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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
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HOUSE OF LORDS

OFFICIAL REPORT

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Questions	
Deaths: Younger Age Cohorts	95
Leasehold Reform	98
Immigration Detention: Brook House Inquiry.....	102
Storms: Weather Resilience	106
Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill	
<i>First Reading</i>	109
Business of the House	
<i>Motion on Standing Orders</i>	109
Parliamentary Democracy and Standards in Public Life	
<i>Motion to Take Note</i>	110
Long-term Plan for Housing	
<i>Statement</i>	147
NHS Winter Update	
<i>Statement</i>	161
Climate Change: Impact on Developing Nations	
<i>Motion to Take Note</i>	172
Trade (Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership)	
Bill [HL]	
<i>Order of Consideration Motion</i>	210
Judicial Pensions (Remediable Service etc.) (Amendment) Regulations 2023	
<i>Motion to Approve</i>	210

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Abbreviation	Party/Group
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
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party

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House of Lords

Thursday 11 January 2024

11 am

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Chelmsford.

Deaths: Younger Age Cohorts

Question

11.06 am

Asked by **Lord Strathcarron**

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the level of (1) excess deaths not attributable to COVID-19, particularly coronary and vascular-related excess deaths, and (2) excess deaths in younger age cohorts, since 1 January 2020.

Lord Evans of Rainow (Con): My Lords, the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities has estimated excess deaths for non-specific Covid disease groups. Across the course of the pandemic to date, deaths involving cardiovascular diseases were 12% higher than expected. Deaths from all causes in people under 65 were 13% higher than expected. We are acting to reduce excess deaths, including those involving Covid-19, by rolling out vaccination programmes, tackling elective backlogs and through action on preventable conditions such as cardiovascular diseases.

Lord Strathcarron (Con): I thank my noble friend the Minister for his reply. Converting these statistics to reality means that 60,000 people died last year, mostly from heart-related conditions, at a much younger age than they would have been expected to before the pandemic and, in particular, our response to it. Could my noble friend suggest to the official Covid inquiry that, rather than concentrating on the tittle-tattle of WhatsApp messages, it considers whether lockdowns did more overall health harm than good—as evidence from around the world now suggests they did? Could it also investigate why, according to submissions already made to it, the UK has considerably higher excess mortality than other similar countries and in what way lockdowns and other interventions are linked to last year's 60,000 young deaths, with no doubt more to come this year?

Lord Evans of Rainow (Con): My Lords, I am most grateful for the noble Lord's excellent question. The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities estimates that, from the start of the pandemic to date, the total number of excess deaths in younger cohorts—that is, those under 65—is just under 38,000. Across all ages, this is likely due to a combination of factors, including flu prevalence, the impact of Covid-19 and the continued prevalence of conditions such as cardiovascular diseases. Vaccines are our first line of defence and millions have received their jab in our autumn campaign. As regards the Covid-19 inquiry, it is an independent public inquiry and will determine the issues it chooses to explore within the parameters of its terms of reference.

Lord Watts (Lab): Does the Minister agree that we should take no notice of keyboard warriors and we should take notice of scientists who have proven facts and used statistics to make sure we make the right decisions?

Lord Evans of Rainow (Con): I am grateful to the noble Lord for his question and I completely agree with him.

Lord Allan of Hallam (LD): My Lords, I think it is fair to claim that the pandemic was the most comprehensively documented public health event in human history. How much are the Government spending on teams of crack medical data scientists to analyse the wealth of pandemic-related data from the UK and comparable countries? This is outside the inquiry, which I think is about blame to a certain extent, and decision-making in politics. It is about the science. I suggest to the Minister that, if the Government are able to recover money from dodgy PPE suppliers, investing in this research would be a good use of those funds.

Lord Evans of Rainow (Con): The noble Lord raises a very important point. Of course, it is very important that we learn from the data. The NHS has very good data scientists, many of whom have helped me with today's Question Time. Regarding the noble Lord's other comment, he will not be surprised that I cannot comment on that. But your Lordships' House can rest assured that the Government and the NHS have learned from the Covid pandemic and that it is very important to learn from examining the data.

Lord Walney (CB): Are the Government considering excess deaths from the damage to mental health that many of the lockdown conditions imposed, particularly in young people deprived of their traditional education settings?

Lord Evans of Rainow (Con): The noble Lord raises a very important point about mental health. One thing the pandemic exposed is the increasing mental health challenge, not just in young people but across the board. The Government will be launching a major conditions strategy, which will include mental health issues. We expect to notify your Lordships' House on that in early spring 2024.

