there. As Ian Murray, the shadow Scottish Secretary says, there was also a complex web

of links between SNP Ministers and Sanjeev Gupta, the Scottish part of the now notorious Greensill saga. Meanwhile, Nicola Sturgeon continues—as we saw yesterday in her statement to the Scottish Parliament—her obsession with another referendum on independence, wasting taxpayers' hard-earned cash on improperly paying civil servants to produce a case that is clearly party-political and is, indeed, in a reserved area of the constitution. Then there is the rapidly growing scandal of the Crown Office. Having already outspent its budget by pursuing malicious prosecutions, it is now facing a further claim of £120 million on top of that as the Rangers crisis deepens.

These are just a few of many examples—I could give more if time allowed—of how the seven principles, particularly of integrity, objectivity, accountability and openness, have been breached by the SNP Government. And although the controversies of the missing £600,000 in the SNP's finances and the McGarry embezzlement charges are party-political, they also reflect badly on the Scottish Government. The SNP has become very skilful at controlling criticism using patronage and threats. Nevertheless, some courageous people, such as Jim Sillars, have spoken out, describing the Government of the party of which he still a member as corrupt. Sadly, with honourable exceptions, some of the media and civil society are also cowed. STV is heavily dependent on Scottish Government advertising and the BBC seems to be in the thrall of the First Minister. Opposition parties—the Tories and the Lib Dems, as well as Scottish Labour—are increasingly effective at exposing the scandals of the SNP.

Now I come to the noble Lord, Lord True, again. There is one action that the UK Government could do to help. If parliamentary privilege that we have here in both Houses were extended to Holyrood, MSPs would be able to speak the truth without fear of prosecution. I hope that Ministers will give consideration to taking action on this in legislation as quickly as possible. Since I have resisted the temptation to attack the noble Lord, Lord True, I hope he will respond positively this afternoon.

1.27 pm

**Lord Stunell (LD):** My Lords, I think I should steer clear of the topics raised by the noble Lord who spoke most recently, but I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Donaghy, for her kind words about my late colleague Diana Maddock. She is much missed on our side. She was a predecessor on the Committee on Standards in Public Life on which I now serve.

One of the key tasks of that committee is to monitor how the seven principles are being applied and to assess the relevance and resilience of those principles in an age when society is changing and evolving, when legislation imposes new challenges and demands on those who deliver public services, and when public expectations are a moveable feast and reshaped. There are new risks and new opportunities, so the committee has a full agenda.

The principles operate in a dynamic society. Even seemingly rock-solid principles, such as the principle of objectivity, which require office holders to act “without discrimination or bias”, change from generation to



generation. I will give an example: when my mother got married, she was required to resign from her job in the Civil Service. There was not much objectivity there. In my generation, the fight for equal pay for equal work across public services finished only when it was resolved in the High Court. There was not much objectivity there. Now, my children have expectations about protection from sexual harassment and bullying in their workplace that would have been unimaginable 20 years ago. Noble Lords may well think it has been a change in the application of the principle of objectivity in the right direction.

However, some changes have had more mixed results. The advent of social media has indeed dramatically improved openness, but it has also—as the noble Baroness, Lady Stowell, pointed out—enhanced bullying and created a polarised climate in which calm and balanced decision-making may put at risk. That polarisation has made custodianship of those principles—

**Baroness Stowell of Beeston (Con):** I thank the noble Lord for giving way. I am grateful to him for referring to my contribution earlier, but I am just a little concerned: I was not suggesting anything in the way that he is interpreting—I did not refer to anything in the way that he is suggesting I meant. I would just like to correct him on that.

**Lord Stunell (LD):** My Lords, I deeply apologise if I misunderstood or misinterpreted what the noble Baroness said. I certainly would not wish to sustain that. What I will say is that there has been a polarisation in political dialogue, which has led to the custodianship of those principles being an increasingly challenging task.

An example I will give is that, when the Chancellor of the Exchequer Hugh Dalton gave a hint of a tax change to a journalist a few moments before giving his 1947 Budget speech, he felt compelled to resign over his leak. Last Friday, the Prime Minister set out a new tax policy in a daily newspaper, with a three-day lapse before a Statement was made in the House. Any idea that this breach should lead to his resignation is now regarded as absurd in the popular discourse. That means that, clearly, the application of the principles of integrity and selflessness have migrated in that period. Yet the principle of leadership still requires a leader to “be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.”

The CSPL does not deal with individual cases. It does not make findings of fact nor does it pass sentence. Where appropriate, that is the task of the various regulatory and monitoring bodies. Nevertheless, when a pattern of practice emerges in public life that, at the very least, challenges the conventionally understood meaning of the principles, the committee does report on it and makes recommendations. Those recommendations go via the Cabinet Office direct to the Prime Minister. That is of course both a great strength and a serious weakness. However, those who argue that it should report instead to Parliament, or maybe have a free-standing statutory constitutional position, are surely mistaking the presenting symptom for the underlying disease, which is that the UK has a uniquely powerful prime ministerial constitutional model.

All roads lead to the door of No. 10. Everything depends on the occupant leading from the top, whether it is on Covid, Brexit, or standards in public life. Seen that way, the more directly that the Committee on Standards in Public Life sends its good advice and strong recommendations to the top, the better. There is certainly a strong case for urgent reform of our current model of prime ministerial power, but that is a matter for a further debate.

1.33 pm

**Lord Evans of Weardale (CB):** My Lords, it is an honour to follow my colleague, the noble Lord, Lord Stunell, in this debate. I am most grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Blunkett, for securing this debate, which is timely and important. I declare an interest as the chair of the Committee on Standards in Public Life.

I am grateful to noble Lords for their support for the various recommendations that we have made in recent years and also for the contribution that many noble Lords have made to our consideration. The cross-party nature of our committee is a real strength and means that the recommendations that we make carry more weight than they would otherwise. We wait with optimism that the Government will respond positively to the most recent recommendations that have been discussed already this afternoon.

There has been no golden age of public standards in the United Kingdom. We have already heard about MPs’ expenses and cash for questions and, going further back, we can think about corruption in local government in the 1960s. Nevertheless, the United Kingdom has a strong reputation for the public standards that are embodied in our public life and for the lack of corruption that we enjoy. That is something that matters enormously to our national well-being.

I was struck by the compelling evidence that the committee received recently from business leaders as to the value that they put on high public standards and the fact that this makes the United Kingdom a more attractive investment area. We were also impressed when we talked to members of sixth forms the year before last and asked them what they saw as the right public standards. They gave a strong endorsement to the seven principles of public life that were first articulated by Lord Nolan. More recently, our committee has commissioned research into public attitudes towards public standards, and we were encouraged again that there was strong support for the idea that those in public life should live up to high standards. I do not believe that this is something merely of interest to the metropolitan elite; it is also of great interest to young people today, and to the people of this country.

We have a strong reputation but we need always to be looking for ways in which we can shore that up. Our system of public standards regulation in this country is complex—probably too complex—and relies on a network of bodies, some of which have statutory power, some of which do not, and some of which are dependent entirely upon convention. There are strengths to that, in that standards apply differently in different environments, but some of the institutions that we rely on need to have better statutory underpinning to ensure that they are able to undertake their roles

[LORD EVANS OF WEARDALE]

strongly and without fear of any political interference. We need to consider whether there is more to be done by way of statutory underpinning for our standards system.

I have also noted with interest the way in which legal process is starting to encroach on this area. The Good Law Project has brought a number of cases that, ultimately, have been about public standards. We are seeing the way in which the courts are starting to make decisions or how the Government have sometimes changed their position when challenged in the courts. I do not wholly welcome that. This is something where the political leadership of this country needs to provide the strong lead; we should not have to rely on the courts. The seven principles of public life are a personal responsibility for all of us who have a public role, whether in politics, government, local government or beyond. The seven principles, which I think have stood the test of time extraordinarily well, are ones that apply institutionally, but also individually, and are a personal responsibility.

A number of noble Lords have made reference to recommendations that we made in our *Standards Matter 2* report in respect of a number of the institutions that we rely on. I await with hope that we will see progress and that the Government will respond positively to those.

I also draw attention to another matter that has been referred to briefly—namely, the forthcoming Elections Bill, which contains provisions that, in my view, would significantly weaken the independence of the Electoral Commission. We should view that with great concern, not as a party-political issue, but one of good governance. There was a Written Ministerial Statement on this recently, which was encouraging, but I believe that we need to see changes to what is in the Bill if we are going to underpin the independence of the electoral system which is, in turn, a critical part of our public standards.

1.38 pm

**Lord Griffiths of Burry Port (Lab):** My Lords, it is a privilege to follow the noble Lord, Lord Evans, and indeed to take part in a debate initiated by my noble friend Lord Blunkett. He set the case before us, and it has been illustrated widely. My contribution shall be much narrower; I mean to complement what we have heard thus far.

If I may decouple the words “my noble friend”, I shall take the word “friend” out for a moment and release it from its honorific usage when we are in this House, which limits its application to those on our side of the House. Suppose, in a debate like this, we look for what the noble Lord, Lord Evans, has just suggested is the benefit of the committee system—namely, that all of us, on all Benches, have a common interest in seeing this together as a team and not in oppositional terms, although there is plenty of illustrative material that could point the finger here, there or anywhere else.

The noble Lord, Lord Blunkett, said that he was not a saint. From my professional background, I found saints a pain in the backside and prefer dealing with sinners any day.

**Noble Lords: Oh!**

**Lord Griffiths of Burry Port (Lab):** The realities are all around me, as I can hear from that response.

If we consider ourselves a Committee of the whole House and if the word “nobility”, freed from the word “friend” just for a moment, can be a word that sums up all those Nolan principles—truth, integrity and all the other things—we will have a starting point.

I have to say that this House astonished me in recent times in the way it responded to the introductions to the House made by the Prime Minister that took the proportions between our respective parties into such an unhealthy place. The Labour Party, since the Burns report, has tried hard to follow the formula we all agreed as friends, and I think the Liberal Democrats have done the same. However, the expansion on the Conservative Benches is in defiance of an agreed position that all of us took in accepting the Burns report. I was astonished that there was not an uproar. My noble friend Lord Blunkett introduced Machiavelli into these discussions this afternoon. I would introduce Extinction Rebellion, because its tactics are more appropriate for this present age. If we had glued ourselves to our seats or bolted ourselves to the doors, protesting against the mistreatment of this House and of this Parliament by overruling the common, agreed statement of the House on the question of its membership, we would have shown some stamina and spunk and would have had a word we could possibly say outside this Chamber.

Public trust has been invested in every one of us. The electorate have put their trust in every Member of the other place. When the body politic has a rotten head, it will soon find itself infected similarly. I therefore believe that we must take the general points and address the philosophy and constitutional aspect of this case, but it is in the interests of all of us—and of our credibility outside this Chamber—for us to see that we simply must find a way to deal with infractions and diminished responsibility, which are a threat to the public life of this country.

I suppose that, as I sit down, that someone will say, “There we are, he has reverted to type—that was a Methodist sermon.” If it was, let the cap fit.

1.43 pm

**Baroness D’Souza (CB):** My Lords, in the UK, where governance relies heavily on conventions, there is always the danger that these conventions are ignored or significantly tailored to fit the current zeitgeist, in Parliament and beyond. Parliament has recognised this by creating a whole raft of behavioural standards and rules. In bringing up this topic, the noble Lord, Lord Blunkett, indicates that there should be better monitoring of all those involved in governance, and surely that must be right. However, there is the wider question of how to foster trust, especially if trust has been eroded. Governments must inspire trust to govern effectively and, ultimately, trust is based on the citizen’s perceptions of the Government’s competence and intent. This in turn requires overt values, transparency, data access and giving citizens a voice. Conversely, non-compliance with the rules, such as last-minute U-turns

on decisions immediately following categorical statements, has confused and irritated the public, and the failure to call Dominic Cummings to account following his flouting of the Covid-19 travel restrictions meant that others felt that they too could disobey rules with impunity.

How is trust best achieved? It is by means of clear rules for legislators, uniform adherence to those rules and rapid effective sanctions for transgressions. How does the UK measure up to these criteria? Not too badly, as it happens, but many areas are in need of tightening up to prevent and sanction transgressions and, most importantly, the perception of abuses. The British Academy review on the longer-term social impacts of Covid came up with nine areas, one of which was continued

“Low and unstable levels of trust”,

particularly at local or national government level. This is not a desirable culture and will likely lead to further structural inequalities—for example, them and us attitudes—and even greater tensions between safety and security and personal freedoms and privacy.

The emphasis has to be on reviewing the current rules and ensuring their implementation, the aim being to build a culture of open government. In recent years, lobbying, cronyism, the sometime arbitrary invoking of the Ministerial Code, public procurement, overreaching executive powers and misinformation, among other weaknesses, have provoked adverse press attention and much more public distrust than there would otherwise have been. In 2020 alone, some 30 alleged breaches of parliamentary and ministerial rule were reported.

If we accept that trust forms the basis for policy-making in governance, the following actions seem urgent: more detailed definition of and adherence to integrity principles; political leaders leading by example; common standards at all levels; perceptions of fairness and improvement in public services; and the sound use of public money. As ever, these principles in action come best—and must come—from the top. It is absolutely in the interests of government to do so.

1.47 pm

**Lord Parekh (Lab):** My Lords, I begin by congratulating my noble and good friend Lord Blunkett on securing this debate and introducing it with great understanding and wisdom. Standards in public life has become a common subject of anxiety for many of us who care for this country. I want to make four or five points of a systematic kind.

The first thing to bear in mind on standards in public life is that there is a danger of being rather nostalgic about them and imagining an age when things were fine. That is not so. Look at 18th-century Britain and the scandals that took place then, or at 19th-century Britain, when things were horrendous. That is not to underestimate what is happening today but simply to put it in a historical perspective. Standards in any given age always seem to fall.

The other important thing is what kinds of standards we are talking about. If you asked a medieval monk—or my good and noble friend Lord Griffiths, who gave us a Methodist sermon—they might talk about religious

standards. Later on, people might have talked about moral standards of people falling. What standards are we talking about—financial standards, those involving the treatment of women, or what? The first and most important thing to bear in mind is that when we talk about standards, we should not be too nostalgic about the past and should be precise about what standards we are talking about. The Nolan principles are very relevant but, at the same time, they are also limited. They never talk about sexual harassment or the treatment of women, which has become a subject of great importance. Therefore, the first point I want to make is, as I say, on specifying the kind of standards that we have in mind.

The second important point is that when standards fall, corruption sets in, and corruption always starts at the top. The man at the bottom does not have the guts to violate standards, because he knows he will get caught. The man at the top starts the process, feeling confident that others will bail him out if he is caught. So corruption starts at the top, gradually spreads downwards and, if we are not careful or if the process is not arrested at some point, it permeates the entire society like a blanket and creates a situation where it simply cannot be dealt with. Who do you appeal to against corruption when the entire society is complicit in it?

Another important point is that corruption in any society is often sustained because people are generally too tolerant. It is a difficult point to make but, in our own country, people often talk about the Prime Minister. I do not wish to get into this, but the point is that, whatever he has done, people seems to have lapped it up. People seem to be with him. How do you accept a situation where standards are violated—I could mention half a dozen systematic violations—and people laugh it off and allow him to get on with it? It never seems to be held against him.

To me, that is the danger: standards are ultimately sustained by what? What are the sanctions behind standards? The sanctions are individual conscience, although that may or may not work, and professional ethics. For example, as a doctor or professor, I cannot do certain things; however, again, that may or may not work. What else? There is public opinion. Public opinion is the guarantor, the custodian, of standards in public life. When the public opinion is no longer interested in or is indifferent to those standards—or, indeed, delights in the playful violation of those standards—who will guarantee that they will be kept and preserved?

That is the danger, and not only in this country. I am sorry to disagree with the earlier remark that we are better off than other countries. Sadly, we are not, partly because our standards are not as vigorous as those in some other countries and partly because we have not examined them as carefully. Our standards are no better and no worse than elsewhere; we are all the same human beings. The simple point is that the same failure of public opinion is evident in every country, including the one I come from—India—where standards have been systemically falling. The question is this: when public opinion fails to perform its role, where do you go? Whom do you appeal to?

[LORD PAREKH]

The next question, therefore, is: how can public opinion be educated? However, that sounds very patronising, as though we are in the business of educating public opinion. How can the public themselves arrive at a more sensible view? There, you need freedom of information and all kinds of machinery by which the public can be kept informed.

1.53 pm

**Lord Dubs (Lab):** My Lords, first, I congratulate my noble friend Lord Blunkett. He has done us an enormous service. I hope that enough people will follow what he said for him to have done this country an enormous service in terms of standards in our public life.

We have always said traditionally that our standards in public life are of a high order. I wonder whether that is still true today. I look at the seven principles of public life and think that they are exemplary, but they must be made to work. Before I develop that point, let me say that I listened carefully to the speech made by the noble Lord, Lord Young. He said that we in this House do not inject into our debates venom of the sort that characterises some debates in the Commons. Well, I wonder—perhaps we need a bit of venom to pinpoint failings in public standards. The noble Lord was not making a bland speech but, if we become too bland about all this, we are failing.

I have thought very hard about some of the excellent speeches I have been listening to. It seems to me that there are two aspects: whether we can develop good enough systems or safeguards to protect standards in public life; and whether it is a matter of the personal integrity of the people at the top. I cannot help feeling that, if there is no personal integrity at the top, no amount of systems and safeguards will remedy this. We must demand the highest standards of personal integrity, which is where the seven principles come in.

In listening to programmes such as “Any Questions?” or “Question Time”, I always find it a matter of sadness when, if one of the contributors makes a sneering comment about MPs, an enormous cheer goes through the audience. This is sad because, if we denigrate our elected politicians, we weaken democracy. The question is whether they deserve some of that denigration; of course, some people would say that they do, up to a point, but not to the extent to which they face this abuse. I repeat: I am always saddened when people denigrate our elected politicians because our democracy suffers.

I have been thinking about previous Prime Ministers. By the way, I was told by the powers that be in this House that I am not allowed to call anybody a liar, and I do not intend to do so. I was thinking about Margaret Thatcher, John Major and Theresa May. What they shared was personal integrity and honesty. I spent most of my political life opposing what Margaret Thatcher did and opposing quite a lot of what Theresa May and John Major did, but the fact is that, for all her awful policies, Margaret Thatcher had personal integrity, believed what she said and made sure that it happened. I think that that honesty was important. I never thought that I would hear myself praise the late Lady Thatcher but, in terms of this debate, it matters.

The Ministerial Code is crucial. I want, if I may, to tell a little story about when I stopped being a junior Minister in Northern Ireland. I remember being asked whether I would host a meeting in one of the Committee Rooms about voting machines so that we could have an American system of voting. I was going to put on display a whole set of voting machines and invite Members of both Houses to have a look at them. I had a real job getting permission to do that; eventually, Lord Mayhew, who was in charge of the appropriate committee, said yes, but it took several weeks. There was not a penny coming to me for this—there was no personal benefit for me at all except for the fact that I was hosting the meeting—but it was interesting. That was a tight standard, and I think it was right. I had no relationship with electoral systems in Northern Ireland, but I think it was right that there should have been a hurdle for me to overcome.

I want to make two brief points. First, we have to look at the way in which membership of this House happens. We must look at appointments. There is a lot of scepticism about whether they are made in return for favours or whether the principles of public life apply to them. I have a lot of respect for most Members of this House, but I feel that the integrity of this House depends on our having standards that pass all the tests we are applying in this debate for appointment to it.

Secondly, on the Ministerial Code, as has been referred to before, when the independent adviser resigns, there is something amiss with the whole system.

1.58 pm

**Lord Smith of Finsbury (Non-Affl):** My Lords, it is a privilege to follow the noble Lord, Lord Dubs. I warmly commend the noble Lord, Lord Blunkett, on both initiating this debate and introducing it so superbly.

Many years ago, in the early 2000s, I was a member of the Committee on Standards in Public Life for two and a half years. I must say, it is a great enhancement to our debate today that the current distinguished chairman is able to be with us and take part in our discussion. The committee was, and is, charged with the stewardship of the Nolan principles. They remain as vital for the success and value of public life and service as they have always been. Sadly, I must observe that they are no longer held to as firmly and clearly by Ministers and Governments as they once were.

When a Minister is incontrovertibly found to have bullied the senior staff in their department and nothing happens, what is the value of the principle of leadership? When contracts are awarded to friends and acquaintances without a proper tendering and evaluation process, what is the value of the principle of accountability? When Ministers from the top down simply make up figures because they suit their argument, and fail to correct mistakes and misinformation subsequently, what is the value of the principle of honesty? When planning permission is rushed through to assist a party donor, what is the value of the principle of integrity? When a former Prime Minister lobbies aggressively by text on behalf of a private company, what is the value of the principle of openness? When the public appointments process is manipulated to secure a politically favoured

candidate for a supposedly impartial role, what is the value of the principle of selflessness? I fear that these principles, on which the integrity of our entire system of governance is founded, are being regularly undermined.

No Government have ever got this completely right, but I have never seen a Government getting so much so wrong. Too many people in public life, including senior figures in government, are disregarding the ethical standards that ought to govern behaviour and action. When contraventions occur and are seen to have occurred, nothing happens.

This is serious. Two things in particular happen when public officials and representatives play fast and loose with standards. First, a Government develop an arrogance, a kind of hubris, a sense that they can get away with anything. That ultimately leads to bad decision-making. Policy gets made regardless of evidence or consequence, and disaster often follows. I could, for example, argue that hubris led to the poll tax and to the Iraq war.

Secondly, the public distrust of organisations and people in authority simply intensifies. That distrust is already there—we know that very well—but the flouting of proper standards makes the problem of public scepticism and distrust far greater. Leadership to change this downward drift has to start from the top. The Prime Minister, above anyone else, has to set, lead and enforce the standards. I doubt he will, but that does not diminish in any way the urgent necessity that he do so.

2.03 pm

**Lord Berkeley (Lab):** My Lords, it gives me great pleasure to take part in this debate. I congratulate my noble friend Lord Blunkett on his wonderful opening speech. I took away four issues—procedures, processes, transparency and trust—and many other noble Lords have spoken about these, as well. I will give the example of what I believe is a disgraceful standard in public life, as applied by the Government to HS2. I am pleased that my noble friend Lord Adonis is in his place, and I am not going to start criticising whether it is the right project or not; I am talking about its management and the way that Parliament has been misled. I hope we can have a few lessons learned.

I remind the House that this is the most expensive public sector project on the Infrastructure and Project Authority's annual review of government projects, and it has the dubious record of having the longest run of amber/red designations—seven years—followed by a red one. That means

“successful delivery of the project appears to be unachievable”.

I believe this is a good example of a project that needs regular and detailed scrutiny, instead of what we have, which is a massive, long-lasting cover-up of costs.

This week, we received from senior managers in HS2—I think you can call them whistleblowers—85 megabytes of files, so big documents. That is interesting because, for the first time, it says that they had produced a detailed estimate of this project from the beginning. They had always denied that to me and to many others, but they have an estimate and the problem is that it came out at £48 billion, at a time when Ministers

were telling the House of Commons and your Lordships' House that the cost was £23.5 billion. It was on the basis of that £23.5 billion that the House approved phase 1 of the HS2 Bill.