Baroness Manzoor (Con): My Lords, the Government have put a significant amount of money into the NHS, which I welcome. However, the lion's share of this money has gone into secondary and tertiary care, and, personally, I would have welcomed more money going into diagnostic services and preventative care. Therefore, can my noble friend the Minister say why waiting lists continue to rise, why the NHS is missing key targets and how the Government intend to address this?

Lord Evans of Rainow (Con): My noble friend raises an important point. The Government have recruited more doctors, nurses, community diagnostic centres and single surgical centres. We are treating record numbers of patients. We know that the waiting list will rise before it comes down, as demand returns to the NHS following the Covid-19 pandemic. This is a good

[LORD EVANS OF RAINOW]

thing, and we urge everyone who is worried about their health to come forward. We are taking action to recover elective services by providing the NHS with record levels of staffing and funding, and by supporting trusts to maximise capacity via a new network of community diagnostic centres, surgical hubs and an increased use of the independent sector. These new investments will make a significant dent in the waiting list. Unfortunately, strike action has led to further increases in waiting lists this year.

Lord McColl of Dulwich (Con): My Lords, the increased mortality is due to 40 million people who are obese, and it is up to each one of them, if they wish to avoid a premature death, to start eating less and doing with one fewer meal a day. What is more, this would save the NHS as well as saving the 40 million people, because the obesity epidemic is costing in excess of £50 billion a year.

Lord Evans of Rainow (Con): My noble friend makes a good point and is a doughty campaigner on such matters. We could all do with looking after ourselves, taking physical exercise and eating less.

Lord Kakkar (CB): My Lords, I draw noble Lords' attention to my registered interests. A substantial research effort that not only attended the Covid-19 pandemic but came subsequently to that has resulted, particularly in the field of the management of cardiovascular disease, in the identification of novel biomarkers and advanced imaging techniques that will allow for earlier and more accurate detection of disease and risk. Is the Minister content that the output of that research effort is appropriately mobilised by the NHS through the health innovation networks across the NHS in England?

Lord Evans of Rainow (Con): I pay tribute to the noble Lord's expertise in this matter. I cannot say that I am content, but I can say that the Government have improved the NHS health check, our national cardiovascular disease prevention programme, investing almost £17 million in an innovative new digital NHS health check to be rolled out from spring 2024, which is expected to deliver an additional 1 million checks in the first four years, and investing £10 million in a pilot to deliver up to 150,000 CVD checks in workplace settings. In the olden days, when we had manufacturing factories, the workforce had nurses who used to look after their health and well-being. Sadly, that is not the case these days and the Government are trying to replicate that in the workplace. But the noble Lord raised an important point, and I will take it back to the department so that I can be reassured about what he asked.

Baroness Merron (Lab): My Lords, the *Lancet* found that deaths from cardiovascular disease among those aged 50 to 64 are one-third higher than over the previous five years. To what extent do the Government assess that this comes down to the relevant average ambulance response times being consistently above 30 minutes since the beginning of 2022? For those who are suffering heart attacks or strokes, how will the fact

that the Government have now increased the target for ambulance response times help to ensure that lives are being saved?

Lord Evans of Rainow (Con): The noble Baroness is absolutely right to raise this point. I am not aware of the significance of her point on ambulance times, but the NHS makes every effort, through rigorous contingency planning, to minimise the disruption. The ambulance service does a good job, but clearly it has to do more. I will write to her on the specific point about ambulance times.

The Earl of Leicester (Con): My Lords, on 24 October, the DHSC published a statement in response to concerns expressed in the other place. It said:

“There is no evidence linking excess deaths to the COVID-19 vaccine”.

I suspect my noble friend the Minister will reconfirm that. But, to put the matter to rest, can he undertake to promptly publish an explanation of the data or research on which the department has relied in reaching that conclusion?

Lord Evans of Rainow (Con): My Lords, I cannot commit at the Dispatch Box to the exact point that the noble Earl made, but I will take it back to the department. What I can say is that Covid-19 vaccinations were very safe and saved millions of lives in this country.

Leasehold Reform

Question

11.16 am

Asked by **Lord Kennedy of Southwark**

To ask His Majesty's Government why they did not proceed with the planned abolition of leasehold for flats in the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Bill.