Everybody knew about this; it is clear from this documentation. I can list all the people who knew about it, and it goes back to a meeting in Oxford, at the Saïd Business School. The present Prime Minister was not there—this was in 2016—and the notes of the meeting, which we have, indicate that Ministers and officials knew that the project could not be completed for the figure that they had given to Parliament. Somebody wrote an email to the current Prime Minister when he was assuming leadership of the Conservative Party, saying that the cost would be over £120 billion, when they were saying it would be £20-something billion. This is a serious misleading of Parliament and a breach of the ministerial code.

I wrote to the Cabinet Secretary on 7 July, suggesting that Ministers appeared to have misled Parliament on the costs and timescale, and asked him to set up an inquiry. I also asked him to look at the role of the Permanent Secretaries at the Department for Transport, who are the accounting officers and must have known all these figures. Did they tell Ministers, as they are required to under the code, and did they ask for a letter of instruction to authorise the funding? There is no record of either.

The Cabinet Secretary passed my letter to the Department for Transport, but the Permanent Secretary there is the accounting officer. It is interesting that the Cabinet Secretary thought it the right thing for the Permanent Secretary to investigate her department's own failings, but there we are; that is what happened. The Cabinet Secretary has now replied to me and said that the decision to investigate any matters like this rests with the Prime Minister, which goes back to what several noble Lords said, including the noble Lords, Lord Young of Cookham and Lord Kerr.

I quote in support a comment made to me by Sir Tim Lankester, a former Permanent Secretary, who has quite a track record from the Pergau Dam issue in Malaysia, 20 or 30 years ago:

“Like you, I think the continuing deception over the costs of HS2 is an absolute disgrace. We had come to expect this from ministers, trying to protect their own backs and trying to protect the project's credibility against mounting evidence ... But what I find utterly horrible, and in some ways even worse, is the Permanent Secretary's complicity in this deception. Her weasel words ... are utterly unacceptable from a senior civil servant, or indeed from any civil servant.”

That is a very telling comment.

The project is massively over cost, at £160 billion now. One of these whistleblowers—

**Baroness Scott of Bybrook (Con):** Can I remind you of the five-minute limit?

**Lord Berkeley (Lab):** I was about to finish. The latest opening date for phase 1 is 2041, and I think this boil needs lancing. I hope the Minister, when he responds, confirms that he will pass on my comments to the Prime Minister and ask him to take some action to lance this boil.

2.10 pm

**Baroness Prashar (CB):** My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Blunkett, for securing this debate and providing us with the opportunity to discuss this important subject.

As we have heard, the seven Nolan principles, which have stood the test of time, are there to ensure that those in public life act in the public interest and do not abuse power. I know for a fact that the Committee on Standards in Public Life, a body that I greatly admire—I had the privilege of working closely with it when I was the First Civil Service Commissioner, on the same floor—has not always had the wholehearted support of successive Governments but continues, despite all, to do some sterling work. Its report, *Standards Matter*, published in June this year, illustrates that, after 25 years, the time has come to take stock and identify the reforms that are needed. The report is well judged. I agree with its findings and the areas identified as requiring significant reform, and with the comments of the noble Lord, Lord Evans, the current chairman of the committee, about the need for the statutory footing of some of the regulatory bodies to be looked at. Perhaps the Minister can tell the House whether the Government will heed the committee's advice and support the reforms that it recommended.

I should like to highlight the committee's recommendation regarding the process by which regulators are appointed. The committee rightly argues that the appointments process for standards regulators requires a greater element of independence than is the case for other significant appointments. If those who are regulating standards are appointed through a process that is not seen to be independent, that would discredit the very bodies charged with regulating and monitoring standards. For the system to be credible, safeguards to ensure the integrity of the appointments process for regulators are crucial. But no safeguards are adequate unless the will to give effect to them is fully present. Do the Government have that will?

Codes or guidance are not likely to be effective unless they are accompanied by education, training and induction that inculcates the meaning of what they mean in practice and are ingrained into the DNA of the organisation. The seven Nolan principles provide a set of tools to negotiate the challenges that organisations face. The principles can be used in a deliberate, open and honest manner to steer the way through dilemmas and, in the process, to educate institutions and raise awareness. Similarly, leadership in the overlapping areas of business and politics involves ethical decisions. Again, this should be managed within the framework of the Nolan principles, and the committee rightly suggests that the advisory committee on public appointments should be given additional resources to promote awareness and understanding of the rules.

However, as other noble Lords have said, regardless of rules and regulations, those in public life need to take personal responsibility and act on their honour, be eternally vigilant about purpose, and respect boundaries and the checks and balances, and understand why those checks and balances exist. I know for a fact, as a

former Civil Service Commissioner, that it was my job constantly to remind Ministers that the system was for their benefit.

Failure and mistrust come when we forget our ideals, values, principles and objectives. Those in public life cannot exempt themselves from ethical and exemplary behaviour, because ethics make democracy safe for debate on the substance of public policy. When ethics are in disorder, they are a digression. A reaffirmation of the Nolan principles, both in words and actions, and embracing the reforms suggested by the committee, would therefore send a strong signal that the Government care about standards and that standards matter, as does our standing in the world. I look forward to the Minister's response.

2.14 pm

**Lord Brooke of Alverthorpe (Lab):** My Lords, like others, I am grateful to my noble friend Lord Blunkett for introducing this debate in such a magnificent way, based on his long experience in politics. It was a great blessing for us. I am grateful, too, to the Library for the briefing note that it provided, which reminded me to spend a little time looking at the seven principles.

In that context, it is interesting that the new Lord Speaker recently sent out a little reminder to us all about how we conduct ourselves and the courtesies that we show each other when we come into the Chamber. I think that that has been quite well received. It might be worthwhile if the seven principles were circulated among all of us, particularly for newcomers, who are coming into politics perhaps for the first time.

I was particularly taken by what my noble friend Lord Blunkett said in his introduction about the responsibility that we hold, given the privileges we hold, our ability to exercise power and how we do so. I would like to focus primarily on a narrow area, one that my noble friend Lord Griffiths picked up on: the way we conduct ourselves.

If we look at the seven principles, we see that I as an individual and we as the Lords are somewhat weak when it comes to accountability. Who are we accountable to? What is our principal job? I would say that scrutinising legislation is our principal role: legislation comes to us from the Commons, or we introduce it ourselves, and because it goes through the Commons, ultimately we are accountable to it, because it decides, yea or nay, whether our amendments will be taken. But there are many areas beyond that in which, when I look for accountability, there is a great big gaping hole. I am not really sure, in the context of this debate, whether I am asking questions of the Minister or of the House on how we conduct our business, because there is a Nolan principle up there, when we come to it.

I share a room with my good friend the noble Lord, Lord Young, who raised the issue of finance. We are not accountable to the Commons on finance. I do not know who we are accountable to on that. Is it the Government directly? We seem to run our own show in what we believe is the best way possible and acceptable. But as to a clear line of accountability, there is no stream there to be identified, and that is a weakness of this House that we should address.

Linked to that of course is the growth of the House. There are now 830-odd of us—it is far too big and we do not need that. We need change, and we have endeavoured to make that change ourselves. I put it to the Minister that the Government have a responsibility to say what they will do about the ever-growing size of this House, the way in which they conduct themselves in making appointments, and how we contain it and reduce the cost. We, in turn, still have further work to do in that area; we ran away from having an age of retirement, and I can see the arguments against that. But our basic function here is to vote. If people do not come here and stay to vote, they are not fulfilling the public duty that they have been given. If they are not fulfilling the full role given to them, as for a policeman, a nurse or others, they should not be Members of this House; they should exercise the principles and voluntarily leave. We should go back to our work in looking at the House and review whether we could do more to reduce our numbers.

We then come to the issue of accountability to the public. Deep down, we do not want any real change, because it threatens our positions. Whenever this has come up, we have found ways and means, as has the Commons, of avoiding elections to this Chamber. I do not want to get involved in that today, but we still have a gaping hole in our accountability to the public. I hope that we can open up and start to have a conversation in that area. I might suggest that a start would be to do some MORI-type work among the public at large on how they perceive us in the light of where we stand in 2021, particularly after Brexit. In 2016, we were well out of touch with the mood of the public, notwithstanding all our intelligence and expertise. We have to be close to the people and we need to find ways in which we can get closer to them than we are, for the betterment of ourselves, for the betterment of the public and for the betterment of public standards.

2.19 pm

**Lord Balfe (Con):** My Lords, it is a great honour to take part in this debate, initiated by our good friend, the noble Lord, Lord Blunkett. It is also great for me, because I get lower and lower down the speaking list, to a point where I am now so low that the Chamber is beginning to fill up for the winding-up speeches, so I am actually getting a better audience than I normally do.

I will begin by saying a word in support of the House of Lords Appointments Commission. It has been very much maligned because of a decision about a Lord, but, when I was appointed to this Chamber, there was a very thorough investigation. Two of the people on the list nominated by the Prime Minister were later withdrawn—and this is by no means uncommon. I am told that if you look at the commission's proceedings, quite a lot of names have, after investigation, been withdrawn, so I do not think that we can tie all the commission's work around one nomination. I am also told that the nomination that was turned down from the present Prime Minister was not the only one. Indeed, in the reign of Gordon Brown there was also someone turned down who was subsequently put forward—but I am sure we can look at that.

The next thing I would like to say is that there is a general ooh-ah about corruption in this country. I was shocked last Sunday to see the headline in the *Sunday Times* where a gentleman, Mahfouz Marei Mubarak bin Mahfouz, was castigated for receiving a CBE for donating a huge amount of money to Prince Charles's charity Dumfries House. Were it not for the Prince of Wales, that house would not have been rescued. He has done an enormous job as prince and, frankly, if you have to give away the odd bauble to get some money in, I would have said that that is a matter for congratulation, not for having a go at people. We probably need to get a scale and a perspective, because if you look through any honours list you always see a number of honours "for charitable services". That is all this particular person did, so I exonerate him.

I will make one or two points about what we could do in our House. First, I very much endorse what my noble friend Lord Young had to say. The time has come for us to look to IPSA to be our regulatory body. I do not think we would have the scandal, frankly, of Members of this House who do not live in London basically being given a different rate of allowance from those who do. IPSA is probably the place to look after our pay and rations, because it has worked down the Corridor.

I would also like to see some attention paid to the revolving door. When I was young in the Civil Service, almost 60 years ago, people wanted to bring in outsiders. At that time, the union I was associated with warned that if you brought them in, their premium would be on getting a job outside and that senior civil servants would constantly be looking to the people they were giving the contracts to and thinking, "What happens when I'm 60?" Well, the first thing to do of course is to increase the retirement age, but the second is to look at this revolving door, because it revolves a bit too smoothly in some places.

I would also like the Government to look at the situation of trade envoys. Trade envoys are not government appointments, yet my good friend Andrew Rosindell was sacked as trade envoy to Tanzania for voting against the Government. Trade envoys also come from the Labour Party. I do not know whether they have any sanction about Labour trade envoys, but I do not think it is right that a trade envoy appointed on expertise should be treated as part of the payroll vote.

My final point is that we really have to look at the idea of non-legislative Peers. There are people in society who deserve high honours and who have contributed enormously to the country, but they are not trained legislators. There should be a way for this top honour of being called a Lord to be split into two divisions: legislative and non-legislative Peers. This would get rid of a lot of the problems of donors as well.

2.25 pm

**Lord Davies of Oldham (Lab):** My Lords, it is a real privilege to participate in this debate. In fact, it has been a real privilege to sit and listen to the contributions, which have in many respects identified issues that should be of great concern to the Government but which we all feel are being somewhat derided at present.

[LORD DAVIES OF OLDHAM]

I was grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Kerr, for emphasising the difficulties for senior civil servants in relation to Ministers under the present regime.

It seems very important that we get the key points from this debate across to government. We know that the Prime Minister himself probably pays little regard to principles, but there is a capacity for the generation of pressure in specific areas, which is what we should concentrate on, in order not just to improve the situation but to stave off what several speeches reflected, which is the growing sense of unease about critical aspects of our democracy being undermined. I remember when it was suggested during the middle months of the Trump regime that there were one or two defections from democratic participation—challenges that looked to smack of belief in other forms of running society. Then look what happened: it all exploded. Of course, we are not in that situation, but we must guard against such developments.

One of the things I miss most at present is that Covid has taken away school visits for a lot of us. I enjoy talking to young people—by “young” I mean 15 to 16 year-olds and sixth formers, who are certainly young in comparison to the vast majority of us—because two things crop up each time. The first is, “How do you become a politician?” That is interesting, because it seems to give the impression that it is a career in which you have to learn to make the progress of securing first base and then move on from there. I am afraid that I tend to destroy those illusions fairly fast. I have a good record of failure in politics, so they do believe me after a short while.

The second aspect, which is of great importance, is that they do believe that our society can be made better and that there can be improvements—and there are aspects of this debate that must be translated into those anticipations so that it is recognised that the body politic needs improving.

I look forward to the response to this debate of the noble Lord, Lord True. I congratulate my noble friend Lord Blunkett not just on initiating the debate but on the brilliant speech he made. I hope that the Minister will not let the intervening three hours pass in such a way that he will fail to respond to the crucial points put to him by my noble friend. I very much look forward to that speech.

Of course, we have to appreciate the limitations of this House when it comes to action to protect crucial aspects of democracy, because we are unelected and can easily be put down in those terms—but we still need to articulate those defences. The other House needs support on this, because Members there are expressing obvious anxieties, and those anxieties are real when power begins to believe that it can be utterly untrammelled and uncontrolled because of the legitimacy of the last election. Politics in this country have always meant a good deal more than that, and I think today’s debate in this House has helped to establish how important these crucial points are for the continuation and extension of our democratic tradition.

2.30 pm

**Lord Tyler (LD):** My Lords, our thanks are certainly due to the noble Lord, Lord Blunkett, not just for this very timely debate but for the comprehensive way in which he looked at so many aspects of the concerns that we are all now experiencing. We also owe a huge debt of gratitude to the noble Lord, Lord Evans, his current colleagues and his predecessors, some of them Members of your Lordships’ House, for the meticulous work of the Committee on Standards in Public Life. In that connection, I express my appreciation for the kind words said about our much-missed former colleague, Diana Maddock.

I have a personal interest in the value of the committee. It was in answer to a Question from me on 18 October 1994—about Tory sleaze, as it happens—that the then Prime Minister, John Major, announced his intention of appointing the committee; the Minister may recall that exchange. In addition to supporting the work of the CSPL over the years, not least on political funding, I echo the contribution today from the noble Lord, Lord Evans; I am only sorry that he was limited in time. I refer also to his trenchant evidence to the Select Committee on Tuesday. His insistence that the overall integrity of our electoral system depends on the independence of the Electoral Commission, the statutory regulator, and that it should not be infringed by government or party interests is very germane to this debate.

The Speaker’s Committee is not only overweighted with Conservatives—and MPs who have a grudge against the commission, due to their own electoral misdeeds—but surely inappropriate. As I have already pointed out, the commission is answerable to Parliament as a whole, so it should be a joint committee so that Peers can ensure that the MPs on it are not just there to be partisan. Adding some lay members to the committee would also increase confidence in its impartiality.

The Statement by the Minister for the Constitution and Devolution, which was referred to earlier by the noble Lord, Lord Evans, was somewhat misleading in this respect. She said that

“the Government will empower the UK Parliament to hold the Electoral Commission effectively accountable”.—[*Official Report*, Commons, 7/9/21; col. 16WS.]

But this is a two-House Parliament. It is not just the House of Commons keeping an eye on our electoral system; this House has a responsibility, too, and some among us may feel that we are slightly more impartial. It should not be a question of MPs marking their own homework, as we might expect if it is left simply to them.

I very much endorse the points about the CSPL made by my noble friends Lord Wallace, Lord Clement-Jones and Lord Stunell—himself an assiduous member of that committee, as he demonstrated in his contribution today—but in the interests of brevity I am not going to repeat their comments. However, I will pick up one comment by the noble Lord, Lord Young of Cookham. As it happens, I have been listening to the noble Lord for over 60 years and I have experienced much wisdom from him. I felt that he too, after his long experience in government and in this House, was making an extremely



strong case for strengthening adherence to standards but that there was an element of complacency in his reference to other international experience. I felt that that was not really where this House was this afternoon; I do not think there is any inclination to be complacent.

In that connection, I want to take up the wise words of the noble Lord, Lord Dubs. We have to see this in terms of both institutional responsibility and individual responsibility. They go together; you cannot divorce the two. A number of other contributions have made a similar point. Indeed, there have been many formidable contributions and clearly we are going to have to read *Hansard* with great care. I hope the Minister is going to do so as well.

Reflecting those contributions, I will take one very topical example. Naturally, much of the debate today has concentrated on the issues covered by the CSPL report *Standards Matter 2*. I want to refer to its even more recent report on electoral finance regulation. It was the product of careful consideration and examination, and equally thorough consultation, over some 12 months, with all the committee's usual independence and integrity, and it resulted in 47 recommendations. All seven Nolan principles are rigorously relevant there. In particular, the committee was determined that electoral law should be approached with selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness and honesty. It obviously also hoped that the Government and Parliament would show leadership in adopting a strictly non-partisan approach.

Given that we manage to review and update electoral law only every 20 years or so, you would hope that Ministers would recognise the overwhelming case for delaying the Elections Bill until the CSPL recommendations had been fully considered, incorporated or adapted. Not a bit of it. Ignoring the unique status of the committee, Ministers have charged ahead with their partisan Bill. Indeed, when my colleague Alistair Carmichael challenged the Minister for the Constitution and Devolution on this during the Second Reading debate on Tuesday, she abysmally failed to answer the point. Not only is this a direct insult to the committee but it prevents Parliament from doing its scrutiny duty.

In these circumstances, I am sure that Members on all sides of your Lordships' House will sympathise with the evidence given by the noble Lord, Lord Evans, on Tuesday. He noted, incidentally, that the Government did not even consult the committee on the vital financial elements of the Bill. I also thought it significant that the Conservative chair of the committee told the Commons debate that the Bill should have had pre-legislative and cross-party scrutiny before the Government finalised their proposals. This is a classic case of trying to ensure that scrutiny is cross-party, not partisan.

The vexed issue of compulsory photo ID at polling stations has attracted most attention so far, but I believe that the clauses relating to cash are even more insidious—hence the vital significance of the CSPL recommendations. “Follow the money” is the watchword of all effective investigative journalism. We should learn the lesson there. Ministers have already had to admit that policing the eligibility of foreign residents

for both electoral registration and political donations could be fraught. How can the UK registration authorities check the eligibility of a resident in a far-off tax haven?

A less noticeable set of clauses tears up the 2018 Supreme Court judgment that reiterated the century-old principle that candidates and agents should be fully responsible for all expenditure seeking to secure election in a constituency. Your Lordships' House has a number of former MPs and we know how important that is; if that is not going to be a rule in future, it goes to the very basis of the integrity of our electoral system. We should not forget that the judge in that case urged the necessity to return to a level playing field. Suspended sentences are not verdicts of innocence. Reversing that judgment could enable a very rich party, benefiting from even more foreign donations, to pour hundreds of thousands of pounds into marginal constituencies without proper recording, reporting or controls.

In short, the Elections Bill looks like a measure to help millionaires buy seats while ignoring the voting rights of millions of disenfranchised citizens. This goes to the very roots of our parliamentary system, as the noble Lord, Lord Evans, and his committee have already said. This is all about standards of propriety in public life and in our representative system.

At one point we were told that the Government intended to introduce a Bill with the title of “Electoral Integrity”. Presumably trading standards then intervened, since there is no such claim to integrity now. The CSPL naturally pays much more attention to the need for fairness at the very heart of our electoral and political system. It should be listened to by Ministers now.

2.40 pm

**Baroness Smith of Basildon (Lab):** My Lords, I join those who have congratulated my noble friend Lord Blunkett not just on initiating the debate but on the way in which he did so and the points he made. One of the most poignant things he said in his introduction was that the integrity and conduct of our Government is not just important for the functioning of democracy at home; it impacts on our international reputation and authority.

What I have found so encouraging about this debate is, first, that despite the comments by the noble Lord, Lord Balfe, Members have been here to listen to other Members and not just make their own speeches; and, secondly, how deeply colleagues feel about the integrity of the political and parliamentary processes of public service. I draw particular attention to the comments of my noble and much valued friends Lord Davies of Oldham and Lord Dubs, with their own long public service in both Houses, and their concerns that this can be denigrated and affect our ability to be effective in what we do.

In some ways, today's debate follows on from the debate on Monday in the name of the noble Lord, Lord Norton, about the status of the House of Lords Appointments Commission and the Government's approach to appointments. The issue of standards is about not just politicians and politics but the behaviour of all those in responsible positions in public life. That

[BARONESS SMITH OF BASILDON]

has to start with government and Parliament. The comments about our personal responsibility by my noble friend Lord Hunt and the noble Baroness, Lady Stowell, are points extremely well made. What we do and say, and what government does and says, has an impact on the national behaviour. The comments made by my noble friends Lady Donaghy and Lord Puttnam showed just how much this House values the integrity and credibility that we bring to our work.

Let us be realistic: there has never been a golden age in which politicians have been universally loved and admired. I recall a meeting with a former Secretary of State for Health, speaking to a room full of medics. He said to them: “Between us, we have the support of 99% of the population. You’ve got 97% and I’ve got 2%.” These are not golden times, but perhaps that is a little harsh. The question today is: has there been a fundamental change in political responsibility that has had a deep impact on the respect and, more importantly, the confidence in which politicians are held?

My starting point on this is a ministerial resignation—understandably not recent, but the one referred to by the noble Lord, Lord Stunell, from 1947. As Chancellor, Hugh Dalton made his way to the Chamber—this Chamber, incidentally, because the other was damaged—to present the Budget in 1947. He was stopped by John Carvel, a reporter from the evening *Star*, who asked an innocuous question about what he was going to drink at the Dispatch Box. Unfortunately, like most politicians he chose to talk too much, got into a brief conversation and gave him a few bullet points from the Budget as he was going to the Chamber to present it. The *Star* immediately got a stop press of a few bullet points on the front of the local paper. MPs were in the Chamber—he was presenting the Budget—and very few people outside could have read it before he presented it to Parliament. An inquiry that later took place even said it had no economic impact whatever, but he took full responsibility and resigned his post. His integrity was praised.

By contrast, when the independent adviser Sir Alex Allan investigated the Home Secretary following allegations of bullying civil servants, he advised the Prime Minister that she had broken the Ministerial Code. It was not the Minister who resigned but the adviser.

As the noble Lord, Lord Kerr, referenced, when the Falkland Islands were invaded in 1982, the Foreign Secretary resigned, saying in a letter to the Prime Minister:

“The Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands has led to strong criticism ... of the Government’s policy. In my view, much of the criticism is unfounded. But I have been responsible for the conduct of that policy and I think it right that I should resign.”

Contrast that with a Foreign Secretary going on holiday and then remaining out of the country as an international crisis unfolds.

So, yes, there is clear evidence of a fundamental shift. I do not think that our expectations are lower, but we have ceased to be surprised when a Minister clings on to their job by their fingertips. In this regard, I was struck by the comments of the noble Lord, Lord Smith of Finsbury, on the consequences of flouting

standards of behaviour. While the individual Minister and the Prime Minister may breathe a collective sigh of relief at getting away with it, they need to recognise that this chips away at the moral integrity and authority of government, and indeed of politics as a whole. That is the danger in some of the behaviour we have seen.

We have heard a number of examples today, but I will focus on three areas in which changes could and should be made: government procurement; appointments, particularly of non-executive directors; and the Ministerial Code and the Committee on Standards in Public Life.

On procurement, it has now been exposed that companies with no relevant experience or track record were awarded contracts for PPE during the Covid crisis. The noble Lord, Lord Bethell, has had to admit to Parliament that there was potential litigation in respect of 40 PPE contracts to the value of £1.2 billion, involving 1.7 billion items of PPE that were not delivered or were unsafe. That is a scandal of historic proportions. The noble Lord shakes his head, but I got this from a Parliamentary Answer he gave. He said discussions are ongoing that could lead to potential “legal action”.

We need a full and independent investigation to uncover the scale of this problem, including the involvement of Ministers and their political advisers, whether the rules were adequate and whether the rules were broken. It has to investigate whether there was any impropriety in the awarding of £2 billion-worth of Covid contracts to Conservative donors or friends of Ministers, because £2 billion is a lot of taxpayers’ money. It would be helpful if the noble Lord, Lord Bethell, could report back on the legal action as soon as he is in his place; we would welcome that.

On government appointments, it was Peter Riddell, as Commissioner for Public Appointments, who said that

“the precarious balance between ministerial patronage and appointment by merit ‘is under threat’.”

Personally, I am not against ministerial involvement in public appointments, but it has to be absolutely clear and transparent that the appointment is on merit. I wrote to Simon Case about the appointment of the noble Baroness, Lady Harding, to try to understand whether she was a civil servant and what the rules of appointment were. The response I got back was inadequate but honest: basically, there were no regulations in place and no transparency. She did not have to abide by the Civil Service Code and could be very party political. That seems to me an unacceptable position that we are in.

The noble Lord, Lord Kerr, drew specific attention to the appointment of non-executive directors in government. When the Government insist on appointing friends, donors and special advisers to non-executive director roles on departmental boards, it fundamentally alters the role of those boards. They are supposed to be there to provide challenge, scrutiny and insight to government. If they fail to do that, it undermines the role of the boards and good governance.

On Monday, we discussed appointments into your Lordships’ House; it was raised today by my noble friends Lord Griffiths, Lord Dubs and Lord Brooke. The Government seem to have torn up the rulebook on this. The House agreed to the Burns report—that

two Members would come out and one would go in, to reduce the size and maintain political balance. That is not the Government's view, and it is very sad. It is interesting that it has been universally condemned across the House.

Time is not allowing me to say as much as I wanted to on the Committee on Standards in Public Life. I was grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Evans, for his very thoughtful comments today, as well as his comments on the Elections Bill, with which I concur. It is quite clear—I have mentioned this to the Minister before—that there need to be changes. The Government should take forward some of the changes recommended to preserve the integrity of the work the committees do.

Perhaps the greatest obligation on Ministers and all parliamentarians is the responsibility and obligation of honesty and openness. I have had to write to the Leader of the House more than once about the inadequacy of ministerial answers to questions from Members of your Lordships' House. We want to see full answers for good reasons, and I hope that the Minister will be able to address that today, but it has to start at the top, with the Prime Minister.

I am sure the Prime Minister wishes that he had never been caught on camera telling manufacturers in Northern Ireland that they would not have to fill in any forms and, if they had a customs form, they could throw it in the bin or send it to him. We have a Prime Minister who will give answers to get him through the moment with a throwaway line, and that does not help to improve public perception of the honesty of your Lordships' House.

I think things have changed from the days of Hugh Dalton and Lord Carrington. I do not share the optimism of the noble Lord, Lord Young of Cookham, but I want to remain optimistic. I still believe that politics is a force for good. I also believe that the overwhelming majority of those in political and public service behave with decency, integrity and honour—and with enthusiasm for and commitment to what they do. When others do not, that undermines us all.

2.51 pm

**The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Lord True) (Con):** My Lords, it has been an extensive debate. It is customary on these occasions to say that it has been an outstanding debate, but let me not, on this occasion, be customary. Let me say sincerely that it has been an outstanding debate. I thank all those who have taken part. The subject being discussed is of profound importance, and I know I speak for all noble Lords present, as well as those who have spoken. So many people here in this Chamber have had the honour that I have had, over quite a long life, of public service in many different walks of life. I believe that we all share a common desire and a common interest to achieve the best, to root out wrongdoing and to reflect in the best way we possibly can a sense of honour—honour on the profession of politics and honour on our place in your Lordships' House. I have been very grateful for the opportunity to listen to the debate; I assure all noble Lords that I have listened to it very carefully; and I am grateful to all those who have taken part.

I do not wish to single out the noble Lord, Lord Evans of Weardale, or the noble Lord, Lord Stunell, but it has obviously been particularly helpful to have their contributions from the perspective of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, and I thank them for the work they do. I must echo others in thanking the noble Lord, Lord Blunkett, for moving the Motion and, as many have said—including, I think at her conclusion, the noble Baroness, Lady Smith—for the way in which he moved it.

On these occasions, I try—although I am sometimes a little combative, I know—to avoid the yah boo thing that our dear friends in the other place sometimes get into of saying, “Well, he did that, but you did that”, et cetera. I agree with the very wise remarks of the noble Lord, Lord Dubs, and I do not agree with politicians criticising other politicians except where there is a very legitimate and strong case to do so. It does not help any of us. The tenor of this debate, where we have, in the words of the noble Lord, Lord Griffiths of Burry Port, come together in a common endeavour, is very important. I was not so happy about his use of the word “rotten” later in his speech, but I will forgive him for that.

I have listened with great respect. I agree with the fundamental point made by the noble Lord, Lord Blunkett, about the need for high standards. I differ with some on the idea that we have now descended into an age of rust and that standards now are uniquely poor or corrupt. I do not believe that is true and, as I said at the outset, it does a disservice to the vast bulk of those in this place and in public service.

I will try to address the main points that have been made, but before I move on, I give the noble Lord, Lord Blunkett, the fundamental assurance he asked for: these matters are constantly under review. The voices that your Lordships have raised today will be part of that review and consideration, and a number have been referred to in the debate.

I agreed with the remarks of my noble friend Lord Young of Cookham and others, notably the right reverend Prelate, about the need for proportionality. That informed this debate: the need to admit our own fallibility. It is certainly my personal credo that one is imperfect and must seek to do better day by day. We must all strive for the highest ethical standards, and I agreed with the point made in the thoughtful speech made by the noble Lord, Lord Brooke of Alverthorpe: it is about not just the processes of central or local government, but ourselves in this House. Yes, we need to examine ourselves and the way we do things and, in the old language of this House, as I said, to seek to stand on honour.

I agree, too, with what my noble friend Lady Stowell of Beeston and the noble Lord, Lord Hunt, said: meeting the letter of the law is not enough; we need to go beyond the letter of the law. I do not wish to impugn the legal profession, but this is not a House of small print lawyers; this should be a House which aspires, as should the Government as a whole, to do more than the letter of the law to uphold standards.

This House, with its Members drawn from so many walks of life and professions and with such experience to share—that is the strength of an appointed House—has

[LORD TRUE]

always played an important role in preserving our national reputation for good government and high standards. I know it does not always seem that way but, while I am at this Dispatch Box, I welcome the challenge that comes to the Government from this place, from parties and colleagues opposite and—yes, I use the word used by the noble Lord, Lord Parekh, I think—friends.

We should never be complacent. We should continually hold ourselves to high standards. Many noble Lords have rightly continued that tradition today in the course of their comments.

The noble Lords, Lord Wallace of Saltaire and Lord Tyler, in particular, referred to the fact that it is 26 years since the Committee on Standards in Public Life completed its inaugural report. Before that, yes, indeed, I was present in No. 10—I think it was on a Monday morning—when we discussed these matters and decided to go forward with that proposal, which was a good policy and has stood the test of time, to set up the Committee on Standards in Public Life under the chairmanship of a former Member of your Lordships' House, Lord Nolan.

He set down those principles, which have rightly been referred to by so many of your Lordships. We know what they are, but it is worth reading them into the record again, because they are fundamental: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability—yes—openness, honesty and leadership. I have heard the call for a broader tapestry to be woven on top of them, and work is done constantly by the Committee on Standards in Public Life to do so, but we must never lose sight of those fundamental principles. Lord Nolan led the committee admirably, and his legacy through the Nolan principles will be remarked on for many years to come.

The noble Lord, Lord Puttnam, said that those seven principles of public life are the bedrock of ethical standards in government—in this Government and in all Governments. They give all of us who work in public life a set of principles to embody and to take pride in upholding, at every level—in my case, from my first day in local government as a young councillor upwards.

The noble Lord, Lord Foulkes, referred to devolved Administrations. I was grateful that he did not attack me today, although I always enjoy it when he does; I rarely go home from this House without a few lashes on my back. I will not go too far—as he knows, this is a delicate area—but I am aware that Article 9 of the Bill of Rights is not necessarily applicable to Members of the Scottish Parliament. However, it is a matter for the Scottish Parliament to consider, in our view, and I am sure that his powerful speech will have been heard and noted outside this House.

Following on from Lord Nolan, I pay tribute to the successive chairs of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, coming down to the present day with the noble Lord, Lord Evans. He and his committee have, a quarter of a century after the Nolan principles were first laid out, embarked on the second *Standards Matter* review to ensure that the highest standards are maintained. This work is in progress, but it has been a landscape

review of the institutions, processes and structures in place to support high standards of conduct. Let me be absolutely clear: the Government welcome the work being undertaken by the committee, recognise the importance of such recommendations in ensuring the conservation of high standards in public life and will, of course, consider the final recommendations of the committee's review carefully—as the committee would expect and all noble Lords would accept.

In the interim, the committee has set out its views on four main topics: the Ministerial Code and the independent adviser on ministerial interests; business appointment rules; transparency around lobbying; and the regulation of public appointments. Although we are at this interim stage and the final government responses will come later, since many of the observations made by noble Lords in the debate touched on these areas, I will venture to provide some comments on all four of those issues now.

The noble Baroness, Lady Smith of Basildon, and many other noble Lords, referred to the Ministerial Code and the role of the independent adviser on ministerial interests. The Government have discussed this frequently and believe that the Ministerial Code should remain the responsibility of the Prime Minister of the day. This reflects the Prime Minister's constitutional position as the sovereign's sole adviser on matters concerning the royal prerogative—in this case, on the appointment, dismissal and acceptance of resignation of other Ministers. From that position flows the accountability to this sovereign Parliament of the Prime Minister for the appointment and removal of Ministers.

In its valuable and important report—and I am not anticipating the final report or conclusions—the Committee on Standards in Public Life said in its findings that the Ministerial Code should be issued by the Prime Minister and that there should be a range of graduated sanctions for breaches of the Ministerial Code. This is being addressed. It said that the issuing of those sanctions should be a matter solely for the Prime Minister, and that rests on this constitutional doctrine, which most of us under successive Administrations have accepted.

However, the Ministerial Code does require Ministers to maintain high standards of behaviour and provides guidance on how Ministers should act and arrange their affairs in order to do so. The Prime Minister is the judge of that, ultimately, but to assist him in the responsibility a Prime Minister has an independent adviser. In May, the Prime Minister appointed a highly regarded Member of your Lordships' House to that role, the noble Lord, Lord Geidt. Many noble Lords will remember that, as part of the process of appointment, my right honourable friend the Prime Minister agreed with the noble Lord new terms of reference for the role and set out his position on the role in a letter to the noble Lord, Lord Evans.

The letter confirms a number of important points. First, where, in the assessment of the adviser, the adviser believes an allegation about a breach of the code might warrant further investigation, he will raise the issue with the Prime Minister. Secondly, where a matter is referred to the adviser and his work is concluded,

the adviser's advice on his conclusions will be published in a timely manner. There should be a range of potential outcomes if the breach of the Ministerial Code is determined to have occurred—in fact, this has always been the case, but a more formal approach is suggested. The adviser should have a specific role in providing recommendations about the appropriate sanction in the circumstances where it is determined that a Minister has failed to adhere to the standards set out in the code. The adviser should be appointed for a non-renewable five-year term to give him or her independence. And when the adviser undertakes work, it should be supported by civil servants who act under his direction and report to him.

Many noble Lords today, including my noble friend Lord Young of Cookham, have commented that the changes to the terms of reference embodied in that letter do not go far enough and that the independent adviser should have the power to initiate their own investigations. In response, I point to the comments of the noble Lord, Lord Geidt, in evidence to PACAC in the other place, that he would wish to operate the new terms of reference for a period before drawing conclusions about their efficacy, but I take note of what noble Lords have said in the debate.

The noble Lord, Lord Blunkett, and others, referred to the role of ACOBA and business appointments. The noble Baroness, Lady Smith, also referred to this matter, which has been a focus within the *Standards Matter 2* review. The business appointment rules are an integral part of how the Government uphold integrity and retain public trust. I share the concern of noble Lords that they should be effective and consistent, and as set out in my honourable friend the Minister for Constitution and Devolution's Written Statement on government transparency and accountability in July, the Government have been working to improve the operation and efficacy of the rules.

Again, as the noble Lord, Lord Blunkett asked, we do not assert that this is completed work; it is all ongoing work—ongoing consideration. The work will consider and implement improvements to the scope and clarity, the consistency and proportionality, and the enforcement of the rules. The Government are working closely with the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments and departments across the Government to implement changes, and there will be an update to the rules later this year.

The Government do differ from some of your Lordships. They believe that a statutory system would be out of line with the general principle of UK law that Ministers and officials are subject to the same legal system and statutory framework as all others. The rules form part of civil servants' and special advisers' contracts of employment and, as such, are subject to legal processes. That is the same legal approach and potential sanctions for breach of contract as apply to all other private citizens who might have similar provisions in employment contracts with private companies.

The noble Baroness opposite asked about PPE and procurement in that respect. As the noble Baroness said, my noble friend Lord Bethell on hearing those remarks, I think, would say that is not true, and the

Government would say that, in relation to whether the PPE in the cases referred to was necessarily inadequate, we are protecting the taxpayer's interests—

**Baroness Smith of Basildon (Lab):** I am so sorry to interrupt the Minister, but he is aware that the noble Lord, Lord Bethell, shook his head at me as I made a particular point, and he has just said that would not be true. This was a Written Question that was answered on 1 September 2021. The noble Lord, Lord Bethell, said:

“As of 27 July 2021, the Department was engaged in commercial discussions (potentially leading to litigation) in respect to 40 PPE contracts with a combined value of £1.2 billion covering 1.7 billion items of PPE.”

That is a direct quote from *Hansard*.

**Lord True (Con):** My Lords, I did not deny that there were cases of litigation. I was making the point that, in those cases, it was not necessarily the case that the PPE concerned was inadequate. I do not challenge what the noble Baroness opposite said and was not seeking to do so.

The experience of Covid-19 shows that we could be better at ensuring consistency in the management of conflicts of interest. Updated commercial guidance on the management of actual and perceived conflicts of interest was published this May, to provide commercial teams across government with further information on the roles and responsibilities of those involved in decision-making and risk management and how provisions may be applied to suppliers. The future legislative scheme will continue to place a legal duty on authorities to prevent and remedy conflicts of interest, with additional policy and guidance provided by the centre where the need arises. Our broader proposals to strengthen transparency and non-discrimination measures will also complement the fight against conflicts of interest, which is an important fight.

Regarding the next theme in the committee's *Standards Matter 2* review on strengthening transparency around lobbying, I am pleased that, despite the need to reprioritise resources to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic, good progress continues to be made this year by central government departments in publishing core transparency data. Yes, transparency is important.

The noble Lord, Lord Clement-Jones, asked about AI transparency and standards. We recognise the need to develop appropriate mechanisms to increase transparency and accountability in decisions made by semi-autonomous systems, and to monitor their impact. Currently, data scientists across departments use the *Data Ethics Framework* and other guidance, including the guide to using AI in the public sector, to support a safe and fair use of algorithms. Building on the existing work on algorithmic and data ethics, the Government are developing appropriate and effective mechanisms to deliver more transparency on the use of algorithmic-assisted decision-making within the public sector. I can assure the noble Lord that that remains under consideration.

More broadly, the Cabinet Office supports departments to publish data that is consistent, timely and helpful, including with regular communications, guidance and

[LORD TRUE]

training, and offers of more bespoke support where required. The Government will consider the committee's recommendations on how the Cabinet Office should work

"To improve the quality of departmental transparency releases".

Separately, I can assure noble Lords that the Government are reviewing Part 1 of the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014. Part 1 of the Act increased transparency around the work of consultant lobbyists by establishing a statutory register of consultant lobbyists and an independent registrar with powers to monitor and enforce compliance. We will set out the conclusions of this review work in due course and take also into account the work of the Boardman review.

I do not wish to go into the matter of the Boardman review at great length, but I heard the remarks of the noble Baroness, Lady Donaghy, and understand her strong personal statement on that. Mr Boardman provided the Prime Minister with a report that sets out his findings of fact. It was published, as we all know, on 22 July, with the contested consequences the noble Baroness referred to. The Government thank Mr Boardman for all his work in examining the evidence. We will publish the second part of the Boardman recommendations shortly and consider them. The Government will also, in that context, want to consider the recommendations made by the parliamentary Select Committees which have looked at this and the Committee on Standards in Public Life. Again, this is work in progress, not in any sense work dismissed.

The final part of the review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life focused on the regulation of public appointments, on which a number of noble Lords have spoken. We also had some discussion earlier this week about the appointment of non-executives to government departments. I repeat that all non-executive appointments are subject to compliance with the Committee on Standards in Public Life. The process—

I am sorry, but I have been looking at the wrong clock.

**Noble Lords:** Oh!

**Lord True (Con):** I was about to say that a number of checks and balances are built into these matters. Fortunately, we have a Whip here who is a check and a balance. I do not wish to take any time away from the noble Lord, Lord Blunkett, given his outstanding speech. I would like, in brief conclusion, to repeat my reference to the seriousness with which the Government take these issues and the points raised by your Lordships' today on the vital importance of high ethical standards in public life. I apologise for overrunning.

3.15 pm

**Lord Blunkett (Lab):** My Lords, I am grateful to the Minister for the tenure of his response and hope he will be able to transmit to present ministerial colleagues—and perhaps, very shortly, future ones—the feelings of this House. In the interests of openness and honesty—two of the Nolan principles—I should say that I am indebted to my noble friend Lady Smith of Basildon, because it

was the communication between us during the recess that led to me leading this debate. I want to put that on record for transparency purposes.

I thank everyone who has taken part this afternoon for their tremendous contributions and thoughtfulness. I know the House will forgive me for saying, as was said by the Minister, how grateful I am that the noble Lords, Lord Evans and Lord Stunell, were prepared, as members of the committee, to come and contribute. That indicates their very genuine commitment to their work, and we wish them well in the next stages. Again, I thank everyone for being here and for addressing what I consider to be the core of our constitution and democracy.

*Motion agreed.*

## Covid-19 Update *Statement*

*The following Statement was made in the House of Commons on Monday 6 September.*

"With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will update the House on Covid-19 and our vaccination programme.

Earlier this summer, we took the fourth step on our road map. We were able to take that step because of our vaccines and the way that they are working. The latest data from Public Health England estimates that our jabs have prevented over 100,000 deaths, over 143,000 hospitalisations and around 24 million infections. Across the United Kingdom, we have administered over 91 million vaccines; 88.8% of people over 16 have had their first dose, and 79.8% have had their second dose. Our jabs are building a vast wall of defence for the British people.

But this vital work is not yet complete. With the delta variant sweeping around the world, we have seen how it thrives on pockets of unvaccinated people. Last week, across the UK, we saw an average of 34,000 new cases and 938 hospitalisations each day. It is vital that we continue to plug the gaps in our defences and widen and deepen our wall of defence.

Over the summer, we have continued to do that in several ways. In August, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation recommended that vaccines should be offered to 16 and 17 year-olds. It also recommended jabs for 12 to 15 year-olds with specific underlying health conditions and household contacts of someone who is immunosuppressed. We accepted both recommendations, bringing us into line with countries such as Sweden. In recent weeks, 16 and 17 year-olds have been coming out to do their bit in droves, travelling with schoolmates and family members to get the jab.

We are taking the jab to people, too, with walk-in and pop-up vaccination sites at football stadiums and shopping centres, and of course at university freshers' fairs; I think we have got to 20 universities. Over the bank holiday weekend, NHS pop-up sites at the Leeds and Reading festivals made picking up a jab as easy as getting a beer or a burger. As a result of these kinds of efforts, more than half of 16 and 17 year-olds across

the United Kingdom have received their jabs since becoming eligible last month. That is in addition to over three in four—76.3%—18 to 34 year-olds, who have already had at least their first dose. Much of young people's enthusiasm, I believe, comes from the fact that they have seen at first hand the chaos that Covid-19 can bring. They have sacrificed so much and shown that age is no barrier to public spirit. I am sure the whole House will join me in thanking them for playing their part in helping us all to live safely.

On Friday, the JCVI outlined its recommendations on the vaccination of children aged 12 to 15 years who do not have underlying health conditions. It concluded that while there are benefits to vaccinating this cohort, taken purely on health terms the benefit is finely balanced. Building on the JCVI's advice, we will now consider advice from the UK's four chief medical officers and make a decision shortly. We have already accepted the JCVI's recommendation that 12 to 15 year-olds with the following conditions become eligible: haematological malignancy, sickle cell disease, type 1 diabetes, congenital heart disease and poorly controlled asthma. That will amount to an extra 200,000 teens becoming eligible.

I also want to take this opportunity to address vaccination in pregnant women. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the Royal College of Midwives have both recommended vaccination as one of the best defences for pregnant women against severe Covid infection. Extensive real-world data show our vaccines are safe and highly effective for pregnant women. We now know that pregnant women are more likely to become seriously ill from Covid if they are not vaccinated. In fact, 98% of pregnant women in hospital due to Covid-19 are unvaccinated. Yet we also know that not one single pregnant woman with two jabs has required hospitalisation with Covid-19. I urge pregnant women to continue to come forward and get the jab. Our new Preg-CoV trial is advancing knowledge on how we can even better protect pregnant women and their babies.

Taking all of that together, our overarching ambition is to widen our wall of defence so that we can protect more and more people. As well as widening that wall of defence, we are deepening it. Last Wednesday, 1 September, the JCVI advised that people with severely weakened immune systems should have a third vaccine dose as part of their primary Covid-19 vaccination schedule. It will be offered to people over 12 who were severely immunosuppressed at the time of their first or second dose, such as those with leukaemia, advanced HIV and recent organ transplants. This, I must stress, is separate from any potential booster programme for the rest of the population. The JCVI is still investigating who should receive boosters. Our Cov-boost study is comparing immune responses produced by third doses of different brands of vaccines. As ever, whatever the clinical decision from the JCVI, the NHS will be ready. We will proceed with the same sense of urgency we have had at every point in this campaign.

Vaccines remain our most important line of defence, yet they are not our only line of defence. Regular testing continues to play a crucial part in returning this country to something that feels a bit more like

normal. PCR tests remain freely and easily available, and anybody with symptoms should make sure to get tested. Children are returning to classrooms across these islands. I am sure all honourable Members welcome that, as did the Secretary of State for Education at Questions this afternoon. They return to an immeasurably better set up: no more home schooling, no more bubbles, teachers vaccinated, and all 16 and 17 year-olds offered a first dose before returning. That matters because we know that face-to-face education is the best place for children and young people.