Lord Kennedy of Southwark (Lab Co-op): My Lords, in begging leave to ask the Question standing in my name on the Order Paper, I refer the House to my relevant interests, as set out in the register, and the fact that I am a leaseholder.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (Baroness Scott of Bybrook) (Con): My Lords, the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Bill contains a substantial package of measures to increase leaseholders' rights as consumers and home owners. We have prioritised the most significant measures that will help existing leaseholders now. We remain committed to continuing our leasehold and commonhold reforms, and the Bill is a major step forward. The best way to help leaseholders now is to make the existing leases fairer and more affordable. Our focus is on legislating where we can in order to make genuine improvements to leaseholders' daily lives straightaway.

Lord Kennedy of Southwark (Lab Co-op): My Lords, although many of the measures in the Bill are very welcome, we have been told for years that the Government would abolish, as they put it, this “feudal” leasehold housing tenure. The Bill had been promised in the

third Session of this Parliament. Here we are in the last Session of the Parliament, and the abolition of leasehold is completely left out of the Bill. It was then confirmed that the Government would introduce amendments later on, but only to abolish leasehold houses, with leasehold flats, which comprise 75% of leasehold, here to stay. That is not good enough. Will the Minister take the opportunity to apologise, given the Government's pledge to abolish the feudal leasehold housing tenure?

Baroness Scott of Bybrook (Con): My Lords, I will not apologise; the measures in the Bill will benefit owners of flats and houses alike. The majority of houses have always been provided as freehold, and there are few justifications for building new leasehold houses, so the Government will ban them, other than in exceptional circumstances. However, flats have shared fabric and infrastructure and therefore require some form of arrangement to facilitate management. This has been facilitated by a lease. None the less, the Government recognise the issues in the leasehold system and remain committed to reinvigorating the commonhold system so that developers and home owners have an alternative to leasehold ownership.

Lord Young of Cookham (Con): My Lords, further to the question from the noble Lord, Lord Kennedy, the Secretary of State made his views absolutely clear when he said:

"I don't believe leasehold is fair in any way. It is an outdated feudal system that needs to go".

But the Bill does not do that—it does not even mention commonholds. When I asked about this in the previous exchange, I was told by the noble Baroness, Lady Penn:

"When it comes to reforms to commonhold, we continue to consider the Law Commission's report in detail to find the best way forward".—[*Official Report*, 30/11/2023; col. 1180.]

The commission reported in 2020. When will we learn the Government's conclusion?

Baroness Scott of Bybrook (Con): I assure my noble friend that we remain committed to continuing our leasehold and commonhold reforms, and the Bill is a major step forward. The Government remain committed to a widespread take-up of commonhold for flats, and we have been reviewing the Law Commission's recommendations to reinvigorate commonhold as a workable alternative to leasehold, alongside working with the Commonhold Council to consider practical steps to prepare consumers and the markets.

Lord Shipley (LD): I congratulate the noble Lords, Lord Kennedy and Lord Young, on their persistence in this matter. We took a Question on this on 30 November, replied to by the noble Baroness, Lady Penn, in which she said that

"commonhold provides a potential way forward to move away from leasehold".—[*Official Report*, 30/10/2023; col. 1181.]

That we know. She also promised to explain in writing the complications of abolishing leasehold in flats, to which she referred. Can the Minister explain what the delay is in implementing commonhold and what the complications are perceived to be?

Baroness Scott of Bybrook (Con): My Lords, I can only reiterate what I have said. We are reviewing this, and it is a complex matter that has ramifications throughout housing law. We are looking at and reviewing the Law Commission's recommendations, and we are working with the Commonhold Council. It is an important matter, and we will come forward with further steps on it in due course. It is a complex issue, and I am more than happy to meet noble Lords as we move into the Bill. If any noble Lords would like to meet me and my team, I am very happy to do so.

The Lord Speaker (Lord McFall of Alcluith): My Lords, the noble Lord, Lord Campbell-Savours, is participating remotely.

Lord Campbell-Savours (Lab) [V]: Is not the simple, unvarnished truth that, on leasehold for flats, the Government are under intense pressure from powerful institutions, which have sunk millions into freehold title, to duck the big decision and delay? The Government's response is to leave it to the next Government to sort out. Is it not no more than an income stream for lazy investors, greedy developers and pension funds, all of which are squeezing the Government through political pressure to back off, while leaseholders pay the price? Labour will sort this out.