Rapid testing can uncover hidden cases of the virus at the start of term. Whether it is our constituents or our children, we must encourage people to do it. On their return to school and colleges, students should take two rapid tests on site three to five days apart. They should then continue to test twice weekly at home. To university students, I would also say this: make every effort to get fully vaccinated before going back. It has never been easier to drop in and get a vaccine and the necessary testing. These are straightforward steps, but they are essential in stopping the spread.

Finally, I am sure the whole House will join me in welcoming the additional £5.4 billion cash injection we are putting into the NHS. This investment will go straight to the front line, supporting our Covid-19 response over the next six months. The funds include £1 billion to help to deliver routine surgery and treatments for patients and to tackle our backlog. The funds take the Government's total support for health services in response to Covid-19 to over £34 billion this year alone.

We are widening and deepening our wall of defence. We are getting jabs to more people and getting some people more jabs. We are getting the NHS what it needs. The ask of our NHS colleagues continues to be complex and challenging, yet they rise to it day in, day out. I pay tribute to everyone involved in these lifesaving efforts. We must keep going, and I commend this Statement to the House."

3.18 pm

**Baroness Thornton (Lab):** I hope the Minister has had a good break and I thank him for the Statement today. I regret that phrases such as "Groundhog Day" and "Here we go again" keep jumping into my mind unbidden. Obviously everybody welcomes the continued rollout of the vaccine, and I congratulate the NHS and its partners on this. However, we must not pretend and behave as if we are at the end of this pandemic. The figures still show a substantial daily rate of infection, hospitalisations and deaths. If we go into the winter with a high proportion of ICU beds still occupied by Covid patients, this will have a knock-on effect for serious elective surgery, emergency needs and flu. It will affect the ability and capacity of the NHS to deliver the beginning of the catch-up that we face in the next couple of years. The context of this catch-up is starkly illustrated by the figures concerning cancer this week. The Macmillan Cancer report reveals that

"More than 600,000 cancer patients in the UK are facing treatment delays or missing out on vital support because of a shortage of specialist nurses".

[BARONESS THORNTON]

Less than a month ago, the Health Secretary said that he wanted booster jabs to be given at the same time as flu jabs and that they would be starting this month. However, is it the case that, due to supply issues linked to a shortage of drivers, equipment and flu vaccinations, these are delayed? If so, for how long? Is it for two weeks or is it longer?

In this context, it is not surprising that GPs are at their wits' end, forced to cancel first blood tests because of test tube shortages and now flu vaccination appointments. We need to think about what that means; for example, if you are pregnant and need a flu vaccination, the delay is a serious matter because you cannot put your pregnancy on hold while the supply catches up with you. It is especially worrying as we head into what could be one of the most difficult and challenging winters for the NHS. What steps are the Government taking to ensure that there are not further delays and to avoid a flu crisis this winter?

If the CMOs are recommending vaccination, will the Minister guarantee that our public health workforce, our health visitors and our school nurses, as well as primary care, will have the resources they need to roll out that vaccination? Can he advise what the anticipated time frame for commencement and the communication strategy will be? He Minister must be aware that many parents appear to be hesitant and that with other groups with low levels of vaccine uptake, access to accurate and trusted information is key.

Some scientists have suggested that the vaccination of children against Covid-19 is already too late to blunt an autumn wave of the infection because they will get only one dose, which is not terribly effective at preventing infection with the delta variant. What assessment have the Government made of this and what consideration has been given to limiting the minimum interval between first and second doses?

The Education Secretary has suggested that weekly Covid tests for pupils could be scrapped this month, following a review. That may be quite concerning, given that the autumn could bring a surge in cases driven by a new variant, by more mixing of people at school or work, or indeed by a drop in the levels of immunity provided by the vaccine. Does the Minister agree that testing really ought to continue?

The Education Secretary also seems to have removed many of the infection control mitigations in schools. From these Benches, we urged the Government to use the summer to install ventilation, air filtration units and carbon dioxide monitors in schools. I would like to know how many schools now have these systems installed. I also share with the Minister our concerns that the current rules seem to suggest that a child can go to school even when their parents test positive. That seems not to be a sensible way forward.

Are the Government making contingency plans for an October firebreak lockdown if hospitalisations continue to rise at their current rate? Last week, the World Health Organization designated mu as a variant of interest, adding that it can potentially evade immunity granted from a previous Covid infection or vaccine. Perhaps the Minister could update the House on that issue.

On Tuesday, the Prime Minister finally made his long-awaited social care Statement, over two years after standing in front of the steps of Downing Street proclaiming to have a plan. Now, we had a debate and discussion earlier today about whether it is actually a plan—because we think it is not—and what the tax increase means. However, the timeframe for the delivery of this plan does not seem to recognise that we already have bed blocking in our hospitals. There is already an emergency in social care and the knock-on effect of that on Covid, flu and the winter could be substantial. I would really like the Minister to address that issue.

**The Deputy Speaker (Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall) (Lab):** My Lords, the noble Baroness, Lady Brinton, is taking part remotely. I invite the noble Baroness now to speak.

**Baroness Brinton (LD) [V]:** My Lords, yesterday 38,486 new daily cases were reported. That is equal to daily cases in mid-January and there are now just under 8,000 people in hospital, with 1,000 on ventilators—and yesterday 191 deaths were also reported, equal to the daily numbers at the beginning of March. The consequence of removing all mitigations and life returning to the new normal means Covid is still very much with us, especially the delta variant. Members of SAGE appear, according to the press, to be advising that preparations for an October lockdown should now be made.

It appears that Ministers are reliant on vaccination as the main mitigation, until the NHS is overwhelmed again. But we are already hearing of hospitals having to dedicate more wards just to Covid, with the complexities of double staffing for hot and not-hot wards. These numbers also make it much harder for the NHS to catch up on the long waiting lists, which have been talked about a great deal during the week, with the health and social care announcements.

The Statement talks about test and trace being another pillar. That is right, but the advice to the public is complex and there is evidence that many are not taking tests even when they have symptoms or have been in touch with a positive case. For example, you have to hunt quite hard online if you have had a negative PCR test but still have some residual symptoms to find out whether you should release yourself from self-isolation. Are there plans to make it clearer exactly what people should do, because we all know that sometimes the first PCR test is a little early and a second one is necessary?

Are the news reports true that there is about to be an announcement that anybody double vaccinated will not need to take a PCR test if they come into contact with a Covid-positive person? The delta variant can and is being caught by double-vaccinated people, and—importantly—they can transmit it too. That can have difficult consequences for those not vaccinated, or those who are clinically extremely vulnerable. The noble Baroness, Lady Thornton, referred to the mu variant. If it is true that the Pfizer vaccination is ineffective in holding it back, that is serious and we may need to think about mitigations again sooner rather than later.



The Statement explains the partial changes on policy for vaccinating 12 to 15 year-olds with underlying conditions. It is good to see that those with blood cancers, sickle cell, type 1 diabetes, congenital heart disease and poorly controlled asthma are now added to the list. Actually, it is vital, given Gavin Williamson's removal of all mitigations in schools. But other children are omitted from this list, who may be on immunosuppressants or immunocompromised, and who are now expected back in school. The Statement refers to "no more home schooling, no more bubbles, teachers vaccinated, and all 16 and 17 year-olds offered a first dose".

But the removal of bubbles and facemasks, and the Government's shameful lack of movement on providing proper ventilation interventions in classrooms, means that Covid can and will spread, and not just among the children—they may well take it home. While most children will not have a problem, some—those with underlying conditions—will.

Can the Minister explain why all children with serious underlying conditions have been removed from the clinically extremely vulnerable list of shielders? Parents are already getting threatening letters from schools, yet their questions about why their at-risk child has been taken off the list have not yet been properly answered. The evidence in America is that these children are occupying more paediatric hospital beds and more intensive care beds.

Turning to clinically extremely vulnerable adults, it is good that the 500,000 severely clinically extremely vulnerable are to get a third dose as soon as possible. But delaying the decision on a booster jab for the remaining clinically extremely vulnerable, who number just over 3 million, is worrying. Guidance online for them is still 10 pages long, muddled in with advice to the general population, but the key parts are still not to go into any environment with people who are not yet double jabbed or might breach social distancing, and if they come inside your home they should have had a lateral flow test first. As I have said, that amounts to a stay-at-home order but without the support that government provided before. When will the booster decision be made for this particular group of people?

Care home providers are warning that they are already losing staff ahead of the 11 November deadline for all staff to be double vaccinated. This is in addition to the staff shortages that they are already trying to manage, which include the perfect storm of losing staff through Brexit and increased pay in retail and agriculture. Losing more staff who are unvaccinated will be catastrophic. They have asked for a delay to the start of the scheme, particularly now that a new consultation has started for NHS staff on a scheme which would start at a later date. What plans are there to delay this implementation date?

Finally, the Minister for Vaccines came a real cropper in the House of Commons yesterday when trying to justify Covid vaccine passports, when he was on record in the past as not supporting them. Can the noble Lord update the House on the Government's plans regarding vaccine passports in light of yesterday's debate, which demonstrated that the relevant Minister could not even explain his own policy credibly?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Lord Bethell) (Con):** My Lords, I am extremely grateful for such thoughtful questions. I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Thornton, for her kind remarks: I had a very good break, and I hope that both she and the noble Baroness, Lady Brinton, did so too.

We are in a much better place than we were this time last year, but there are still serious challenges on the horizon. I am grateful for the opportunity to address some of those.

The noble Baroness, Lady Thornton, rightly alluded to the important flu vaccine rollout ahead of us. I reassure her that any issues of supply are focused very much on single suppliers, and we have a wide range of people stepping forward to supply us. We will continue an extended vaccination programme for the whole of the 2022 season, and more than 35 million people should be eligible for free seasonal flu vaccines. It will be the biggest flu vaccine rollout that we have ever done, beating, we hope, the record uptakes that we had last year. It will include a continued offer of vaccination to 50 to 64 year-olds and, for the first time, will be extended to additional cohorts in secondary schools so that those in years 7 to 11 will be offered a vaccination. The vaccination rollout is on course and we hope that it will hit all its targets.

While talking about education, I reassure the noble Baroness that asymptomatic testing in secondary schools and colleges will be continued. That includes two tests in person on return, which many have recently done, but there will be a review point at the end of September. Schools will not be responsible for contact tracing of positive cases. As with positive cases in other settings, NHS Test and Trace will work with those cases to identify close contacts. I believe that will lift a severe burden on schools and make life easier both for parents and for pupils.

On ventilation, both the noble Baroness, Lady Brinton, and the noble Baroness, Lady Thornton, are quite right: these are important developments. But we cannot turn around a massive change in the infrastructure of our education system overnight. As autonomous institutions, it is right for providers of education to put in place their plans based on individual circumstances, including allocating their own budgets. None the less, we are putting in place special provision for ventilation in schools where there is an acute need.

To answer the noble Baroness, Lady Brinton, directly, she is right: vaccines are the primary but not the only way out of this pandemic. She will know as well as anyone our remarkable achievements in that space. The noble Baroness, Lady Thornton, asked whether we are therefore planning to have an autumn "firebreak" of lockdowns. The Government are undertaking a review to assess the country's preparedness for autumn and winter, which will consider whether to continue or strengthen public and business guidance. We may need to take measures to help manage the virus during periods of higher risk, such as autumn. However, we will do everything we can to seek to avoid imposing restrictions that have significant economic, social and health costs. We will do it only as a last resort if absolutely necessary.

[LORD BETHELL]

Both the noble Baroness, Lady Brinton, and the noble Baroness, Lady Thornton, asked about children's and young people's vaccines. As they know, on 3 September we accepted JCVI advice on extending the list of 12 to 15 year-olds with underlying health conditions who can receive the vaccine. That is very good news. It includes children with haematological malignancies, sickle cell disease, type 1 diabetes, congenital heart disease and a number of other conditions. We are now awaiting the CMO's assessment of the JCVI advice so far and its advice to us on whether the remaining 12 to 15 age group should also receive the vaccine. We look forward to receiving that advice.

Regarding boosters and a third vaccine, on 1 September we accepted JCVI advice on offering a third vaccine dose to individuals with severe immunosuppression. That dose is being given to bring severely immunosuppressed individuals nearer to the same level of immunity achieved by healthy individuals in two primary doses. Again, this is very good news. Following the publication of interim advice by the JCVI in June, the Government are preparing for a potential booster vaccination programme from September, and I look forward to bringing details of that to the House at a future date.

On the mandation of vaccination in social care, we are enormously grateful for the huge amount of support among social care workers for our vaccination programme. It is true that some—a very small proportion—have not taken up the opportunity for vaccination. We hear the concerns of providers of social care, but, in the round, this has proved to be an effective programme that has delivered a huge amount of reassurance to those who live in social care and has put safety at the forefront of our efforts. That is why we are looking at a consultation on mandatory vaccination for NHS workers, following a public consultation that we recently announced. While many of those working in health and care have taken up the offer, it is crucial that this is consistent across relevant services to safeguard vulnerable people, which is why we are looking further at mandatory vaccination elsewhere.

Testing is still very much an important part of our campaign against the virus. We are supporting the testing programme, but we maintain it under review. On discharge arrangements, there has been generous financial support for discharge provisions from hospitals to schools because, as the noble Baroness, Lady Brinton, rightly pointed out, that is a very important bottleneck that has tied up a large number of hospital beds. As we go into winter, we want to have the best possible arrangements for ensuring that those hospital beds are prioritised for those who need them most.

3.36 pm

**Baroness Finlay of Llandaff (CB):** My Lords, I have some supplementary questions. I am most grateful to the Minister for the update and for yet again appearing before the House. I will pose short questions about three areas.

First, on the public health messaging over asymptomatic carriers, we seem to have had a complete drop-off of mask wearing and of being distance aware.

Neither of those impedes the economic viability of any business at all; they are simply social behaviours. People seem to have gone back to the most inappropriate social hugging, which is unnecessary. Yet I do not see any public health messages coming out just to maintain the control measures we had in place before. Could the Minister tell me what the plans are for that?

Secondly, does the noble Lord plan to widen the list of eligible children to ensure that those who have a family member, whether a sibling or parent, who is particularly vulnerable are offered vaccination—this would not be forced but would be an offer to them—rather than being excluded, as they are at the moment, because they themselves are not ill? They may carry quite a large emotional burden, knowing that someone at home could become very ill, despite being double vaccinated.

Thirdly, on preparing for the winter, does the Minister recognise this week's notice from the Royal College of Emergency Medicine showing that 80% of respondents are not confident in their ability to cope safely in their departments as we go into winter, and that half of the emergency departments are reporting delays of transfer from ambulances into their departments? That compares with a quarter of such departments reporting these delays in October 2020, which would suggest that the whole backlog and silting up has got worse. Can the Minister explain what provision there is to expand bed provision, so that people who arrive in emergency departments and need admission can be moved rapidly into beds to be looked after, rather than having this backlog, which also stops ambulances going to other emergencies while they are stuck outside an emergency department?

**Lord Bethell (Con):** I thank the noble Baroness for three extremely thoughtful questions. I will dwell on them, if I may, because they are a good opportunity to answer some of the concerns that I know many noble Lords have.

On public health messaging and behaviours, there is a question of perception. If we look closely at the analysis done by our behaviours team, we see that the public remain extremely conservative and restrained. While the noble Baroness's perception may be that mask wearing and distancing have been given up and that hugging is not where she would like it to be, from the data it appears that the public remain extremely concerned about public transport, going to the shops and attending major events. Therefore, we are in a moment of transition, but roughly speaking we are where we would want to be.

Let us be clear: we are keen to get back to the life we once had, and vaccines are going to be the way that we do that. We want to return to intimacy and to the way in which our community likes to live. Testing, social distancing and the panoply of virus control play a role in that—but we are seeking to step back from those days and, so long as the vaccines work in the way they are working at the moment, we are keen not to disrupt people's lives as much as we can.

On eligible children, that ball is with the CMO at the moment. I completely hear the noble Baroness; she is entirely right about the emotional burden. I also

emphasise the importance of making sure that children get the education they need, while at the same time empathising with their concerns for their loved ones and those with whom they live. It is an awful position for those children and families to be in. That is why the CMO is looking at vaccination for 12 to 16 year-olds and possibly beyond.

On winter preparations, I hear the noble Baroness's comments about the Royal College of Emergency Medicine. The statistics she gave are a matter of concern, but the medical director of the NHS monitors these questions extremely carefully. We think we are in the position we need to be in to get through this winter. We are on the balls of our feet in case there is either an uptick in the current delta variant or a new variant. A huge amount of investment has gone into the redeployment of NHS beds. The NHS has never had a bigger capacity in terms of its workforce and the number of beds available. The use of ICUs and the management of Covid patients have become much more efficient and productive than they used to be, and we believe that we are in good shape.

**Baroness Donaghy (Lab):** My Lords, perhaps I could ask the Minister two questions. My first question is the question I asked on the day we broke up in July, about whether there are plans to do booster jabs combined with flu jabs. The Minister was not certain and said he would try to let us know. Has he got more information on that?

My second question is slightly more speculative, but it is something I am very concerned about. BBC news has been extremely conscientious about keeping everybody informed about the Covid rate, the death rate and the number in hospital. Can we have an assurance that no pressure will be put on the BBC by the Government in order to bury the worrying developments that are taking place?

**Lord Bethell (Con):** I am very grateful to the noble Baroness for asking about the co-administration of the flu and Covid vaccines. I hope very much that I got back to her. If I did not, I shall give her an update now. JCVI's interim advice is to plan to offer Covid booster vaccines from September 2021 to prolong the protection of the vaccines provided to those who are most vulnerable to the serious effects of Covid ahead of the winter months. This would take place alongside the annual flu vaccination programme. The NHS will continue to follow the guidance given by the JCVI on the co-administration of flu and Covid vaccines—so, yes, they will be co-administered. That is an enormously effective way of delivering the vaccines, and the reach of both programmes is amplified by the other.

On the BBC, I reassure the noble Baroness that no pressure is put on it. If we had an effective pressure mechanism on the BBC, she would certainly be the first to know about it.

**Lord Paddick (LD):** My Lords, may I take the noble Lord the Minister back to a question about Covid passports that my noble friend Lady Brinton asked and that he did not have time to answer in his first response? I understand both sides of the argument

regarding Covid passes, but what I do not understand is the potential exclusion of those properly vaccinated overseas, or indeed anyone double-vaccinated outside England.

In July, the Vaccines Minister, in a Statement in the other place, said that, by the end of that month, those vaccinated overseas could have their vaccinations recorded on the NHS England system and access their Covid pass using the NHS app. Despite the Government promising that this would happen by the end of July, it is still not possible. What do these people do when they are told to self-isolate on arrival into the UK from yellow-listed countries, or when they are excluded from designated premises, if the Government bring in compulsory Covid passes for access to certain types of premises?

**Lord Bethell (Con):** I am grateful to the noble Lord for raising the point again, and my apologies to the noble Baroness, Lady Brinton, for not addressing her point the first time around. I will just say that, from 19 July, it has been voluntary for organisations to use and implement the Covid pass under step 4. There are some essential settings where certification should not be used, and we have made that plain.

However, the Government are encouraging and supporting businesses and large events to use the Covid pass. The Government intend to make full vaccination a condition of entry to nightclubs and other venues where large crowds gather from the end of September. Work is under way to find a solution for Northern Ireland citizens who have been vaccinated in England but are registered with a GP in Northern Ireland. We are also very close to establishing data flows with the Isle of Man.

To the noble Lord's point about those who have had their vaccinations overseas, in countries such as Norway, he is entirely right. We are working extremely hard on those processes. I have met with NHSX and NHSD to talk about this matter and I assure him that we are putting every effort into dealing with it. I wish that we had dealt with it by now. It is an extremely complex matter. The validation and verification of vaccines requires an enormous amount of bilateral and multilateral co-ordination, and the approval of different vaccines taken by different people in different locations and the record keeping by overseas countries are things that we have to consider and manage. He is right: when the Covid pass system is brought in, those who have had a vaccine overseas will need special consideration. I reassure him that we are working as hard as we can to resolve that issue.

**Lord Farmer (Con):** My Lords, perhaps I might bring up the subject of antibodies. All the statements seem to be focused completely on vaccinations, yet there is growing evidence that those people who have had Covid and have had vaccinations are indeed almost super-immune even to variants. There was an article in today's *Telegraph* about that. So my first question is, do the Government have any idea how many people have in fact had Covid? There are an awful lot of people who have not had symptoms, have been at home, have had it and have recovered, and the

[LORD FARMER]

Government have not really been informed about it. Is there knowledge in the Government about this area and, if so, is research being done on the strength of the antibodies of those who have had Covid and is that being taken into account in policy?

**Lord Bethell (Con):** My noble friend has had an interest in this very important area for some time, and I completely applaud his diligence on it. It is an area that I share an absolute fascination with. We know so much about the vaccines but so little about the body's immune system. It is incredibly frustrating but it is, I am afraid to say, just one aspect of this pandemic.

To answer the specific question of how many people have had the disease, it is difficult to be precise. Unfortunately, a lot of people have had the disease and never known that they had it. The fact that they have now gone on to have a vaccine means that it is extremely difficult for us to trace whether they have had the disease, because we do it mainly through the counting of antibodies. My noble friend can look on the ONS website, which I am sure he probably has, and he will see that the Venn diagram makes it almost impossible to figure out exactly how many people have had the disease. I can, through correspondence, share with him the various modelling that we have done, but there is not a definitive answer to that question.

I wish it were true that having had the disease and the vaccine together creates some kind of super-immunity, but I am afraid that there is a subset of people who have had both the vaccine and the disease who then go on to have the disease again. I have met a few of those people; they are extremely frustrated, as you can imagine. I am afraid that it does not bode well for thinking that the vaccine presents a concrete and immutable guard against the disease. I am afraid we will be living with the thought of boosters and improvements on the vaccine for some time to come. That is emerging as something we are working on. We are doing a tremendous amount of research on this. I had a meeting earlier with the antibody team, and I reassure my noble friend that we are doing everything we can to understand it better.

**Lord Hunt of Kings Heath (Lab):** My Lords, I come back to the advice from the JCVI relating to 12 to 15 year-old children who do not suffer the underlying conditions it has set out. I worry about the implications of that being overruled through the process that the Ministers have set up, seeking the advice of the four Chief Medical Officers. The Minister will know that they concluded that some young people, although it would be extremely rare, could suffer from myocarditis with lifelong consequences.

I must ask about the ethical considerations here as to some young people who will be damaged as a result of that decision because 6 million adults are too stupid or ignorant to have the vaccination. That surely is where our focus should be. Could he say something about what the Government are doing? Does he agree that the integrity of the whole vaccine process, not just in relation to Covid, is at stake here? I think that the JCVI should be listened to.

**Lord Bethell (Con):** I violently agree with both the noble Lord's points in spirit. If I may take them in reverse order, he is right that there are people who are not taking the vaccine, and they put the entire community at risk. Vaccination uptake among the under-30s has plateaued at around 60%. I cannot tell him exactly what will get that number up any further. That is why we look at questions such as certification and mandation. These are already in place in many European countries, including France and Italy, where they have taken advantage of certification and mandation in an extremely tough way to drive through vaccination. That example weighs heavily on our minds as we assess those two important opportunities. It is tough, and we will have important debates here in the House of Lords on both of them should they come to pass.