Baroness Scott of Bybrook (Con): That is not the case. If noble Lords have listened to some of the things that the Secretary of State has said in the last many months, they will know that we are committed to changing this. It is complex, and we will take our time and do it properly.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock (Lab Co-op): It is very good to see the Minister back at the Dispatch Box. She has read out very faithfully the Civil Service briefing. However, we know from the Post Office scandal that Ministers are ultimately responsible and should take responsibility. Her Secretary of State was born and brought up in Aberdeen—and in Scotland leasehold was abolished in 2000 by a Labour and Liberal Democrat Government. Will the Minister go back to Michael Gove and say, "For goodness' sake, if it can be done in Scotland, do it in England as well"?

Baroness Scott of Bybrook (Con): I assure the noble Lord that I shall go back and take that message to my Secretary of State, but I can also say that we are looking at the Scottish model.

Baroness Butler-Sloss (CB): My Lords, the Law Commission reported in 2020, and I understand the Minister to say that the Government are taking their time—but four years is far too long. It cannot be so complicated that there cannot be a decision.

Baroness Scott of Bybrook (Con): It is extremely complex; it affects many other legal issues to do with housing—with leaseholds and freeholds. We are looking at it as we move through the Bill. What we are putting forward is a very good first step, but it is not the end of the line. We will be working further.

Lord Kamall (Con): My Lords, I am sure that many noble Lords are grateful to my noble friend the Minister for saying that the Government are still committed to commonhold. She keeps saying how complicated the whole issue is. To ease the understanding of noble Lords and others, will she commit to listing some of the complications in a letter to me and other noble Lords, so that we too can understand how complicated it is and why commonhold provisions have not been brought forward at this stage?

Baroness Scott of Bybrook (Con): I shall certainly do that—I thought that my noble friend Lady Penn had agreed to that letter, but I shall look into it and sort out a letter. But I think that my offer of meeting noble Lords, as we move into the Bill, is the correct way forward.

Baroness Taylor of Stevenage (Lab): My Lords, millions of leaseholders across the country, such as those in Vista Tower in Stevenage, have suffered extreme financial distress, bankruptcies and inability to sell their properties, because the issue of fire remediation has fallen directly on them. When will those leaseholders have the Government's reassurance that this is going to be dealt with once and for all?

Baroness Scott of Bybrook (Con): We are dealing with it—it is a big piece of work, but we are dealing with it. It is happening all the time. What I have said to the noble Baroness and others many times at the Dispatch Box is that, if there are individuals who have complex issues and want to discuss them, we have a team of people in the department who will do that. I am happy to talk to her further about that.

Lord Cormack (Con): My Lords, is the delay due in any way to the fact that we have had a significant number of ministerial changes at Secretary of State level?

Baroness Scott of Bybrook (Con): I thank my noble friend for that question—but not as far as I am concerned, no.

Lord Watts (Lab): What is to stop the Government and Michael Gove getting on a train, going to Scotland, seeing the legislation there, bringing it back and adopting the same regulations? What would be the problem with that?

Baroness Scott of Bybrook (Con): I did not quite catch that—but with regard to going up to Scotland and bringing back that legislation, the law is very different in Scotland, and we have to look at it.

Lord Grocott (Lab): My Lords, I have listened carefully to this exchange, and we have had similar ones in the past, initiated by my noble friend. What is noticeable is that the Minister—not personally, of course; we welcome her back—but politically, during this exchange, has found herself friendless. There is virtually no one prepared to stand up and defend the Government's position, other than the Minister. At the very least, as this place can be a bit of a cauldron for making plain what opinion is, she should report

back what I have just relayed to her to her Secretary of State, and say, "Next time I come to the Dispatch Box, please give me some better arguments than you have given me so far".

Baroness Scott of Bybrook (Con): I am not going to give noble Lords any different answer. We are committed, and the Secretary of State has made it very clear that we are committed as a Government, to commonhold. We are working through it—but the best way in which to help leaseholders now is to make existing leases fairer and more affordable. That is exactly what is happening through the Bill, and I am pleased that the Government are at last doing it. I hope that the noble Lord opposite is also pleased that this Bill is in, because he has asked me many times when it is coming.

Immigration Detention: Brook House Inquiry *Question*

11.28 am

Asked by Lord German

To ask His Majesty's Government what consideration they have given to the findings of the Brook House Inquiry, published on 19 September 2023, in particular its recommendation for a 28-day time limit on immigration detention.