On children, the noble Lord is right that there are profoundly complex epidemiological and ethical issues around child vaccination. Child vaccination has been rolled out in America and in many European countries. Some European countries are looking at vaccinating those aged over three, not just those aged over 12. Why do they do that? It is because children are vectors of infection and drive the disease through their families, schools and communities. He is right that there are very rare examples, but examples none the less, where harm is done to children through the vaccine. Therefore, the assessment of that harm and weighing it up against the harm done by Covid to children, which again is extremely rare but is a statistical occurrence, and the community obligations and the damage done through the spread of the disease is something that ethicists and epidemiologists are looking at right now. We are being extremely careful about the way we do that. We are aware that it might be open to challenge. Therefore, we are dotting the "i"s and crossing the "t"s.

## Universal Credit

### *Question for Short Debate*

3.54 pm

*Asked by Baroness Tyler of Enfield*

To ask Her Majesty's Government what impact assessment they have made of the proposed withdrawal of the £20 uplift to Universal Credit.

**Baroness Tyler of Enfield (LD):** My Lords, I draw attention to my interests in the register, particularly as a member of the Financial Inclusion Commission and president of the Money Advice Trust. I very much look forward to hearing the contributions of other noble Lords, who I know feel passionately about this issue—one that goes to the heart of who we are as a nation and our moral obligations to each other. I thank the Library for its excellent briefing note setting out the context around the proposed withdrawal of the £20 uplift in universal credit.

The basic facts are as follows. In March 2020, the Chancellor announced that the standard allowances of universal credit and the basic element of working tax credit would be increased by £1,000 a year, or £20 a week, describing this very welcome uplift as a measure to "strengthen the safety net" during the pandemic. It

was part of a wider package of support for family finances hit hard by Covid, including the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and the Self-employment Income Support Scheme. This package was generally considered to be well-judged and the right thing to do in quite extraordinary circumstances.

In March 2021, the Government announced that the uplift, initially intended to last 12 months, would be extended for a further six months. In July, the Government confirmed that they would withdraw the uplift at the end of September. What has been the impact of this and how has it been received?

Back in November 2020, the Legatum Institute reported that, although poverty had risen because of the pandemic, government policy, including the uplift to universal credit and working tax credits, “has insulated many families” from it. It estimated that the policies had protected 690,000 people from poverty in winter 2020. On the day that the withdrawal was announced, Boris Johnson told the House of Commons Liaison Committee that, as Covid-19 restrictions eased, the emphasis

“has got to be on getting people in work and getting people into jobs”.

This statement, suggesting that there was a binary choice to be made between work and benefits, completely ignored the high and rising levels of in-work poverty.

It is fair to say that the withdrawal announcement has been met with widespread criticism across the political spectrum. Among others, the Centre for Social Justice, the chairs of the relevant committees in the House of Commons and devolved assemblies, the influential Economic Affairs Committee of your Lordships’ House and, quite remarkably, six former Conservative Work and Pensions Secretaries have called upon the Chancellor to make the uplift permanent, with many calling on it to be extended to legacy benefits. Tellingly, the six former Tory Secretaries of State argued that

“work remains the best way out of poverty for those who can work, but we want to make sure that those who cannot work are supported with dignity”.

It is hard to disagree with that statement.

In September, 100 organisations, including charities, health professionals and others, called on the Government to abandon their plans to remove the uplift. They argued that the decision would

“pile unnecessary financial pressure on around 5.5 million families, both in and out of work”.

That list is not just the usual suspects; it is a much wider cross-spectrum of opinion.

Crucial to this debate, what assessment did the Government make of the impact of this highly controversial decision? There has been no shortage of calls for the Government to publish any impact assessment or analysis they have done on the effect of withdrawing the uplift. I was shocked to learn that, in response to a Written Question on 22 July, asking the Government to publish the impact assessment for the removal of the uplift, Will Quince, Minister for Welfare Delivery, said,

“no assessment has been made”.

I ask the Minister if she will explain whether such an assessment is now available and, if not, why not, when it will be published and, ideally, what it says. Is there any truth to the report in yesterday’s *Financial Times* that an internal Whitehall analysis says that the Government should be braced for a “catastrophic” end to the welfare uplift?

Given this gaping hole, various organisations have produced their own analysis of the potential impact, including the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Citizens Advice—both highly respected organisations. Among others, these assessments have commented that 6 million low-income families will lose over £1,000 from their annual incomes; 0.5 million more people will be pulled into poverty, including 200,000 children; working families make up the majority of families who will be affected by the cut; families with children will be disproportionately impacted; and the impact of the cut will be greatest across the north of England, Wales, the West Midlands and Northern Ireland.

It is ironic to note that, according to Citizens Advice, people are 1.5 times more likely to claim universal credit in places the Government have said they want to invest in, including those areas prioritised by their levelling-up fund. Indeed, it seems that this decision will take more money out of these local economies than it would put in, which is an extraordinary case of giving with one hand, but taking—in brackets more—with the other.

I am particularly concerned about the real-life impact: heart-rending decisions that individual households will need to take on whether to put food on the table, pay the rent or pay the bills—in short, going without essentials or being forced into debt to cover the costs. According to recent research from Toynbee Hall looking at the experiences of Londoners disproportionately affected by Covid, for many, income has reduced, expenditure has increased and debt has risen.

The Financial Inclusion Commission, of which I am a member, has argued that continuing the uplift is a key measure in avoiding the future financial and human costs of unpaid bills, evictions and debt recovery. For the most financially vulnerable households there is a real danger that people will have no option other than to turn to high-cost credit or illegal lenders to meet basic costs. The charity StepChange has highlighted how the termination of this uplift will be a cliff edge for millions, pushing them into deficit budgets. Can the Minister say what plans the Government have to ask all financial services providers and utilities suppliers, as part of their vulnerable customer activity, to signpost claimants to the freely available benefits and grants information and advice provided by a wide range of charities?

On the impact on mental health, many people with severe mental illness rely solely on benefits to survive, and the uplift has provided a much-needed lifeline to people who cannot work because of their condition. According to a recent Rethink Mental Illness survey, 76% of UC claimants said that over the last 12 months, concerns about money had impacted on their mental health “a lot” and over half said that they had experienced not having enough money to pay for food.

[BARONESS TYLER OF ENFIELD]

I want to ask the Minister, who I know thinks deeply and feels passionately about these issues, the following questions. First, all of the last six Work and Pensions Secretaries have described the uplift as a vital improvement in the adequacy of social security, joining hundreds of charities and other experts who have warned that this cut will cause real hardship, rising poverty and debt. Why are the Government ignoring this warning from such a wide array of voices and taking welfare support back to inadequate levels, particularly at a time when energy bills are set to rise?

Secondly, we keep hearing the Government's plan for jobs as the justification for this cut. However, the majority of people who will be impacted by the cut are in fact already in work, and universal credit provides vital support for families moving back into work at precisely the same time as other pandemic-related government support schemes finish. How does this add up?

Thirdly, what are the Government's plans for families on universal credit who are unable to work due to caring or disability? Surely, we believe these families should live above the poverty line and with dignity.

Finally, what assessment have the Government made of the interaction between the ending of the uplift and Tuesday's announcement about the rise in national insurance to fund health and social care? Will there be any overlap between universal credit recipients and those earning enough to pay national insurance, in which case is this a double whammy?

I end by making a heartfelt plea to the Government, adding my voice to so many others, urging them to keep the £20 uplift, make it permanent and extend it to legacy benefits.

4.03 pm

**Baroness Eaton (Con):** My Lords, today's debate is a very important one. The subject matter is understandably highly emotive and families, especially those with children, who are suffering poverty need our concern and our practical help. Unfortunately, universal credit has had naysayers from its inception. I feel it has been the unsung hero of the pandemic, with 3 million extra claimants rapidly joining the system. The old tax credit system would have let people down badly, and errors and delays would have led to massive hardship in the depths of lockdown. The book by the noble Lord, Lord Freud, said that paperwork got lost in 40% of tax credit claims.

It is clear to all of us that the days of the pandemic have been difficult for people, but they have also been difficult for government. Difficult decisions have had to be made. When the pandemic hit, the Government created a range of measures and it was always made clear that the uplift to universal credit was temporary. Can the Minister say whether the £6 billion cost of universal credit was modelled on a zero improvement in the labour market? Obviously, the economy is now revving up, so there are so many more job vacancies. Now the labour market circumstances have dramatically changed, there are more work opportunities.

The aim of and philosophy behind universal credit is to help people to escape the negativity of a life spent permanently on welfare. Attempts by previous

Governments, such as tax credits, have trapped people in welfare. While the uplift is being removed, the Government are increasing the number of jobcentres and work coaches—factors to help people to find more, and better, jobs. The problem of in-work poverty is concerning. Can my noble friend the Minister inform the House about the in-work progression scheme, which, I understand, is aimed at helping with this situation?

The uplift is costing £6 billion. I believe that there can be, and must be, more and better ways for the Government to help people.

4.06 pm

**Baroness Donaghy (Lab):** My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Tyler of Enfield, for initiating this debate. She was so comprehensive that I do not think I will use all my time, so as not to repeat her.

I want to make a couple of points, if I may, in reply to the noble Baroness, Lady Eaton. Somebody who was born on the day the old benefits disappeared and UC arrived has probably celebrated their 10th birthday by now, so I wonder how long that argument will be played out in this Chamber. I congratulate the noble Baroness on her stalwart defence but, really, it is getting a bit thin and memories of how bad the old system was are fading. I am the first to accept that it was a bad system; I just do not think that this is a particularly good one. I agree with the noble Baroness that it came into its own during the pandemic, however.

I slightly resent—this is not against the noble Baroness, Lady Eaton, or anybody individually—the fact that, if the benefits were adequate, we would not be having this discussion about a £20 uplift. If the benefits were decent, people would not be struggling. We are not talking about people falling into poverty here; we are talking about people falling deeper into poverty so that they cannot even afford the basics.

I want to say a little about the impact on actors, writers and other creative workers, who are often ignored in these debates. Some 65% of Equity members rely on universal credit and other welfare to stay in the industry. Removing the £20 uplift would mean 53% of them experiencing financial hardship, with 41% unable to meet housing and other essential costs. These figures were taken from a recent impact survey; I thank Equity for its excellent briefing. It joined 100 other organisations across the UK that wrote to urge the Government to abandon their plans. Only 9% of its actors and creative workers had received a grant or other funding from Arts Councils, and more than 40% “have not received help from the Self Employed Income Support Scheme”.

Of equal concern is the reintroduction of the minimum income floor. These moves will risk an exodus of talent from our world-leading creative industry, already clobbered by the Brexit legacy. Obviously, there will be time in future to discuss the minimum income floor and Brexit, but families will receive significantly less help from the social security system now than they would have a decade ago. The loss of the £20 uplift will take the main rate of out-of-work support down to its lowest level in real terms since 1990.

I am aware that the chairs of the relevant House of Commons Select Committees have written to the Government to ask for the uplift to be made permanent. As the noble Baroness, Lady Tyler, has already said, six former Conservative Work and Pensions Secretaries have urged the Chancellor to make the uplift permanent. If they cannot change the Government's mind, I begin to despair. Why will they not publish the impact assessment mentioned by the noble Baroness, Lady Tyler? If—

**Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist (Con):** I hate to interrupt a good speech but the noble Baroness is almost a minute over the suggested speaking time.

4.10 pm

**The Lord Bishop of Gloucester:** I am grateful to the noble Baroness, Lady Tyler, for introducing this important debate, and I declare my interest as a trustee of Feeding Britain. I will focus my time on the impact that withdrawing the £20 uplift will have on food poverty. More than 500 anti-poverty workers, volunteers and supporters within the Feeding Britain network have signed a petition calling on the Government not to remove the increase, and that petition will be delivered to No. 10 in about an hour.

Food banks in the Feeding Britain network have credited the £20 increase with helping to stabilise, or indeed reduce, the levels of need for crisis support. As has been said, the decision to remove that increase coincides with the ending of other support schemes, such as furlough and local support grants and, with the imminent predicted increase in food and energy prices, there is deep concern that withdrawing this uplift will lengthen the queues outside food banks.

A survey published this week for the Trussell Trust found that, faced with a cut of £20 a week, 1.2 million people—20% of those who claim universal credit—say that they are very likely to need to skip meals, and nearly 1 million—that is, 15%—say they are very likely to need to use a food bank as a result of the cut. I find it really shocking to read a stat from the Food Foundation, which estimates that in order to eat according to government guidelines for a healthy diet, the poorest in our society would have to spend 74% of their disposable income, compared to only 6% for the richest.

This is most certainly not about laying all the solution for addressing food poverty at the Government's feet. The role of civil society and community engagement, particularly during the pandemic, has been inspiring and has involved many faith groups, and it needs to continue to be fanned into flame. During the first six months of the pandemic, a project involving the diocese of Gloucester partnering with a charity in Stroud called the Long Table delivered over 35,000 meals to the vulnerable and NHS workers. However, to enable civil society and community responsibility, we need the Government to put the right enablers and safeguards in place, and that means keeping this £20 uplift.

In 2018, I added my voice to the End Hunger UK campaign. Three years later, the fundamental point remains. While celebrating the work that churches and other faith and voluntary groups are doing to respond to urgent need, it is clear to me that structural change

needs to happen to reduce the need for food banks in the first place. That now includes retaining the uplift to universal credit.

4.13 pm

**Baroness Fookes (Con):** My Lords, I rise to contribute to this debate with very mixed feelings. I was very approving of the Government's decision to have a substantial uprating at the beginning of the pandemic and to extend it from the original 12 months to 18 months, but I query the wisdom of ending it abruptly at the end of this month. Others have made mention of those six Conservative Secretaries of State who have urged that this should be permanent. I remind everyone that the architect of universal credit, Sir Iain Duncan Smith, was one of those who contributed to this, and I think his views are worth a great deal. That said, I have been long enough in politics to know that it is one thing to give a benefit but quite another to take it away. Whatever the merits or demerits might be of doing so, as night follows day, there will be instances of real hardship—real, agonising true-life stories—which will immediately diminish the reputation of the Government for doing something that was in fact very good indeed.

I know that the Government are setting great store by getting more people into work, and I fully subscribe to that. I am delighted by the number of schemes that are afoot to try to help, particularly those that will give people greater skills and therefore the chance of earning better money in better jobs, which would bring them off universal credit altogether. Others have mentioned the fact that many people on universal credit are also working. That is something that we ought to see the end of as soon as possible. In the meantime, I am deeply concerned about such an abrupt ending—what I call the “cliff edge”. I am sure there are other ways of dealing with this, if the Government feel they cannot make the uplift a permanent arrangement, as they have made clear. Surely it would be more sensible to have some gradual diminution of the amount rather than doing it all in one go. I do not know whether that has been considered in government circles, but I think they should take another look at it to ensure that, as I say, we do not cause people immense hardship by an abrupt ending of something on which so many people rely.

I know the Minister understands very well the position of people who have not had it very good in life and who have been at the bottom of the pile, since much of her work has dealt with that, so I look to her to see if she can bring her powers of persuasion to bear on the powers that be.

4.16 pm

**Lord Davies of Brixton (Lab):** My Lords, it is good to see the Minister again; we have spent a lot of time together this week.

We have to give credit to the Government for having had the sense and the compassion to introduce the £20 uplift in the first place, so equally we must now condemn them now that they want to take it away. It goes without argument that we should have a proper assessment of the impact of withdrawing the uplift.

[LORD DAVIES OF BRIXTON]

Indeed, we have several clear assessments and measured judgments of the impact—just not from the Government. We have the assessment of reputable organisations including the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Citizens Advice, and they have made the position clear. I also had the privilege of attending a meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Universal Credit earlier this week. We heard from a wide range of organisations, including the Trussell Trust, which has been mentioned, but also, crucially, from individuals who were able to enlighten us about their real experiences and their fears of what faces them after the cut in their benefits.

We are recovering from the pandemic, but much more slowly than we hoped and expected earlier in the year, not least with the expected increases in unemployment and the consequent poverty and financial difficulties. It is also worth mentioning the loss of the economic stimulus that will arise because of the withdrawal of the uplift; that money is being taken out of local economies across the country.

My question to the Minister is simple: given the overwhelming weight of opinion and evidence, from and on behalf of those in receipt of universal credit, how can the Government in all conscience proceed with this action?

4.18 pm

**Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (GP):** My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Tyler, for securing this debate.

I started by contemplating £20. What does that mean to different people in our society? Like the right reverend Prelate, I focused on food. I thought about the people in this Chamber and those who live around us here in Westminster. I looked at some of the restaurants around us here in Westminster. At the Corinthia London Hotel, just up the road, you can get a baked fig starter for £18. At the Ivy restaurant you can get a shepherd's pie for £19.50. If you have lunch at the Ritz, you can get a veal sweetbread starter for £28.

Also visiting us here briefly at Westminster were people testifying to the Work and Pensions Committee, telling it what £20 meant to them. Anthony Lynam said that it means,

“do I go hungry, do my kids go hungry?”

Amina Nagawa said that already with the £20 she goes without food and her son cannot eat something nutritious. Gemma Widdowfield said that she would buy essentials on her credit card and just stack up the debt.

The right reverend Prelate talked about the need for structural change. We have a crisis of inequality in our society. £20 means the world to some people or a veal sweetbread starter to others. As the noble Lord, Lord Davies, just said, this involves not just individual households but whole communities. Citizens Advice assessed the community impact of this cut as the Government appear not to have done. It worked out that for each £1 of investment that the Government might put in their levelling-up fund, £1.80 was being taken from local economies targeted by the levelling-up fund, the poorest in our society.

We come back to food. We think about what people might be eating in Doncaster, Wigan or Merthyr Tydfil. If they are eating out at all, it might be spending £2 in the café for a pie and chips. They probably will not be eating out at all but shopping around in supermarkets to find the cheapest possible thing to put food into people's mouths. The people dining at the Ritz and the Ivy are taking the food out of the mouths of the children who cannot eat now. Twenty pounds is not much, but taking it away as well is absolutely unconscionable.

4.22 pm

**Lord Desai (Non-Affl):** My Lords, it is almost a universal law of poverty studies—I used to do that 40 years ago—that any level of payment at which the Government of the day fix as being necessary is 15% short of what is really needed. Peter Townsend, a great economist carried out a study way back in the 1970s in which he was able to show that what we then had by way of supplementary benefits was 15% to 20% short.

When the £20 extra was given in the pandemic, the Government just fixed the existing allowance to what it should always have been. One of the things that happens when you puts your name down to speak is that people write letters. The actors' union, Equity, has written to me. Actors are peculiar people because even in normal circumstances they have a precarious career. They never know when they will get a role, especially in the pandemic because of the restrictions on large gatherings. Even now, when the theatre and film industries are reviving, the situation is always peculiar. Even when one is employed, one is insecure and inadequately compensated. For them, saying that the economy has recovered and wages are rising is not good enough. There is a large class of such jobs; even when one has a job, one is not actually secure.

For those people, £20 is a lot of money. Two-thirds of actors are in the position whereby under universal credit they are insecure in terms of having an adequate amount of money. I therefore urge the Government to extend their hand—I know things are hard—and perhaps do what the noble Baroness, Lady Fookes, said. If they have to do it, please do it slowly. Break it down into stages and try to see from the data where it will hurt most and do something. Please do not do it suddenly. The best of all possible worlds would be to make the extra £20 permanent.

4.24 pm

**Lord Farmer (Con):** My Lords, I join other noble Lords in thanking the noble Baroness, Lady Tyler, for securing this debate and focusing on impacts.

It has been said that the national insurance increases announced this week will hit the poorest and younger workers hardest, and these categories will often include UC claimants moving into employment, so not maintaining the uplift could be a double whammy for those cohorts. Can my noble friend the Minister give us an indication as to the impact of the interaction of these two measures? If a claimant is paying increased national insurance on their earned income, does that mean that there is now, effectively, an even higher



taper rate and they lose more than 63p of every £1 they earn? I am sure my noble friend will put me right if I am misunderstanding how UC and NI work together.

Much has been written about a decade of underfunded reform, but the focus should be on adequately resourcing the principles of UC, which promised to make work pay. I am particularly interested in the impact on work incentives of not maintaining the uplift. Instinctively, it can be argued both ways. Has modelling been done to establish whether its retention is a marginal disincentive to moving into work or, in fact, a security blanket that keeps morale high and makes moving into work less daunting?

As the Government are rightly very exercised by job vacancies and skills shortages are very high, work incentives are of paramount importance. Strengthening these would make better use of any ongoing increase in the welfare budget than this emergency blunt instrument, which boosted the incomes of almost all claimants regardless of circumstances. If the Government decide against maintaining the uplift, they should decrease the taper rate so that it is closer to the 55% level mooted in early design of UC in 2009-10.

My noble friend Lord Freud was unable to establish properly the system of universal support to run alongside universal credit to help those who will always struggle to get into work, with all the advantages to well-being for them and their children this entails. What progress is being made to help those furthest from the labour market to overcome barriers of addiction, mental ill health, poor education and family relationship problems which a more generous basic welfare payment would barely touch?

4.27 pm

**Baroness Smith of Newnham (LD):** My Lords, I am grateful to my noble friend Lady Tyler for bringing this debate and to the Secretary of State for sitting in for a quite a lot of it. That was a good sign. She is no longer here, but I hope that the Minister will share her answers and the *Hansard* record with her, because it is about time the Government listened.

In July last year, your Lordships' Economic Affairs Committee produced a report on universal credit. It called on the Government to make the £20 uplift permanent. It is an indictment of us as Peers that we have not yet found time to debate that report, over a year later. We need to do a better job of ensuring that we make use of such reports, because that committee raised a set of questions that necessitate considerable reflection.

In particular, the committee noted that universal credit can disadvantage women, disabled people and BAME, and that it was linked to increased food bank usage. The Leader of the other place has talked about the support given to food banks being "rather uplifting". I do not find the support uplifting. It is a travesty that, in this country, people need to go to a food bank at all.

While I listened closely to the words of the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Gloucester, and it is clearly encouraging that people have rallied around the most vulnerable during the pandemic, we should not need food banks in this country, ever. The state

should ensure that people are not indebted to such an extent that they cannot afford to feed themselves and their children.

The noble Baroness, Lady Bennett, made absolutely the right points. For so many of us, £20 might seem a very small amount of money. How many chai lattes does it buy—how many things that seem so incidental to many people above the poverty line? But for others, that small amount of money makes all the difference. If it is right during the pandemic, it is right going forward as well, because we have heard that so many people are on in-work benefits. They cannot do more and more jobs. If they can get a better-paid job, fantastic—but if they cannot, there are questions to be raised.

I have a final question for the Minister. The Economic Affairs Committee, in calling for the uplift to be made permanent, said:

"Universal Credit should be set at a level that provides claimants with dignity and security."

Does the Minister agree? If so, does she think that reducing the uplift will leave people with dignity and security?

4.31 pm

**Baroness Sherlock (Lab):** My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Tyler, and all noble Lords for their contributions. The Government have very few supporters on this matter, and nor should they.

We have heard about the impact on poverty. Citizens Advice has said that 2.3 million people could fall straight into debt. That is because £20 is not a small amount of money. Basic universal credit for a single person over 25 will fall by 21% when this comes in. If they are under 25, the fall is more than 25% overnight. The noble Baroness, Lady Eaton, may think the Government were clear about this, but Turn2us surveyed people last month and found that 36% of respondents were unaware this cut was coming. Rethink found that many severely mentally ill people, because they do not go online, have no idea this is coming down the track.

The defence we have heard from the Prime Minister, that the Government want to prioritise work, is simply misleading. We have been here before. Back in 2012, George Osborne tried to justify cutting £10 billion from social security by talking about the need for fairness

"for the shift-worker, leaving home in the dark hours of the early morning, who looks up at the closed blinds of their next door neighbour sleeping off a life on benefits",

even though he knew he was cutting in-work benefits. Now here we are again.

The Prime Minister will know that 38% of adults in families on universal credit are employed. This cut is a direct blow to low-paid workers, including many we feted as pandemic heroes not long ago. The RSA found that 660,000 low-paid key workers, including nurses, supermarket staff and carers, will be hit by this cut.

The noble Baroness, Lady Tyler, is right: when the Government take £1,000 a year from low-income families, they should remember that this money is spent in towns and cities across the country. Poorer families

[BARONESS SHERLOCK]

spend their money because they cannot afford not to. Taking that cash out of the economy, when the recovery is so fragile, damages us all—disproportionately so in the north and the Midlands.

Let us remember one thing. There is a reason why the Government had to increase universal credit when millions of people flooded on to it: because people could not live on the benefits at the level they were at previously. They had gone up under Labour Governments—historically, they have not always been bad—and the Government cut over £10 billion out of our system, so people could not afford to live on the system that was there. As my noble friend Lady Donaghy pointed out, that is why the Resolution Foundation is right that if this goes ahead, we will be back to the lowest level of basic benefits for three decades.

We deserve a decent social security system and an economy with secure, well-paid jobs. We do not get there by plunging the poorest people into deeper poverty. Can the Minister tell us now whether the *FT* is right? Is there really internal modelling saying that this will have a catastrophic effect, leading to a rise in homelessness and poverty and soaring use of food banks? Is that true? I find it impossible to credit that a Minister would look at that assessment, shrug their shoulders and do it anyway.

4.34 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Work and Pensions (Baroness Stedman-Scott) (Con):** My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Tyler of Enfield, for securing this debate, and I thank all those who have contributed to today's discussion on this important question. I know how important it is, and I understand the depth of feeling.

I was pleased to hear some balance and the view that the Government had done well in supporting people through the pandemic and through their work to get people into work. The debate has been wide-ranging, and there is no doubt that the last 18 months have brought unprecedented challenges: we all had to change the way we lived and worked, and, in the face adversity, this Government provided an unprecedented response, delivering support to people right across the country in response to the crisis.

We have heard how the £20-a-week uplift to universal credit has made a difference to households facing economic shock and financial disruption as a result of the pandemic. The noble Baronesses, Lady Donaghy and Lady Tyler, the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Gloucester and others have made reference to the £20 uplift. It was clear right from the word go that it was temporary and not going to be permanent. I remind the House that the Chancellor has always been clear that the universal credit uplift was a pandemic response. He has ensured that support was in place well beyond the end of restrictions and reopening the economy, and we are not finished supporting those who need our help. No one wants to see anyone in poverty, so I agree with my right honourable friend the Chancellor when he says that he does not accept that people will be forced into poverty because it is now right that we switch our focus to getting people back

into work and improving their prospects to progress in work. Our comprehensive plan for jobs will help to deliver this.

As I have said, the £20-a-week uplift to universal credit and working tax credit was announced by the Chancellor as a temporary measure in March 2020. We took this approach in order to give those people facing the most financial disruption the help that they needed as quickly as possible. At the Spring Budget, we announced a six-month extension of the temporary £20-a-week increase, meaning that it would be in place well beyond the end of restrictions. The additional support has increased the universal credit standard allowance and working tax credit basic element by up to £1,560 since its introduction.

We have also provided other support, and we should look at that rather than just at the £20 uplift in isolation. We introduced the Covid winter grant scheme—now the Covid local support scheme—with £269 million provided to local authorities in England between 1 December 2020 and 20 June 2021 to help the most vulnerable children and families with the cost of food, utilities and other essentials. This temporary scheme has now been extended for the final time, with an additional £160 million for local authorities to help vulnerable households as the vaccine rollout continues. From April 2021, we increased the national living wage. It has always been this Government's intention that this additional financial support and other Covid support will end once the economy has reopened. Now, as we open up and our recovery gathers pace, it is right that we switch our focus to getting people back to work and improving their prospects to progress in work.

My noble friend Lady Eaton, and the noble Baronesses, Lady Tyler and Lady Smith of Newnham, talked about dignity. In my career, I have never seen anything more dignified than someone having a job that enabled them to live and be independent. Our vacancies are currently above pre-pandemic rates, sitting just below a record high since the series began in 2018. This is a very promising sign that the economy is recovering.

In this context, extending the uplift, even by a further 12 months, would have been premature and come at a very significant cost—the equivalent of adding 1p on the basic rate of income tax in addition to a 3p increase on fuel duty—when we consider that total welfare spending in Great Britain will be £241 billion in 2021-22, with over £111 billion on working age welfare, or 4.9% of GDP. Universal credit provides a safety net but is not designed to trap people in welfare. Fundamentally, we recognise—and I support the fact—that work is the best route for individuals.

As we are aware, there have been significant positive developments in the public health situation since the extension to the uplift was announced and the vaccine rollout is now progressing well, with 80.3% of the population fully vaccinated. It is now right that the Government should shift their focus to supporting people into work and to progress in work. We have a comprehensive plan for jobs to do this.

We are spending over £7 billion, around £1 billion more than the cost of a one-year extension of the £20 uplift. This includes £2 billion on Kickstart; £2.3 billion on

the number of work coaches, which we have doubled; tripling sector-based work academies; £2.9 billion on Restart; £200 million on JETS; and tripling the number of traineeships. Our work coaches will be working very hard to get people into work and to progress them.

The noble Baroness, Lady Tyler, asked about an impact assessment. The department has not completed an impact assessment on the ending of the temporary uplift as it was introduced as a temporary measure. We have no obligation to conduct an impact assessment as we are returning to business as usual as the temporary Covid uplift is expiring, as it was always intended to do. Understandably, the noble Baroness also asked us about fuel poverty. My noble friend Lady Bloomfield, who has expertise in this area, said to me that we are doing an awful lot on it. If I may, I will write to the noble Baroness to update her on what we are doing.

My noble friend Lady Eaton raised the point about a £6 billion improvement in the labour market and asked how we would spend it. I cannot answer that in detail, but I have every confidence that those discussions took place. She asked how we would use that money differently, if we could use it again. I cannot answer that, but I am sure that those discussions have taken place.

My noble friend also mentioned in-work progression. Currently, 4.2 million individuals are in low pay, and the Resolution Foundation has found that only one in six low-paid employees managed to escape low pay over the decade to 2016. There are 2.2 million universal credit claimants in work. These numbers have risen due to the impact of the pandemic. My noble friend Lady McGregor-Smith has conducted an in-work progression report, which I hope noble Lords have read. My colleague at the Department for Work and Pensions, the Minister for Employment, is busy trying to implement the things that will make a difference to people to achieve in-work progression.

The noble Baroness, Lady Tyler, also spoke about addressing poverty. Looking at the impact of poverty on an individual is complex and inherently speculative, as it requires projecting how incomes will change for every individual in society, which are affected by a huge range of unknown factors. In 2019-20, working-age adults in households where all adults were in work were six times less likely to be in absolute poverty after housing costs than adults where nobody worked.

The noble Baroness, and other noble Baronesses and noble Lords, asked why we are ignoring the comments and points that stakeholders have made. We are not ignoring them; we are listening but, at the risk of repeating myself, this was always meant to be a temporary measure. As I understand it, the Government have made their decision, but it is not just to stop it and run; they are investing in other areas where we hope this will make a difference to people's lives.

The noble Baroness, Lady Tyler, raised the issue of planning for jobs. I could give her a running commentary on all that we are doing. Let me write to all noble Lords to tell them exactly what we are doing.

The noble Baroness, Lady Donaghy, and the noble Lord, Lord Desai, mentioned people in the creative industries who have precarious employment. These

things have an impact on them when their work stops; I acknowledge that. I am pleased to say that the Minister for Employment in the Department for Work and Pensions has been working with the creative industries. We have been working with Pinewood Studios to help people into jobs there, because there are so many of them. I would be happy to arrange a briefing from the Minister for Employment for noble Lords to see how that work is progressing, and I hope that it will give noble Lords an opportunity to raise other things.

The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Gloucester and the noble Baroness, Lady Smith of Newnham, talked about food bank usage. I pay tribute to the food banks; they are doing a great job in supporting communities. They have enabled people and communities to work together to benefit the people they are trying to help, but it is difficult to predict impacts on the use of food banks. There are many reasons why people use them, and their use cannot completely be linked to a single cause. Impacts also depend on the speed of economic recovery and how we can quickly return individuals to work.

Time has eluded me again—it does annoy me when that happens because I feel that I have not answered everyone's questions and shown them respect—so I will conclude my remarks now. I will write to the noble Lords who asked me questions and place a copy of my answers in the Library, but let me say that I am also prepared to meet people to further this discussion, if that would be helpful.

Finally, our focus is rightly on continuing the implementation of our plan for jobs programme, which will continue to help millions of families into stability and on to the path of prosperity because a working Britain is at the heart of a Britain that works.

## Covid-19: Vaccinations and Global Public Health

### *Motion to Take Note*

4.47 pm

*Moved by Lord Boateng*

To move that this House takes note of (1) the shortage of, and (2) the obstacles to the manufacture and distribution of, COVID-19 vaccinations in the Global South; and of the consequent implications for global public health.

**Lord Boateng (Lab):** My Lords, I am grateful for this opportunity to move the Motion standing in my name. Covid has revealed in every aspect of our lives the impact of inequality, has it not? In no case is that inequality greater than in access to vaccines and the means to manufacture them as between the north and south of our world, as well as between countries that have and those that do not—that is, poor and impoverished countries. The facts speak for themselves; I am grateful, as I am sure all noble Lords are, to the House of Lords Library for its research work on this.

The figures revealed are a stark reminder of the problem that we as a world face in relation to Covid and inequality. On 23 August, approximately 32.5% of

[LORD BOATENG]

the world's population had received at least one dose of a Covid-19 vaccine, while 24.5% were fully vaccinated. That is in the world as a whole. However, only 1.4% of people in low-income countries had received at least one dose. I repeat: 1.4%, as opposed to 32.5%. There are many countries in the world, many of them in Africa—such as Chad, Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, to name just a few—where the percentage of the population that is vaccinated is less than 1%. That is the reality on the ground. Of course, it presents a threat to us all because an unvaccinated world is a world in which variants that threaten us all are more likely to emerge. So, we have to find a way of addressing this imbalance.

We are also confronted too by the stark reality that, on existing projections, we are faced with a situation in which low-income countries cannot expect to have widespread vaccine access before late 2023. In the UK, we have bought enough vaccine to vaccinate the entire population more than three times over—on some calculations, four times over—and even after boosters have been given and the lower age groups have received their vaccinations, we will still be sitting on 210 million surplus doses. That is the figure that represents the reality of the gap between north and south.

The WHO estimates that some 16.2 billion doses will be needed for 2021-22 to achieve universal vaccination. That means that we are going to have to more than quadruple the world's pre-Covid capacity to manufacture vaccines. That is the scale of the problem, but there is every reason to believe that, with the right attitude, approach and strategy, and with a willingness now to co-ordinate global action and to put the resources behind that action, the world could in fact meet the challenge. This is not one of those situations in which we can say, "Oh well, it's all pretty terrible but really there's nothing much we can do about it, that's the way of the world". Actually, it does not have to be the way of the world, because one thing we have learned from Covid is that where there is the concerted will, we can totally transform the picture. We know what has to be done, and what has to be done involves our Government being prepared to take a lead and the world recognising that existing mechanisms simply are not working.

Let us take a look at one of them: COVAX. The COVAX Facility was established—and we should celebrate the fact that it came into being—to create a global procurement mechanism to supply Covid vaccines to all the countries of the world in an equitable and effective way. But I am afraid it simply has not worked, because it was based on the flawed assumption that you could still have business as usual as an approach to the development, manufacture and pricing of vaccines. When I look around the Chamber, the expertise present is indicative of the degree of expertise that is present in this House on a range of issues. On this issue, we all know that, if COVAX is to work, it has to be reformed. It has not just simply to be given more resources; it also has to be geared towards dealing with inequality and not accepting it as a given.

The reality is that COVAX is at risk of failing even the modest, limited targets that it set itself. It looked to allocate just 2.3 billion vaccines by the end of 2022. That would not be enough, anyway, to deal with the

scale of the problem that, as your Lordships are aware, exists, but we now face a situation in which it will be able to distribute and disburse less than a quarter of the intended doses on time.

That is hardly a wonder, because in June of this year, the UK received a distribution of vaccines that was greater than that of the entire distribution to the whole of Africa. In one month, June this year, the UK ordered and received 535,000 doses of vaccine from COVAX, and that was more than double the amount given to Africa in that month. How can the Minister justify that? Will he justify that this afternoon, or will the Government at last recognise that, yes, COVAX has got to be reformed? We and other wealthy nations cannot go on taking vaccines out of that pool, and we also need to put more into it. We hope that we will hear from the Minister this afternoon just what the Government are doing about that.

The other issue—again, one on which our nation needs to take a lead—is addressing the obstacles to scaling up manufacture in low-income and middle-income countries. We must be brave and ambitious in this regard, but we must also recognise that the capacity is there in the developing world. Even before Covid, developing country manufacturers were supplying at least 65% of the vaccine needs in all the WHO regions except the Euro region—so the countries of the developing world were already doing it with their existing capacity before Covid. India, China, Brazil, Cuba, Thailand, Senegal, Indonesia and South Africa all have the capacity to produce Covid vaccines. What they need is the additional investment and, significantly, a WTO regime that permits licensing and the sharing of information and encourages the pooling of intellectual property, and a WTO set of regulations to underpin that.

It is not about a free-for-all in which there will be inadequate and insufficient money for R&D in the pharmaceutical industry. That is not what is being proposed. What is being proposed is reform of the WTO. There are initiatives out there from South Africa and India, working together, and, importantly, from the United States. If the United States, which in the past has been at the forefront of restrictive practices in relation to intellectual property, is prepared to take a lead in reform, what is the reason for Her Majesty's Government being so mealy-mouthed in this respect?

Why have we not taken the opportunity that the much-vaunted freedoms from the EU have given us to say that we will adopt a different negotiating position from the EU on this? Instead, what we have done is to go along with an EU consensus that has in fact been blocking reform within the WTO. I hope that we will get some inkling from the Minister. I do not expect him to reveal all his cards in a debate such as this; that would not be feasible or realistic, but he can at least indicate that we are prepared to join the United States, South Africa, India, and even France, in negotiating wording with the new director-general of the WTO that would give some hope that we will be able to see advances in this area.

There are many other experts in this House who will address this issue and talk about the importance of sharing knowledge and of building on the

manufacturing capacity that exists—as I have indicated—in the global south; they will bring their expertise to bear on this. I hope that the Government will utilise the expertise that exists across Whitehall departments to come forward with a policy on this, so that we see the FCDO working with the Department for International Trade and the Department of Health. The Government should be congratulated on the energy of their Vaccines Minister and the strategy that has been brought to bear to meet the demands of our own country, so why can that not now be brought to bear to meet the demands of the world? This is not only a moral imperative but a public health imperative.

There was a great teacher who lived at the time of our Lord in Palestine by the name of Hillel. He said, in relation to self-reliance and solidarity:

“If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, what am I?”

This is the importance of recognising our common humanity, our interdependence and the need for solidarity. But he also went on to say, “If not now, when?” That is the importance of action, of getting on with it. Now is the time to demonstrate that solidarity and to make sure that all have access to vaccines for the benefit of all.

5.03 pm

**Baroness Brinton (LD) [V]:** My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Boateng, on securing this important debate, and I agree with every word that he said in his compelling contribution.

I am also grateful to the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry for its briefing, updating us on the substantial increase in manufacturing capacity for Covid vaccines. It is worth starting by noting the extraordinary work of our vaccine experts globally, from scientists such as Sarah Gilbert and her team who were working in January 2020, through to the manufacturing companies that have made the most extraordinary steps to provide over 5 billion doses of vaccine to date worldwide, with 41% of the world's population having had at least one dose. But—and this is the reason for the noble Lord's important debate today—shockingly, only 1.9% of people in low-income countries have had one dose to date.

The role of Gavi and the World Health Organization in encouraging high-income countries to share doses as soon as possible has been laudable, and those countries, including the UK, that have guaranteed funding to Gavi are also vital. Credit goes to our Government for stepping up to the plate early with those offers. The comments from the noble Lord, Lord Boateng, about the theory of COVAX versus the actual practical attitude of G7 countries were blunt and right, however.

Much money has been made available to Gavi for COVAX. The practical problem of sourcing new vaccine manufacturing has proved understandably difficult. That is why the World Health Organization has repeatedly asked high-income countries to donate substantial numbers of doses to low-income countries. We on these Benches urged the Prime Minister to set an example from the United Kingdom in his role as the chair of the G7, but sadly he did not. All that was

repeated was the amount of money given to Gavi, which was no use when there was no manufacturing availability. The figure of a 1.9% rate of vaccination in low-income countries is testament to that.

The World Health Organization has rightly said that

“none of us will be safe until everyone is safe.”

That is about overall safety, not just for all people in all countries, but also about the mitigations that we in the UK need to take in our own communities to keep transmission down. I am sorry to say that we are not doing that here in England. This Government have removed all mitigations and that is one of the reasons they are pushing for so many people to have booster jabs—way beyond what is really necessary at the moment. The clinically extremely vulnerable, of whom I am one, are staying at home under the government guidance because we should not be mixing with unvaccinated people. But we must make sure that those who can manage and make changes in their lives—face masks, social distancing and ensuring that spaces they enter are ventilated—play their part as well as government.

I have been watching what has been happening in America. The difference in the numbers of cases, hospitalisations and deaths between states where there are mask mandates and other mitigations and those where there are defiantly no mitigations is truly shocking. Many countries in the global south do not have the resources to provide even these mitigations.

However, there is hope. This month, Covid-19 vaccine manufacturing output will pass the 7.5 billion dose mark, with manufacturers worldwide now producing 1.5 billion doses per month and further continued growth is expected. If there are no major bottlenecks, by June of next year total vaccine production is estimated to reach over 24 billion, by which time vaccine supplies will most likely outstrip global demand.

This is subject, of course, to the emergence of any new variant that is resistant to the currently approved vaccines. There is recent news of the mu variant, which appears to be resistant to the Pfizer vaccine, and worldwide experts are monitoring that and all new variants continuously. We may be relying on our pharmaceutical industry to produce new vaccines for whatever threats are coming down the line. The good news is that G7 countries have sufficient stocks of vaccine doses to vaccinate their own adults and teenagers, and to roll out booster programmes to protect the most at-risk groups—as well as substantially increase the number of doses available to lower and lower-middle-income countries.

There are various things that need to be done, though, and the UK must take the lead on this while we chair the G7. These include stepping up dose sharing, continuing to optimise production, calling for the trade barriers that the noble Lord, Lord Boateng, spoke about to be eliminated, supporting country readiness and driving further innovation. I ask the Minister: what is the current number of doses to be donated from the UK between now and the end of this calendar year? How much will be donated next year? While we chair the G7, it is vital that we lead the way and donate as many doses as we can as soon as we can.

5.08 pm

**Baroness Sugg (Con):** My Lords, the vaccination effort, here in the UK and in many parts of the world, has been nothing short of incredible, with 5 billion vaccines developed, manufactured and distributed. Of course we must pay tribute to the scientists, health workers and all involved in that but, as the noble Lord, Lord Boateng, set out so powerfully, this incredible success has not been equitable across the world. I am grateful to the noble Lord for giving us the opportunity to debate this today.

I will add a further disturbing statistic to the noble Lord's: 50% of the world's vaccine supply has been bought by high-income countries, which account for just 16% of the world's population. So the vaccine rollout has not been equitable, and indeed has exacerbated existing pre-pandemic inequalities.

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted every corner of the world and, to avert further public health and economic disaster, we must address this vaccine inequality. It is in our enlightened self-interest to do so, as well as being the correct ethical thing to do. While the UK is gratefully reaping the benefits of a successful vaccination programme, that is not the case in the rest of the world. We know that economic recovery will be longer in poorer economies, compared to advanced ones, and that low-income countries will now face longer-term debt. We will see an increase in poverty and a reduction in spending on health systems. Unless we address this inequality of distribution, we will see the reversal of many of the impressive gains in development we have seen over the last few decades. Achieving the sustainable development goals by 2030 will be well out of reach.

The moral and ethical case for vaccine equity is clear; if that is not enough, so is the case for it being in our enlightened self-interest. It is right that wealthier countries should do more. Immunising many people in just a few countries, while in large parts of the world the virus remains unchecked, will simply allow more variants to emerge in these places. When variants appear, they will end up in the UK, in the end. We can close our borders and try to buy ourselves more time but, at some point, if the variant has sufficient biological advantages, it will spread around the world and into every nation. This is a global problem that must be dealt with globally.

It is clear that more must be done. In the United Kingdom, we have high vaccination rates, relative wealth, the presidency of the G7 and a desire to be a force for good in the world, so we in the UK must do more. We are rightly proud of our involvement in the development of the AstraZeneca vaccine, our early activity and our funding for COVAX. But, as we have heard, COVAX is struggling to deliver its objectives, given the practice of high-income countries such as ours to make deals directly with manufacturers. This has been exacerbated by high-income countries using COVAX for their own vaccinations. As we heard from the noble Lord, Lord Boateng, in June alone the UK received around 539,000 vaccine doses from COVAX—more than double the amount sent to Africa that month. Not much surprises me these days, but I was genuinely taken aback when I heard that. While COVAX

is open to higher-income countries, given the supply issues it is facing, we should surely not be using its precious doses in our own country.

As I understand it, the UK has another 27 million doses on offer from COVAX and we are not the only country involved in this activity although, under public pressure, Canada has returned some of the doses it got from COVAX. We are not the only country but, given that we have 27 million additional doses on offer, will my noble friend commit the UK not to take up the option to withdraw any further vaccines from COVAX, so that the vaccines that it has can go to countries with far lower vaccination rates than ours?

I welcome the fact that the Prime Minister put global vaccination on the agenda for the G7 summit in Cornwall, and I would welcome some updates on progress following that. While falling well short of the 11 billion doses that the WHO said are needed, we saw pledges for 870 million doses via COVAX, half of which will be delivered before the end of the year. The UK's part in this was 100 million doses, with 30 million going before the end of the year. We all know that time is of the essence, so can my noble friend tell me how many of those doses have been delivered and whether we are on track for that 50%?

The G7 summit communiqué also pledged to create the appropriate frameworks to strengthen our collective defences, so I ask what progress has been made on that and whether the task force to which we committed is up and running. The G7 also agreed to “engage constructively” with discussions at the WTO on the intellectual property issue; can my noble friend share an update on that? Finally, will the Government back calls, at the United Nations General Assembly this month, for a global summit to ignite urgent global action to end the pandemic?