Lord German (LD): My Lords, I beg leave to ask the Question standing in my name on the Order Paper, and in doing so I draw attention to my interests as laid out in the register.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord Sharpe of Epsom) (Con): My Lords, the Government are carefully considering the findings of the Brook House inquiry, set out in its detailed report, in relation to the management of the immigration detention estate and the welfare of detained individuals. There are no plans to introduce a time limit on immigration detention.

Lord German (LD): My Lords, the inquiry exposed the dehumanising abuse of vulnerable people held in immigration detention. Unfortunately, the report's author states that these issues remain in place today. We understand that a senior civil servant has been tasked to prepare the Government's response, to be published "in due course". I wonder whether "in due course" will have ended nine months from now. Perhaps the Minister could tell us. Secondly, the report's recommendation on a time limit was meant to be alongside the Home Office guidance on imminent times of removal. Will the Home Office seriously consider that recommendation, putting it alongside the current guidance, so that people are not detained for periods for which they are not intended?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): My Lords, the Government's view is that a time limit on immigration detention would significantly impair our ability to remove those who have breached our immigration laws and refused to leave the UK voluntarily. It is

likely to encourage and reward abuse, allowing those who wish to guarantee their release to frustrate the removal process until the time limit is reached. It would encourage late and opportunistic claims to be made simply to push a person over the time limit, regardless of the circumstances of their case. That would undermine our ability to maintain effective immigration control and would potentially place the public at higher risk, in particular through the release of foreign national offenders into the community.

Baroness Chakrabarti (Lab): My Lords, the Minister talks about abuse, but the abuse found in the Brook House inquiry report was by G4S staff, with terrible abuse perpetrated against some of the most vulnerable people. We believe in custody time limits in this society. Even suspected terrorists can be held for no more than 14 days. Why should these desperate people be held without limit of time?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): My Lords, the noble Baroness will be aware that the supplier has changed; as of 2020, Serco now looks after this particular situation. I would also say that the vast majority of people are in fact detained for less than 28 days: 65% are detained for 28 days or less and 23% are detained for seven days or less.

Baroness Meacher (CB): My Lords, Kate Eves's report included a number of recommendations requiring immediate and urgent implementation, because they related to serious issues such as the use of force and use of segregation. Can the Minister tell the House what the Government have now done in response to those particular recommendations? If nothing has been done, can the Minister explain why not?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): My Lords, a lot of the work had already been done, because there was a report commissioned in 2016 by Stephen Shaw, who was then the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman. The Government acted in response to that report, before the documentary that prompted the Brook House report. The Home Office has implemented steps across the removal estate to enhance assurance and oversight of service provision. We have strengthened our capacity to provide assurance and oversight of service provision both at the Gatwick IRC and in the wider removal estate. That includes action to refresh and reinforce whistleblowing arrangements, improve information flows and analysis of complaints, address incidents and use of force and enhance supplier and Home Office engagement with detained individuals.

Lord Bellingham (Con): My Lords, I have studied the first part of the report and looked at the rest of it, and one recurring theme in that report is the gross incompetence of G4S. A number of proposals have been put forward for improvement under the new manager, Serco. Can the Minister say something about those improvements that will be made and whether he has confidence in Serco? Another recurring theme in the report is the level of drug abuse, which really seems to be quite appalling in an organisation and institution such as this. Can the Minister also say something about what will be done to solve that particular problem?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): My Lords, the new contract with Serco to run the Gatwick IRC commenced in May 2020 and runs for an eight-year period. The contract provides increased staffing levels, improved use of modern technology and enhanced investment in resident activity and welfare services. We have strengthened our capacity to provide assurance and oversight of service provision at Gatwick and the rest of the removal estate, including action, as I have just said, to refresh and reinforce whistleblowing arrangements, improve information flows and analysis of complaints and address incidents and use of force. As regards the drugs point, the Government will be responding to the report in due course.

Lord Coaker (Lab): My Lords, in his original Answer, the Minister said that the Government are carefully considering the Brook House inquiry report and will respond in due course. Why has the Minister therefore told us that they have already come to the conclusion that they will ignore what the Brook House inquiry said, namely that there should be a 28-day limit on immigration detention? As my noble friend Lady Chakrabarti pointed out, that means that so-called immigration offenders are treated worse than terrorists.

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): That is not what I said; I said that the Government are considering the report. The cross-government working group, chaired by the director of detention services at the Home Office, is considering the report and all the recommendations, including those with wider applicability across the detention estate. As regards the 28 days, I go back to what I said earlier: in particular, we think that this would impair our ability to remove those who have breached immigration laws and refused to leave the UK voluntarily. That would particularly place the community at risk, especially if foreign national offenders were released into the community. As I say, though, the vast majority are released within 28 days anyway.