I look forward to my noble friend's contribution at the end, setting out what the UK has done so far. That is not insignificant, but the UK has a responsibility and opportunity to contribute more to end the global pandemic. I hope the Government will do so.

5.14 pm

**Baroness Lawrence of Clarendon (Lab):** My Lords, I thank my noble friend Lord Boateng for bring us this debate this afternoon. The pandemic in the last 18 months has been devastating around the world, and 18 months down the line we are in a position to address it with the development of the vaccine that has helped us to protect lives.

COVAX was set up to ensure that the Covid vaccine reaches the world's poorest countries. Its aim is to vaccinate healthcare workers, social care workers and those who are over 65 and high risk within a community. COVAX was created as a global procurement mechanism to distribute vaccine around the world. A recent report on economics intelligence from the *Financial Times* showed that low-income countries would have only 1.4% of the 5 billion vaccines delivered. This means that they will not be able to vaccinate 60% of their populations by mid-2022. The knock-on effect will

plunge these countries into longer term debt. This debt will also spiral out of control, leading to increased poverty and reduced spending on countries' health systems.

Another report which came out in July stated that 170,000 doses of the Moderna vaccine were at risk of expiring within two weeks. NHS doctors have also reported thousands of Pfizer and Moderna shots being discarded. There are signs that the Government are encouraging the pharmaceutical companies to share their know-how and technology to waive intellectual property, but there are also signs of hoarding of doses by high-income countries. This is said to be caused by the pharmaceutical companies, which have control over the vaccine.

The British Government have announced that they intend to donate 100 million doses, while the US President announced that the US intends to donate 500 million doses of the Covid vaccine to poorer countries in the next year. This was announced at the G7 meeting of world leaders earlier this year. Do the Government understand that the pandemic is not going to wait a year before taking more lives?

The question is: will the Government look to speed up how the vaccines are reaching lower-income countries, as the prediction is that access to the vaccines will not reach those countries until 2023, as my noble friend Lord Boateng said? The G7 countries do not need a surplus; they could make a decision that lower-income countries should receive the vaccines they need now. The *Financial Times* has talked about vaccines passing their sell-by dates in warehouses, so we know that there is sufficient to vaccinate the world.

Ghana was the first country to receive vaccines from COVAX in February this year. Since then, more than 81 million doses have been delivered to more than 120 countries around the world, including Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia and Fiji, but many African countries are still waiting for the vaccine to reach them.

COVAX is not without its critics; it is said that it is built on an unequal distribution structure. Countries which pay upfront have the option to buy vaccines for up to 50% of their own populations through COVAX. Lower-income countries, financed by advance market commitments, are able to buy for only 20% of their populations. It is morally wrong for rich countries such as the UK to have enough vaccine to vaccinate its population more than three times over, after it has vaccinated the lower age groups and given booster shots in the autumn.

Can COVAX help to end the pandemic that is spreading around the world? This is for not only our Government but world leaders to answer. Speaking on Radio 4 last Sunday morning, the former Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, talked about ordering vaccines and storing doses that are not needed; in some cases, their date has expired. To keep all of us safe, it is important that COVAX has enough vaccine to distribute to all countries:

“No one is safe, unless everyone is safe”—  
that is from the World Health Organization.

5.19 pm

**Lord Oates (LD):** My Lords, I declare my interest as a vice-chair of the APPG on Vaccinations for All, and I thank the secretariat for the briefing they provided to me and other noble Lords. I thank the noble Lord, Lord Boateng, in particular for bringing forward this important debate.

Some months ago, at the beginning of the vaccine programme, Nicky Tyler and her husband, my noble friend Lord Tyler—Paul Tyler—contacted me, because Nicky felt when she got her vaccination that she wanted to be able to donate to people who had not. We worked together to get a facility where people could donate individually to COVAX. As a result of that fundraising effort and with the assistance of the then Lord Speaker and noble Lords from across the House, including the noble Baroness, Lady Lawrence, we managed to raise some funds. We did not raise huge amounts because, unfortunately, the Government and NHS bureaucracy could not get in gear to offer people that chance at point of use, but it was useful revenue none the less.

But all the time the frustration was that we knew that while money was going to be needed, money was not actually the key issue. The key issue was supply. The problem was not only that we in the West, in the UK and other countries, were hoovering up vaccines; we have heard all the statistics. But now we hear—the noble Baroness, Lady Sugg, and the noble Lord, Lord Boateng, cited the figures—that, absolutely disgracefully, we were taking from COVAX as well: 539,000 doses, as has been said. That was more than went to Africa in that month. So, not only did we screw up the way things were supposed to work by all our bilateral deals; we then went and effectively stole from the multilateral vehicle—heads we win, tails you lose. That is not just bad policy; it is morally bankrupt and callously wicked policy. Whoever the Ministers are who signed that up should hang their heads in shame.

It is easy to talk about vaccines in terms of billions of doses and hundreds of thousands taken from COVAX, but the reality is that this is about people. It is about people in these African countries who are not getting vaccinated, who are getting sick, and many of whom are dying. It is utterly wrong, and I hope the Minister will take up the questions from noble Lords and assure us not only that we will not take from the COVAX Facility anymore but that we will return those doses.

The lack of vaccines impacts not only people's health but the economies of those countries. Shortly before the Recess, I chaired a meeting on behalf of the Royal African Society and the APPG for Africa about the impact of Covid on the tourist and wider economies of Africa. As I mentioned in the debate on Africa yesterday, we heard about the triple whammy on African economies. First, we hoarded vaccines, meaning that their economies could not get back on their feet because people were not vaccinated. We then imposed travel restrictions against them, and then, not content with that, we slashed the aid budget well below what it would have even gone down to under the 0.7% rate.

The Government have to approach this in a way that addresses all these factors, because if we are taking out an estimated \$168 billion in tourist income

[LORD OATES]

from Africa as a result of the travel restrictions that have been imposed, that impacts health. It impacts people's lives, and African economies will not recover. We have heard from the noble Lord, Lord Boateng, about the importance of allowing those countries which have the manufacturing facilities to be able to get on and start delivering. That must happen now, and we should be assisting it. On the issue of intellectual property, again, it is completely wrong, at this time of global crisis, that we are denying people access to those vaccines by hanging on to that outdated thing.

I conclude by reinforcing this point: every day that we delay, more people die, more people get sick and more economic damage is done. We have to stop, and start acting with moral responsibility.

5.25 pm

**Baroness Chalker of Wallasey (Con):** My Lords, as we have heard from previous speakers—particularly the noble Lord, Lord Boateng, in introducing this debate—the shortage of Covid-19 vaccines in the global south is serious but it could be corrected. Many ideas have come forward, but the thing to underline in this debate is that it is a question of different parts of Governments, not just in this country but all over the world, working together with their departments of trade and their technical people to get production in many of the more developed global south countries that could provide vaccines themselves. I will come back to that matter in a moment.

It is 24 years now since my time as an FCO Minister and a development Minister. I have worked with NGOs during that time on the prevention of all sorts of diseases, but in none of them—malaria, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and other preventable diseases, including sight loss through trachoma—have we seen such fast development of a solution to the problem we face. We have seen very fast development by some outstanding companies. That development and that knowledge should be shared across the world, not kept to the more developed countries.

It is imperative that we change our developed-nations storage, as I call it, of vaccines, with 27 million doses in this country, plus the Canadians and others, as has been said. Oxford University reported last month that 32.5% of the world's population had received at least one dose but that only 1.4% of the population of low-income countries had done so, and most of those are in the global south.

I can accept that higher-income countries hedged their bets in the early months of the Covid-19 infection, but surely there is now a case, when we and other higher-income countries have been successful in administering the vaccine—91 million doses of vaccine have been administered to citizens in the UK alone—for us to stimulate and donate more doses, even beyond the pledges made at the G7 meeting and other meetings.

I note that 54 African countries have received about 31 million doses of vaccine through COVAX, and the G7 is now committed to 870 million doses via COVAX, but the real problem seems to be with intellectual property rights. I have a few key questions for my noble friend on that. They concern the waiving of IP

rights, both on vaccine production in low-income countries and on distribution. What has happened to the WTO discussions involving the director-general, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, about developing a text to give developing countries access, where there is expertise, to vaccine production under the guidance of the established vaccine providers? What is being done about getting the supply of the tested vaccines to low-income countries as soon as possible?

Given that before Covid-19 hit there was economic growth in a number of African countries of up to 6%, probably driven by new technology and mobile telephone usage, we know that these countries are capable of taking up the information provided in the more developed countries and those countries lucky to have well-developed industry. Will the Minister undertake to investigate how, by distributing greater supplies of vaccines to low-income countries and by supplying technology training, we can develop the licensed developers in those countries? By doing so, we could increase the vaccination in low-income countries substantially.

It does not take a lot of imagination to see what needs to be done; it simply needs someone to get on with it, and I can think of no one better than my dear friend Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala.

5.30 pm

**Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (GP):** My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Boateng, for securing this debate and his excellent introduction, and I have enjoyed the uniformly excellent contributions to it.

It is worth going back a step and thinking about the nature of the world in which the Covid-19 virus arrived. This is a world of massive, almost unenvisionable inequality. Rich countries have drained \$1.52 trillion from the global south since 1960, according to a calculation from the anthropologist, Jason Hickel. I refer to his paper in *New Political Economy*, which looked at the unequal exchange in the post-colonial era, the rate of which increased dramatically in the neoliberal structural adjustment period imposed on the global south, taking us to the point where Covid arrived. The global north was drawing from the south \$2.2 trillion each year through unequal pricing, which is a reflection of unequal power. That has been calculated as being enough to end extreme poverty in the world 15 times over, or it could pay for far more Covid vaccines than we actually need.

At the same time, we have seen destruction of natural worlds and the dumping of plastics and toxic wastes on those nations. We have an economic system—a power imbalance—which sees multinational companies having far more power than entire nations, or even groups of nations.

Then we come to what is happening with Covid vaccines. Here I am particularly pleased to be following the noble Baroness, Lady Chalker of Wallasey, and to pick up on her point about how we are not taking the knowledge of the world and sharing it with the world. Currently, the cost of vaccinating the world is five times what it should be if pharmaceutical companies were not profiteering by charging five times as much as it costs to produce vaccines. These calculations are made by the People's Vaccine Alliance, which includes



the African Alliance, Oxfam and UNAIDS. Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna have been charging Governments as much as \$41 billion above the estimated cost of production of vaccines. To bring this to a national level, Colombia is estimated to have paid \$375 million more than the cost price of the vaccines that it has been able to purchase. They are making vaccines for \$1.20 a dose; COVAX is paying on average five times that.

There is a huge moral argument here, which many noble Lords have made, for why this should not be allowed to continue, but I know that there are some people in politics who do not acknowledge moral arguments so I shall look briefly at the economic arguments. The economic cost to rich countries of not supplying vaccines could exceed their cost by 10 to 100 times. Essentially, we are shooting ourselves in the foot economically. The noble Lord, Lord Oates, spoke about the impact on economies in the global south, but the damage there will have huge impacts on our economies as well.

Of course, as many noble Lords have noted, no one is safe until everyone is safe. One million new infections occur in the world every day right now.

I have some expertise in the area of biology so I will venture for a second into what that means. Uncontrolled transmission of the virus is what drives mutations of it. Each infection in an individual person produces millions of viruses. Most of those viruses will be identical to the infecting virus dose but some will be mutations. There is then a bottleneck, where that person transmits a small dose of virus from what they have to others. Individually, cases will almost certainly be the same as the original virus, but in some cases they will transmit the mutations. The more infections you have, the more get transmitted.

I will finish by looking at some figures. The *New York Times* has a very handy table for the number of doses per 100 of population. Here are some rates. In Congo there are 0.1 doses of vaccine per 100 people; in Haiti, 0.4; in Papua New Guinea, 1.5; and in the UK, 138.

5.36 pm

**Baroness Osamor (Lab):** My Lords, it is a great honour and privilege to participate in this important debate secured by my noble friend Lord Boateng. Coronavirus has taught us that the future is never going to be business as usual and that the virus knows no boundaries either. People all over the global south—Africa in particular—are hungry for change, not charity. That includes harmful, unequal, discriminatory global agreements. A truly global Britain must stop blocking solutions to end the Covid-19 pandemic. They must be available, affordable, suitable to the people we care for and adapted to the place where they live. Imagine trying to keep vaccines cool and effective in blistering temperatures without electricity for refrigeration. People get sick and die needlessly because of these obstructions.

Millions of people are still waiting to benefit from the important medical innovations of the past year and a half. Intellectual property is deepening social and racial injustice across the globe. Shared Covid-19 vaccine know-how to increase global production and

supply is needed. Can the Minister tell us whether the Government will support this? Vaccines made in the global south—for example, in Madagascar, Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, India, Senegal, Zimbabwe, Brazil and so on—could be a game-changer in the Covid-19 response. Lives over profit is not too much to ask—or is it?

5.38 pm

**Baroness Chakrabarti (Lab):** My Lords, I congratulate my noble friend Lord Boateng on securing time for a discussion of one of the most urgent life and death issues in the world today. As someone who advised him in government on pro-human rights and equality measures over 20 years ago, it is a particular privilege to support him today, as it is to speak in the same debate as my noble friend Lady Lawrence of Clarendon, with whom I have campaigned for so many vital causes over the years.

In my too short time I should like to focus on the immorality and self-destructive illogic of the Government's current opposition to the vaccine patent TRIPS waiver. To be clear, and to be clear on the record, I believe that the inevitable national and international inquiries, like future generations, will be very harsh judges of this.

Of course, the waiver is, as we have heard, promoted by South Africa and India and supported by half of our Commonwealth, including Pakistan and now Australia. It is advocated by the WHO, the Pope and the United States, with—it would seem—only Germany and the United Kingdom in embarrassing resistance. Forthcoming elections in Germany might even alter the German position.

In answer to a question in your Lordships' House on 21 July, the noble Lord, Lord Bethell, said:

"It is our strong view that this Government support intellectual property, because it is only through our commitment to intellectual property that we can encourage the kind of massive investment by the private sector ... in the first place. For that reason, we remain hesitant about supporting a TRIPS waiver policy."—[*Official Report*, 21/07/21; col. 250.]

As a human rights lawyer, I believe in intellectual property as well, but, given that the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine was 97% publicly funded, and that it is a similar story for Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech in the US and Germany, it seems to me that there is a very strong argument that there should have been government-owned patents, or indeed creative commons, in the first place.

Furthermore, like so many of our fundamental freedoms, property is a qualified right at the best of times, and proportionate interference is even more justified in the exceptional circumstances of a pandemic. Ordinary people, businesses and nations have made extraordinary sacrifices of their liberties, livelihoods and lives over the last 18 months—so why weep hot tears for a temporary reduction in the profits of pharmaceutical giants that would only make them more popular and trusted in the future, as a result?

Another argument that is sometimes made against the waiver is that countries in the global south are somehow incapable of safe generics production. It is as if we are advocating a sort of "Breaking Bad" solution, with people mixing vaccines in their basements.

[BARONESS CHAKRABARTI]

That is an insult that verges on the racist. As the noble Baroness, Lady Chalker, suggested, with proper support, know-how sharing and regulation, there is substantial capacity. Indeed, the Serum Institute of India was producing vaccines for export to the West while the bodies of Covid-19 casualties were floating down the Ganges. During that same Indian peak, Teva offered in vain to help with the vaccine effort, and, if we had engaged the TRIPS waiver then, that Israeli company could have begun production to help, as it wanted to do.

Not to share vaccine recipes and know-how free of charge during a deadly pandemic is as obscene as it would be for one of us in your Lordships' House right now to restrict or charge for advice on emergency exits from this building in the event of a raging fire. While I congratulate the professionals and volunteers of our wonderful NHS on our domestic vaccine rollout—indeed, I encourage anyone and everyone offered to take up their jabs—it is a luxury to be deliberating child vaccinations and booster shots when less than 2% of people in low-income countries have received a single dose. If we want to trade and travel, while protecting ourselves from endless mutations and variants, this vaccine apartheid is positively self-harming, and it must end.

5.44 pm

**Lord Browne of Ladyton (Lab):** My Lords, I too congratulate my noble friend Lord Boateng on securing this debate. He made an excellent speech in introducing it. From the quality of the contributions thus far, he also appears to have exposed a rich seam of knowledge, wisdom and humanity in your Lordships' House; we owe him a debt for that.

On 15 October 2020, I asked a supplementary question about vaccine equity. Referring to expert warnings—there were many then—that the COVAX initiative offered no guarantee that Covid-19 vaccines would reach the world's poor, I asked the then Minister for Overseas Territories and Sustainable Development at the FCDO, the noble Baroness, Lady Sugg, whether she was aware that a team of global experts led by Ezekiel J Emanuel, a world-class, distinguished medical ethicist, had proposed a new model ethical framework for global vaccine allocation, dubbed the “fair priority model”, and if so what was the Government's assessment of it.

In the experts' words, this framework

“is the best embodiment of the ethical values of limiting harms, benefiting the disadvantaged, and recognizing equal concern ... Ultimately, the model offers governments, international organizations, and vaccine producers a practical way to fulfill their pledges to distribute vaccine fairly and equitably”.

Graciously, the noble Baroness restated her belief that “the right way forward is for the world to come together through the COVAX commitment”.—[*Official Report*, 15/10/20; col. 1186.] She offered to look at the fair priority model and come back to me in writing. I am afraid I am still waiting for the promised letter, but there may be a simple explanation for that omission. On 25 November, the noble Baroness, a Minister of ability and admirable integrity, quit after Rishi Sunak announced that foreign aid expenditure

would be cut from 0.7% to 0.5% of national income. Interestingly, her former post still exists with all its responsibilities, but is vacant; she is indeed irreplaceable.

I expect that the response to this debate will be that COVAX will deliver, but the truth of the matter is that it is not. We have a situation now in which only 1.9% of people in low-income countries have received at least one dose. Today, CNN reports that only

“330 million doses have been released for delivery to underserved countries through COVAX”,

while the ambition for this year was 1 billion. In August only 12.6 million of the 4.46 billion doses administered globally were in low-income countries. On 4 August, the WHO director-general had to issue a plea for a moratorium on third-dose boosters in high-income countries. These facts prompted the *Lancet*, for a second time, to add its voice to growing demand for equitable access to vaccines.

As we have heard, the mantra for the Covid pandemic is:

“No one is safe until everyone is safe”—

and with good reason. Unmitigated transmission means rampant viral replication and the likely emergence of new, more transmissible variants that could overcome natural or vaccine-induced immunity. In the words of the *Lancet* editorial:

“A perverse social experiment would be to allow the virus to continue ripping through low-income and lower-middle-income countries ... where people tend to live in close proximity and infection prevention strategies are difficult to implement ... while seeing how quickly”

high-income countries

“can redesign vaccines to counter yet another variant that has emerged”

from low and middle-income countries.

“Beyond the moral argument, this approach would make no economic sense”.

Rich countries

“rely on raw materials and intermediate goods”

from low and middle-income countries, and if they

“cannot provide these materials because their populations are dying from COVID-19 or are prevented from working because of lockdowns”

how long do we think we can keep our own economies running?

On 1 September, for similar reasons, Professor Emanuel re-entered the fray too, this time in the company of 80 other leading world figures, who published a letter in the *FT*. He urged world leaders to convene a global summit during this year's UNGA to boost vaccine availability. They wrote that

“inequitable access to high-quality vaccines and capacity to administer them is prolonging the pandemic and destabilising economies and societies around the world.”

The briefings we all received for this debate are excellent. They are redolent with evidence of rampant injustice. My noble friend Lord Boateng asked for specific steps to remedy this injustice, as did others. I support them all, but I am struck in my reading by the constant theme from experts that a global pandemic needs a global plan of attack—why did we not think of that ourselves? To boot, it needs one that is developed within an ethical framework, to secure the commitments

and actions needed to close the vaccine supply and capacity gaps, to increase countries' distribution and delivery capabilities and to strengthen health systems and, importantly, our preparedness for the next pandemic.

It appears that not only do we no longer have a specific Minister who holds the responsibilities that the noble Baroness had but we have no comprehensive plan of response to this challenge either. I invite the Minister to urge the Prime Minister to join the call for a global summit during the UNGA and, in the meantime, to study the fair priority model framework, consult its authors and assess its merits and, if he can find the time to do so, to write the letter that I have now been waiting for for coming on a year.

5.50 pm

**Lord Davies of Brixton (Lab):** My Lords, I join in congratulating my noble friend Lord Boateng on introducing this debate. My mind goes back more than 40 years ago to when we were colleagues together on the Greater London Council. I am pleased to report that he has lost none of his power of advocacy. It was an excellent speech. I will echo one point he made: we know what is to be done. That is the criminal fact. We know the nature of this terrible disease. We know it will not be over until it is over for everyone, including and especially the people in the global south. Of course, we cannot just think of the impact it has on us. There is also the moral imperative to get it right for everyone.

The position has been set out clearly by previous speakers, with compelling arguments. I will echo the comments made by a group of relevant voluntary organisations that we know what is to be done. Will the Government, as a matter of urgency, encourage the redistribution of the vaccine via COVAX, targeting healthcare workers and vulnerable people in low-income countries? Will the Government push the pharmaceutical companies to share their knowledge, particularly, as has been stressed throughout the debate, since so much of that knowledge has been accrued and accumulated through the public sector and public service finance?

Will the Government support South Africa and India to waive the restrictions on intellectual property rights so that production can be ramped up? Will the Government encourage investment in manufacturing capacity in low and middle-income countries? Will the Minister commit the Government to protect the health of our people and to meet the moral imperative of helping others in low-income countries in the global south?

5.53 pm

**Lord Hussain (LD):** My Lords, I thank noble Lords for allowing me to speak in the gap. I have a particular issue to share with the House. I have just come back from a red-list country, Pakistan. I would like to share my experience. The region I went to is Azad Kashmir, where the majority of the people who are known to be British Pakistanis come from. They keep going back and forth to that area.

You cannot leave this country to go to Pakistan until you are vaccinated and until you have a test proving that you are negative. Of course, once you get there, they test you again. While I was there I witnessed the vaccination programme in the area. It was widely accepted, with people queueing up every day outside vaccination centres. Vaccination is down to school-age children now. People are really encouraging all ages to have the vaccination done.

Also, I have to say something about the local government I saw, with local lockdowns and national lockdowns. My wife and I went to see my elderly in-laws many times—we were in a village—but whenever we wanted to go out for shopping, we were told, “No, there is a lockdown. You can't go”. So, there is a heavy lockdown in the country. In Azad Kashmir, including in the Mirpur district and the surrounding areas, I did not hear about many deaths from Covid-19, and the hospitals were not full of Covid-19 patients either. That is where the majority of British Pakistanis are travelling to and from.

My experience was also this. Obviously, we could not return without showing a certificate of vaccination and tests. Here, getting from the aeroplane—that is, from the minute the flight landed at the airport—to getting to the hotel, all in London, took nearly seven hours. It was tortuous, and it cost me and my wife £2,300. Yes, we were able to pay, and did pay, but what about those families who have three or four members with them, perhaps elderly relatives or children?

Not only that, let me share my particular experience of when we got to the hotel. Only a few minutes later, a piece of paper came through the door saying, “We do apologise but the hot water doesn't work in the hotel. We are working on it”. The hot water did not come back for another 18 hours. This is the kind of experience that people are going through. What I am saying is that, if we have to have certain countries on red lists for whatever reason, let us make sure that we force to quarantine in hotels only those who test positive. Otherwise, we are pushing planeloads of people who are not positive into hotels where it costs them a lot of money to go through this tortuous experience.

I beg the Government to look at this from a humanitarian point of view. Please, do something about it. I do not know how long this is going to go on for but it is affecting ordinary people quite a lot.

5.57 pm

**Lord Purvis of Tweed (LD):** My Lords, I am glad to follow my noble friend's powerful contribution. I start by commending the noble Lord, Lord Boateng, on securing this debate and introducing it so comprehensively. He set the right tone of fact and passion.

We have heard from all sides of the House the depressing information and the passionate contributions to back it up. I was reflecting on one of those powerful contributions, that of my noble friend Lord Oates, and thought that I have been in the House for eight years but, long before that, it has been a common thread throughout British government policy that we are an upholder of the rules-based international order. The problem with this is that a great number of countries now say that those rules are set by countries

[LORD PURVIS OF TWEED]

that, especially in a time in a crisis, are less interested in an international order than they are in their own internal interest. The rules are out of date and biased towards the developed West. In the 70 years since the rules were developed, the world has never suffered a health emergency such as this pandemic. It had an opportunity to demonstrate that, in the age of sustainable development goals, the response of the richest nations, which set those rules in the first place, could be flexible enough to support the less rich nations and share the enormous burden of the pandemic. That opportunity has been missed.

The chart from *Our World in Data* by the University of Oxford, included in the Library briefing, showing the vaccine doses administered per 100 people across the globe, is as startling as it is shameful. The OECD tells us that high-income countries, which account for 16% of the global population, had negotiated supply agreements amounting to approximately half the world's vaccine supply. The opportunity presented itself last year through the establishment of the COVAX scheme, as the noble Lord, Lord Boateng, indicated, for fair global access between countries, regardless of income level. However, a combination of vaccine nationalism and perhaps what some may consider an understandable desire among domestic populations in rich countries to return to normal as soon as possible and release themselves from lockdowns has meant that the negotiated purchase of rich countries to vaccinate their populations many times over has limited the capacity of the COVAX programme to get access to and then distribute those doses. I shall conclude on the most sobering consequences of those actions later.

As the combined charity briefings that we received say—and as the noble Baroness, Lady Sugg, highlighted—the hoarding of doses has only exacerbated the core source of the inequality in vaccine access. Only 1.4% of the 5 billion vaccine doses administered globally to date have gone to low-income countries. The growing number of destroyed doses in the United States is now outstripping some countries' pull-down from the COVAX scheme. That is a shameful indictment of how we in the richest countries in the world are operating.

Buried in the rather self-congratulatory communiqué of the G7 held in Carbis Bay was an equally sobering detail in paragraph 10 on vaccine production. It stated:

“These include exports from domestic production, with at least 700 million doses exported or to be exported this year, of which almost half have gone or will go to non-G7 countries”.

So of the 700 million doses that the G7 communiqué said had been produced so far, less than half have gone to the non-richest seven countries in the world. That was, again a shocking indictment. Just this week, the relative ease with which two of the richest countries in the world, the UK and Australia, agreed a 4 million-dose swap, when compared with the relative difficulty for African Union members in drawing down already-manufactured doses available, is telling.

The UK approach seems to have been a combination of donation in cash and of surplus doses, as well as the encouragement of manufacturers to share and pool manufacturing. However, for a full year, as my noble

friend Lady Brinton said, Members on our Benches have argued that the UK should have led on activating the Doha declaration and the TRIPS waiver mechanisms. We proposed Amendment 75 to the Trade Bill in 2020 so that the Government would activate that, and were supported by the noble Lord, Lord Collins, and others who took part in those discussions. It was a cross-party effort. In the Government's response to my question about why Canada had activated the mechanisms in March 2020 but the UK chose not to, the Minister replied to me:

“The UK believes that a robust and fair intellectual property system is a key part of the innovation framework that allows economies to grow, while enabling society to benefit from knowledge and ideas.”

However, as the charities' briefing to us highlighted, the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine, if it had been openly licensed, as was originally intended by Oxford University, more suppliers would potentially have been producing vaccines to be distributed globally. Instead, the exclusive licence by AstraZeneca for producing the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine at the Serum Institute of India has meant that there have been major problems with the rollout. Indeed, in some countries it has been halted altogether and others are paying much more, as has been referred to.

Let us not forget that the innovation framework which the Minister referred to in the Trade Bill processes was part-funded by overseas development assistance—so we would not have this innovation for the UK economy if it had not been for the ODA in the first place, and now, most depressingly, as we have heard, we are stripping some of that back. I hope that the Minister can update the House on our position. Are we still acting as a block on the Doha declaration and the TRIPS waiver situation? If the Government gave the reason a year ago, almost to the day, that their situation was preferable, where has been the benefit and where has been the proof that that approach has been better?

What has compounded this—and has also been raised in this debate—has been that at the same time that the UK has not been leading from the front in those areas, it has actively cut development assistance for health systems across many countries. Part of the awful consequences of the unlawful cut of 0.7% to 0.5% has been the reduction in support for health systems to distribute the vaccine, even if those countries were able to get it. Can the Minister confirm that reductions for health system support in developing countries will not be cut next year, as it has been cut this year?

Finally, on the consequences of this, as I highlighted, we have been warning that, without a different approach, there would be consequences. What are some of those consequences? On Wednesday of this week, COVAX slashed its forecast for doses available in 2021 by roughly a quarter. The assumption that was made during the UK hosting of the G7 was “the two billion”. We all saw the Prime Minister talking about “the two billion”. The 1.9 billion has now been reduced to 1.4 billion for the release in 2021, as a consequence of hoarding. The World Health Organization has formally asked for developed countries to delay booster shots as a way of lifting vaccinations to lower-income

populations to 40%. Do the Government agree with the WHO's position? Dr Tedros, Director-General of the WHO, said:

"I will not stay silent when the companies and countries that control the global supply of vaccines think the world's poor should be satisfied with leftovers."

However, most shockingly in today's debate, we have heard that in June, the UK actually drew down 539,000 doses from the COVAX facility itself. Reportedly—I would like the Minister to confirm this—it has options for a further 27 million doses to be drawn down from COVAX. Can the Minister do one thing in response today: confirm that the Government will not do it? It is a clear signal that shows the international rules-based order is working for developed countries. The statistic that Africa as a continent so far has received 100 million doses in its entirety, and we have an option from COVAX just for our country for a drawdown of a quarter of that, surely cannot be acceptable. I hope that the Minister in his response will say that we will not do this.

6.09 pm

**Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab):** My Lords, as the noble Baroness, Lady Sugg, said, the development of Covid-19 vaccinations has been an incredible scientific achievement that has surpassed almost all expectations of what could be achieved so soon. However, as my noble friend Lord Boateng highlighted in his excellent introduction to this debate, the distribution of vaccinations which has left most of the world without access has been a huge geopolitical failure.

Last month, the Associated Press reported scenes in Kampala of nurses desperate to avert violence as people in Uganda's capital jostled for the few vaccines that had arrived in the country. The same scenes are being repeated across the global south, where the hopelessness that the UK experienced in 2020 as the virus spread through the country without there being any protection is still playing out.

As Gordon Brown has said, this is in part a result of vaccine nationalism. More than 80% of vaccinations worldwide have ended up in G20 countries and, as a result of over-ordering with no focus on redistribution, around only 2% of people in Africa have been vaccinated. The tragedy is that this hoarding of vaccine will benefit no one. Regardless of how well vaccinated we are in the western world, as all noble Lords have repeated in this debate, if the virus continues to circulate and mutate elsewhere in the world it will remain a threat to us all. The problem also lies with the lack of political leadership and the Government's unwillingness to step into a vacuum and make a stand. I have no doubt that the Minister will repeat the details of what the UK has done—we have heard it in the debate—in terms of financial contributions, Gavi, the COVAX Facility and CEPI. However, as the noble Baroness, Lady Sugg, said, we should absolutely have been a champion in the world in terms of global vaccination, driving the issue throughout to deal with the suffering that will otherwise continue in the global south. I repeat that we must be aware that if we do not, the virus will continue to pose a danger.

What did the Government do? What have we seen? The noble Lord, Lord Purvis, set out exactly some of the horrible contradictions which I hope the Minister will respond to. What did we do? It took almost six months for the Government to begin donating the promised surplus doses of vaccines to low-income countries, and there has been no effort to speed up the process. Ahead of the G7 summit, Labour called for a serious commitment to vaccinate the world, but leaders at it managed to pledge only 9% of the 11 billion doses the world needs. What is required is a credible plan, backed by the necessary resources from the world's wealthiest countries, as my noble friends have said in this debate. Labour laid out a 10-point plan which we put to the Government. We wrote to government Ministers. It is a strategy which could help transform global vaccine production to produce and distribute enough coronavirus vaccines for the whole world. It included proposals to build on the audit work already undertaken by CEPI, launch a global procurement programme for essential supplies and agree a comprehensive plan to transfer the expertise, knowledge and skills required to start vaccine production at new facilities around the world. This is the exact ambition we need from the Government to overcome the shortage in the global south.

We also need to see that the Government are alert to the ongoing blockages which are preventing distribution and manufacture in the global south. In sub-Saharan Africa in particular, limited manufacturing capacity has meant that it is especially vulnerable to supply-chain disturbances, and we must be alert to these disturbances and be in constant dialogue with the political leaders in the global south so that we can address and overcome these obstacles.

In addition, we need to look at the long term, accept that Covid is likely to stay and plan for future vaccination cycles. This means building up strong and resilient healthcare systems. The noble Lords, Lord Purvis and Lord Oates, highlighted that, instead of building up those systems, we have cut—cut support to those incredibly vulnerable countries and undermined those health systems. I have spoken a lot in this Chamber about the cuts to the nutrition programme, the foundation blocks to make vaccines effective, by 80%. Women and children are suffering. I hope, as the noble Lord, Lord Purvis, has asked, that the Minister will respond that those cuts will be restored, as soon as possible.

The pandemic is not over. For much of the global south, the worst may not yet have passed. It is in everyone's interest that we address the blockages and disruptions that are preventing the delivery of vaccinations to low-income nations, but we must accept that there are systematic political issues behind those shortages, too.

We are fortunate. The UK is in a fortunate position to have access to sufficient vaccines for our entire adult population, but the most effective way to protect our population is to pass on any surplus doses remaining, not taking it down from the COVAX facility, as the noble Lord, Lord Purvis, said, which should be

[LORD COLLINS OF HIGHBURY]  
redistributing. I hope again that the Minister responds positively to the questions of the noble Lord, Lord Purvis.

I conclude with the words of the noble Baroness, Lady Sugg: addressing the shortage of vaccinations in the global South is not only the morally right thing to do—it is in our self-interest to do it. It is in our country's self-interest and the people of this country's self-interest. It is the only course of action that will protect us from this virus again causing the destruction and suffering we have seen in the past 18 months. I look forward to the Minister's response.

6.17 pm

**Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay (Con):** My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Boateng, for tabling this debate and all the noble Lords who have taken part. It has been urgent and passionate, but focused. As the noble Lord, Lord Browne, put it, it has demonstrated the

“rich seam of knowledge, wisdom and humanity in your Lordships' House”.

It has been almost 19 months since the first cases of Covid-19 were reported, and nine months since widespread international vaccination programmes began. Yet, as noble Lords have rightly said today, too many people remain unvaccinated, particularly in the global south.

The rapid spread of the delta variant illustrates what we have known from the very beginning, and what the noble Baroness, Lady Lawrence, and others echoed today: nobody is safe until everyone is safe. Worldwide vaccination is essential to beat the pandemic, and UK science and diplomacy have been pivotal to the progress made so far. From the outset, Her Majesty's Government have advocated rapid and equitable access to vaccines, and we have helped to drive the global response including, as noble Lords noted, by hosting the Global Vaccine Summit and through our presidencies of the G7 and the UN Security Council. We have been a champion for global action in this important area.

We have worked closely with our partners to design, fund and implement the COVAX Facility, which is an unprecedented initiative led by the World Health Organization, Gavi, or the global vaccine alliance, and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, or CEPI. COVAX has brought together 191 countries to fund, develop, manufacture and deliver Covid vaccines, particularly to the global south. Its advanced market commitment is focused on providing safe and effective vaccines to up to 92 low-income and middle-income countries. From Benin to Zambia, from Bangladesh to Timor-Leste, it is delivering vaccines across the world.

It was launched at the Global Vaccine Summit that we hosted in June last year. The UK was among its founding donors and our total commitment of £548 million is among the largest from any donor. Thanks to our leadership at the UN General Assembly and our match-funding campaign, we helped to mobilise an additional \$1 billion for COVAX from other donors by the end of 2021. The noble Lord, Lord Boateng, rightly talked about resources that have been made available—our work has helped to mobilise the resources that have been made available so far. By leading this

early funding drive, we gave COVAX the purchasing power it needed to secure its first deals with manufacturers, which locked in the supply of internationally approved vaccines.

The first COVAX shots—vaccines from the University of Oxford and AstraZeneca—were delivered to Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana in March this year, just four months after the first vaccination in the UK: an historically unprecedented speed. From a standing start in June last year, COVAX has now delivered more than 230 million vaccine doses to 139 countries and territories, including 87 low and middle-income countries.

Manufacturing vaccines at scale is difficult, even for experienced companies. Delays in production have slowed progress, a frustrating fact that has rightly been echoed throughout today's debate. However, the COVAX vaccine rollout is now poised to accelerate, with new funding, supply agreements and donation commitments in place which will provide 1.8 billion vaccines to low-and middle-income countries for early 2022. This will protect millions of front-line healthcare workers and other vulnerable people.

It is right to draw attention—as the noble Lord, Lord Boateng, and others have—to the discrepancy between the number of vaccines available in the UK and elsewhere in the world. The first duty of the Government, just as it is for all Governments around the world, is to ensure that we have sufficient vaccine supply for our own domestic rollout. I am sure that noble Lords would not disagree with that. We are ensuring that we have sufficient future supply for the UK's needs alongside meeting our G7 commitments.

Alongside this, as noble Lords have said today, making vaccines available globally not only helps address the coronavirus pandemic in developing countries and is the morally right thing to do, but it will also reduce the threat posed by vaccine-resistant variants which are emerging and could pose a threat to us all. As my noble friend Lady Sugg put it, it is in our enlightened self-interest as a force for good in the world. Through our participation in COVAX and by sharing vaccines bilaterally, the UK is therefore also championing the need for access for all countries.

At the G7 leaders' summit in Cornwall, the UK committed to sharing 100 million Covid-19 vaccine doses within 12 months, including 30 million by the end of this year. Of these, 80% will go to COVAX to accelerate support to countries in need. My noble friend Lady Sugg and others asked how many had been delivered so far. To date, the UK has delivered over 9 million doses—ahead of our target for the end of September—of which half are helping to meet the urgent need for vaccines in countries across Africa, south-east Asia and the Caribbean. UK donations are already helping to immunise health workers and those most vulnerable to serious illness from Covid, and to protect health systems. Our 100 million doses are part of the broader G7 promise to finance and donate a billion safe and effective vaccines worldwide by June next year.

My noble friend Lady Sugg and many others asked about the taking of vaccines from COVAX for UK use. As well as being one of the largest donors to COVAX, the UK was one of the earliest. That is

pertinent here, because the UK opted into procuring the Pfizer vaccine through COVAX at a time when that was the only vaccine demonstrated to be effective and approved by the UK regulator. COVAX subsequently decided, after consulting those participating, to procure only a small amount of the Pfizer vaccine because it is, as noble Lords will know, difficult for many countries to deploy, given the challenge of establishing the very cold temperatures at which it needs to be stored in the delivery chain. Our early funding to COVAX gave it the purchasing power it needed to secure deals with manufacturers to supply internationally approved vaccines for low and middle-income countries.

These practical points lead to questions posed by the noble Baroness, Lady Lawrence, and others, about donating vaccines with short shelf lives. We agree that adequate shelf life is important for all vaccines supplied to all countries. We are aiming for all donated and dose-shared vaccines to have a minimum of two months of shelf life, in line with Gavi and COVAX guidance. The partner Governments are free to refuse donations if they are concerned about expiry dates. They are working to ensure the rapid rollout of shared doses to priority groups, including people who need a second dose, and to prevent wastage. The WHO EUL vaccines are approved with a six-month expiry date at present, which may be reviewed by the WHO depending on emerging stability data.

The noble Baroness also asked what we are doing to speed up vaccine access and to tackle the problem of sell-by dates. We are working through the governing boards to ensure that Gavi and World Bank funding is available for in-country delivery and that it is approved and dispersed in a timely manner. We are also supporting COVAX to become less reliant on India-based manufacturers and to diversify its portfolio to manage risk.

The noble Baroness, Lady Brinton, asked another practical question about new variants that may evade vaccine immunity. If such a variant emerges, it should be possible for manufacturers to update vaccines to protect against it, but this means scaling up vaccine manufacturing and rolling out vaccines as quickly and widely as possible. In addition, as more people get vaccinated, we expect virus circulation to decrease. This will lead to fewer mutations, but of course we must track those mutations and variants closely to detect them, and that means carrying out genomic sequencing globally and sharing data.

The noble Baroness, Lady Bennett of Manor Castle, referred to the UK's role in the development of the AstraZeneca vaccine. So much of what we have been debating today would not have been possible without the extraordinary work of our scientists. The UK's scientific excellence and co-operation has enhanced collective knowledge about the virus and led to pivotal breakthroughs. The Government's role in supporting AstraZeneca is well known and we are proud of the helping hand that we gave. The advance there has become an extraordinary gift to global vaccination efforts. More than 1 billion doses have already been delivered at cost, with no profit, with around two-thirds

of them going to lower-income and middle-income countries. That has saved countless lives across the globe.

We also supported wider international collaboration to develop vaccines. In March last year the Prime Minister announced £250 million of funding for CEPI to accelerate vaccine development against global threats including Covid-19. CEPI has supported 11 vaccine candidates, including the approved Moderna vaccine, as well as Novavax, which has shown positive results in clinical trials. The UK will host a replenishment conference to raise funds for CEPI's crucial work on vaccine development in March next year, helping it to realise the aim of making vaccines against new health threats, including new Covid variants, in just 100 days.

In addition to our support for vaccines, the UK is a world leader in viral genomic sequencing, which will be important for the reasons I outlined in response to the question from the noble Baroness, Lady Brinton. This has proved crucial in identifying the emergence of new variants and will be essential to ensuring that the vaccines remain effective. Public Health England is already working with seven countries and the Africa Centres for Disease Control to build their capacity in genomic sequencing.

A number of noble Lords raised the issue of manufacturing. The rollout of vaccines has raised important questions about TRIPS, the agreement on trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights, which the noble Baroness, Lady Chakrabarti, and others focused on in particular. We have engaged in discussions on intellectual property and a possible TRIPS waiver at the WTO and we will continue to engage constructively with the US and other WTO members, as the noble Lord, Lord Boateng, and others urged. We have not yet, however, seen conclusive evidence indicating that the removal of intellectual property protections would lead to the scaling up of production or the improvement of the supply of Covid-19 products, including vaccines. At this point we remain unconvinced on how beneficial a waiver would be.

As a practical point, any negotiations at the WTO on a waiver would need unanimous support, which could take a long time. While we will continue to engage in IP discussions and review the merits of any proposals submitted to the TRIPS council, we must also continue to push ahead with pragmatic action now, including voluntary licensing and technology transfer agreements for vaccines, support for COVAX, as I outlined, and solutions to production bottlenecks and supply chain issues. The UK is also co-sponsoring the Ottawa group's trade and health initiative. This aims to increase co-operation among WTO members, keep medical supply chains open and lower trade barriers, getting vital supplies, including vaccines, to those who need them most.

The voluntary licensing approach taken by the team at Oxford and AstraZeneca has had our full support, as has their collaboration with the Serum Institute of India to scale up manufacturing for global supply. We welcome the work of the new Partnerships for African Vaccine Manufacturing, which is developing its road map to manufacture vaccines in Africa and engaging to identify opportunities for partnerships. We have

[LORD PARKINSON OF WHITLEY BAY]

provided technical support to Biovac, a vaccine company in South Africa, to develop an investment case, which helped secure financing to produce Covid vaccines there. We are giving similar support to the Institut Pasteur in Dakar, to companies in Senegal and to the Government of Morocco.

Noble Lords also focused on questions of distribution, and we recognise that distribution, particularly in hard-to-reach locations, is a critical challenge in many countries. Investment in delivery is vital in getting jabs into people's arms. Multilateral development banks are playing a central role in funding health systems to deliver vaccines, treatment and testing while maintaining other essential services, and the UK has led engagement with multilateral banks to strengthen co-ordination with COVAX and speed up the processes for applications and release of funds. The FCDO is also working with UNICEF and other humanitarian partners to ensure that planning and finance are in place to address the challenges of distribution in difficult environments.

It is extremely difficult for charities and healthcare workers safely to provide jabs to people living in conflict zones, so the UK used its presidency of the UN Security Council in February to secure unanimous support for a resolution calling for ceasefires in conflict zones to enable vaccine delivery. We continue to work with our international partners to monitor and support the implementation of that important resolution.

**Lord Purvis of Tweed (LD):** I am not sure whether the Minister will be coming back to the UK and COVAX. He has been asked very specific questions: to confirm whether in fact the UK drew down 539,000 doses in June and whether we have in fact negotiated options for a further 27 million doses. He was asked whether the Government will confirm that they will not draw down those 27 million doses.

**Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay (Con):** I cannot confirm that number, but I outlined that we drew down some of the Pfizer vaccine for the practical reasons that I gave—the difficulty of distributing and using those doses—with the agreement of those taking part. I fear I cannot give the commitment that the

noble Lord asked for today, but I will certainly take his questions and those from other noble Lords back to the Vaccine Taskforce and will ensure that all noble Lords who have taken part in the debate get the answer to that.

The goal to which we and our G7 partners have committed—to vaccinate the world in 2022—is a monumental one. Much has been achieved already but, as today's debate has powerfully underlined, we know that there is much more to do. The points noble Lords have raised today, particularly on manufacturing and distribution, are significant issues, which the UK is working with our partners to tackle.

International collaboration remains the key to ending this global pandemic, and we will continue to work with our international partners through the autumn, including at UNGA, the G7 and the G20, to support the G7 commitment to vaccinate the world in 2022. The international community must work together to get vaccines to those who need them around the world, and Her Majesty's Government are determined to do all we can to ensure that that happens.

6.34 pm

**Lord Boateng (Lab):** My Lords, it is late and we have had an outstanding debate. It has been a rich debate; there has been compassion, knowledge and passion, undergirded by broad experience—experience of campaigning around human rights, experience of activism around social justice, and ministerial experience—on all sides of this House.

I hope the Minister got a sense that the House spoke with one voice, and that one voice was clear. There is, as the Minister himself has said, much more to be done. This House expects more to be done, and we intend to make sure that it is. I can say only a huge thank you to all those who have contributed, but also to all those who have come and stayed—on all sides—to hear these arguments and to indicate their support for what has to be done.

*Motion agreed.*

*House adjourned at 6.36 pm.*