The Lord Bishop of Chelmsford: My Lords, the inquiry found that the inappropriate use of restraint and force on detained persons suffering from mental illness was common at Brook House, with healthcare staff unaware of their responsibilities to monitor the welfare of detained persons during use of restraint. Regardless of this information, the Illegal Migration Act allows for the use of force against even children across the detention estate. What steps will be taken to ensure that the use of force is continually monitored and recorded for all detainees, but particularly vulnerable adults and children, to ensure that what occurred at Brook House is never allowed to happen again?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): I agree with the right reverend Prelate that it should not be allowed to happen again. As I say, the Government are obviously considering all the recommendations, and that will clearly be part of the considerations. I am confident that there is no way that such a situation would be allowed to happen again.

Baroness Brinton (LD): My Lords, recommendation 19 of the Brook House report is on the attitude and behaviour of healthcare staff. The use of force on one person who had a serious heart condition lasted for

[BARONESS BRINTON]

about 18 minutes, was positively harmful and put him at further risk. The recommendation is for immediate guidance for healthcare staff and mandatory training. Can the Minister tell us if that has already been brought into practice?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): I agree with the noble Baroness that that was totally unacceptable, and the inquiry was obviously right to highlight it a something that needs urgent attention. As regards whether advice has been issued, I will have to come back to the noble Baroness, but I am pretty sure that those recommendations are being implemented.

Lord Murray of Blidworth (Con): My Lords, the noble Baroness, Lady Chakrabarti, alluded to the fact that, in the case of those on bail, their detention is regulated by custody time limits. Will my noble friend the Minister agree that, in the case of immigration detention, it should always be regulated by the Hardial Singh principles, enunciated by the noble and learned Lord, Lord Woolf, and as reflected by the recent and now in force provisions of the Illegal Migration Act?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): I thank my noble friend for that; I agree with him. I would also point out that Stephen Shaw, as I mentioned earlier, wrote a report, which he updated in 2018, on welfare in immigration detention. He said the following:

“The current Government position is to oppose a time limit (whether of 28 days or any other period), but Parliament may at some point take a different view ... at present, the case for a time limit has been articulated more as a slogan than as a fully developed policy proposal”.

I am afraid that I agree with that.

Lord Kerr of Kinlochard (CB): My Lords—

Baroness Lister of Burtersett (Lab): My Lords—

Baroness Williams of Trafford (Con): My Lords, it is the turn of the Cross Benches.

Lord Kerr of Kinlochard (CB): Will the noble Lord tell the House how many asylum seekers are now held in detention, in limbo, with their cases unheard by us—or never to be heard by us? Is he at all ashamed that Médecins Sans Frontières is having to look after them?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): I will stick to the question at hand, and will happily provide some statistics on the number of people in immigration detention as of 30 September last year. That number was 1,841, including those detained solely under immigration powers in prisons. That was 11% lower than at the end of September 2022, when there were 2,077 people in detention. I think that those numbers are encouraging and heading in the right direction.

Baroness Lister of Burtersett (Lab): My Lords, another of the inquiry’s findings was that vulnerable people in detention are not being afforded the appropriate protections that the safeguards recommended by Stephen Shaw are designed to provide, because of their

dysfunctional operation. The latest report of the independent monitoring boards and new clinical evidence from Medical Justice—a core participant in the inquiry—show that the safeguards are still failing, including not identifying people at risk of self-harm or suicide, with serious and sometimes tragic consequences for mental and physical health. What steps are the Government therefore taking, as a matter of urgency, to ensure a more consistent and robust application of the safeguards, as called for in the inquiry report?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): As I have said, the detailed recommendations remain under review, but a lot of these issues were dealt with in response to Stephen Shaw’s report of 2016, which was then updated in 2018.

Storms: Weather Resilience Question

11.39 am

Asked by *Baroness McIntosh of Pickering*

To ask His Majesty’s Government what assessment they have made of the impact on infrastructure, homes and farmland of the recent storms, and what steps they intend to take to increase resilience to future weather events.

Baroness McIntosh of Pickering (Con): I beg leave to ask the Question standing in my name on the Order Paper and refer to my interest as vice-president of the Association of Drainage Authorities.

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Benyon) (Con): My Lords, I refer to my interests as set out in the register. I know the whole House will extend our sympathies to those impacted by Storm Henk. To date, 2,185 properties have flooded, and over 81,000 properties have been protected due to the Government’s investment in flood defences. The Government’s 2020 policy statement sets out five ambitious policies and multiple actions to improve future resilience to flooding. Between 2021 and 2027, the Government will have doubled investment in flood and coastal erosion schemes across England to a record £5.2 billion.

Baroness McIntosh of Pickering (Con): My Lords, does my noble friend agree that we should be doing more between floods? I pay tribute to the Environment Agency and drainage boards for the important work they do in regularly maintaining existing flood defences and dredging watercourses. Will he seek to end the arbitrary division of funding between capital expenditure and maintenance funding that is hampering this work, as advocated in the December report from the National Audit Office? Further, will he confirm that the farming recovery grants will reward farmers for loss of crops and for the fact that their land is effectively being used not for food production but to defend downstream communities from future floods?

Lord Benyon (Con): I entirely join my noble friend in saying what fantastic work the Environment Agency has done in reaction to these floods, along with the

ongoing work it does in between to make sure that we are more resilient to them. Its annual maintenance programme activities are prioritised and timetabled using information from inspections, maintenance standards, levels of flood risk and legal and statutory obligations. Local teams work with partners, including drainage boards, on maintenance and dredging programmes. In 2022-23, the agency spent over £200 million on maintaining flood risk assets. In 2021, we announced an additional £22 million per year from 2022-25 for the maintenance of flood defences, and details can be found in our *Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Report*.

My noble friend also talked about farming. The flood recovery fund will pay for the uninsured costs of preparing arable land for planting crops or reseeded grass where it has been damaged, and our agricultural transition plan has a range of measures which will support farmers in these matters.

Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb (GP): My Lords, in the interest of helping this Government, who appear to have run out of good ideas on almost every topic, what about banning new building on flood plains?

Lord Benyon (Con): I really want to know what the noble Baroness means by that. Does she mean that there should be no more houses built in York, Leeds, London or Exeter? It is not what you build; it is how you build and how resilient the buildings are to flooding. I entirely accept and agree with her that some appalling decisions were taken over the last half century, and houses have flooded because they should never have been built there. But we cannot ban the building of properties; we just have to make them resilient to flooding.

Lord Deben (Con): I remind my noble friend that when his department produced its five-year plan, in the usual range of these, the Climate Change Committee said that it was not adequate. In the light of these floods, will he look at that plan to see whether some changes should take place? The Government have done a great deal, but clearly, this will get worse and we need to look at it again.

Lord Benyon (Con): My noble friend is right that these problems are going to get worse: what we are suffering at the moment is almost certainly the impact of an El Niño effect, which has meant a warmer, wetter start to our winter. This will, we hope, be followed by a dryer but perhaps colder end to it, and we can look to the future. The Government are absolutely looking to the future, and he was right in his leadership of the Climate Change Committee to make sure that all departments are being resilient to the effects of climate change. I will just say that we have achieved much more than some of our closest neighbours. We are going to reduce greenhouse gases by 65% by 2030; the European Union has a target of 55%. We are doing a lot to address this, both globally and domestically.

Baroness Hayman of Ullock (Lab): My Lords, I want to pick up on an issue arising from yesterday's Statement. In May last year, the EFRA Committee published a report on rural mental health, which found that extreme

weather events and animal health crises left farmers, workers and vets dealing with mental health trauma with little support. It called on the Government to provide dedicated emergency funding to enable local areas to quickly access more resources to respond to rural communities' mental health needs, both during and, crucially, after crisis events. Can the noble Lord explain why the Government disagree and have refused to allocate this funding?

Lord Benyon (Con): If the noble Baroness looks at our rural proofing annual report, she will see a firm commitment in it to issues relating to mental health in rural areas. She is absolutely right that events such as this trigger severe problems for people whose homes are flooded, or who lose their business or a large part of it, and we are seeing that in the farming community. The Government are providing a range of mental health support measures for people in these communities, and I applaud the work the NFU and others are doing, with the Government, to make sure that we are accessing those in need and providing them with the support they require.

Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville (LD): My Lords, the NFU tells me that a review of the flood defence grant in aid funding is vital. The weighting towards people and property means that rural areas are unable to compete for funding, as they will never score highly enough to receive any grant. Are the Government considering altering the formula so that farmers get a fair share of this money?

Lord Benyon (Con): That is a very good question. The first thing we have done is to introduce partnership funding. At the time, the Opposition referred to it as a flood tax, but it has meant that a whole load of schemes that would never have got the go-ahead, because they did not have the value for money of schemes which defended more homes, did go ahead and have therefore been built. Approximately 40% of schemes and 45% of investment better protects properties in rural communities; and since 2015 we have protected over 700,000 acres of agricultural land, along with thousands of businesses and communities, through schemes.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall (Lab): My Lords, the Minister and others have naturally focused on the macro schemes that are designed to reduce the major impacts of flooding, but does he agree that micro-level interventions can have a significant impact, such as not using nonporous hard surfaces to concrete over front gardens to create hardstanding for motor vehicles? What advice are the Government giving on the appropriate use of porous materials when people want to create hardstanding at their homes?

Lord Benyon (Con): My Lords, the Government are giving money for property-level flood resilience, and that would entirely fall within this. Software is also now available. For example, I looked some years ago at Bristol, where they had created millions of data points around the city at which they could apply different weather events and see how just a kerb being raised at a certain point, or a wall being extended, can

[LORD BENYON]

protect a number of properties from flooding. So the noble Baroness is absolutely right: we need to look at the micro as well as the macro effect.

Lord Bellingham (Con): My Lords, I declare my interests as listed in the register. The Minister mentioned damage to farmland. Obviously, most arable farmers will have the chance to re-drill their crops in the spring and many will benefit from the farming recovery grant. However, in the Fens, covering Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire and Norfolk, a number of horticultural producers have suffered substantial damage to existing crops. They may well not be covered, so what advice can he give them?

Lord Benyon (Con): My noble friend is right: these floods will undoubtedly affect our food security. Lincolnshire and the Fens is a very important area. Internal drainage boards and managing water levels are an important part of this. I cannot say that the level of rain we experienced was unprecedented, and it certainly was not unexpected. We are going to have more of these events, and we have to be better at managing them.

Lord Berkeley (Lab): My Lords, the Somerset Levels have flooded every winter for the last 20 or 30 years, which often stops the railway and roads. I am told it is because the Environment Agency has prevented proper dredging of the rivers, which would allow the rainwater to run away into the sea. Is this not clearly easy to do, and a quick fix that would stop this happening every year?

Lord Benyon (Con): People are very often free with advice. I went down to Somerset when there were floods there and somebody said to me, “All you have to do is dredge this river, cut this dyke through, and the water will flow.” I pointed out to him that that might clear the water from his farm, but it would go into people’s houses in Bridgwater. He said to me, “You are confusing me with someone who is concerned about the people who live in Bridgwater.” These things are never simple, and the noble Lord may be right.

Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill

First Reading

11.50 am

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

Business of the House *Motion on Standing Orders*

11.50 am

Moved by Lord True

That Standing Order 44 (*No two stages of a Bill to be taken on one day*) be dispensed with on Tuesday 16 January to enable the Post Office (Horizon System) Compensation Bill to be taken through its remaining stages that day.

Motion agreed.

Parliamentary Democracy and Standards in Public Life

Motion to Take Note

11.51 am

Moved by Baroness Featherstone

That this House takes note of the current standing of parliamentary democracy and standards in public life.

Baroness Featherstone (LD): My Lords, I have no doubt that this noble House knows right from wrong, believes in decency, wisdom, truth and honesty, and values our freedoms and way of life and the vital part that parliamentary democracy and standards in public life play. Inevitably, much criticism in this debate will be levelled at the current Government, but this is about principles that are for all time and all Governments and opposition parties—all of us in politics. We all need to do better.

In recent years, there has been an erosion of many of the cornerstones of British political life. Recent Prime Ministers and Cabinets have shown a disregard towards parliamentary process; a preference for journalists and broadcasters who support the Government’s position; an apathy for the rule of law; an overwhelming transfer of law from primary to secondary legislation; a disdain for domestic and international courts; a reduction within freedom of protest; and an undue influence on the operational independence of the police services, and indeed the electoral process itself. At the same time, we have witnessed a deterioration in standards of public life, particularly highlighted in the Covid inquiry, where we are seeing how poor standards at the heart of Government led to unnecessary amounts of human suffering at a time when the public needed those standards more than ever. Instead, the Government created a shoddy PPE procurement process, which allowed profiteers to benefit at a time of crisis.

I raised the issue of political preference in media coverage in my response to the gracious Speech. The guidelines for government communication services say that dealing with journalists

“should be objective and explanatory, not biased or polemical”, and

“should not be—and not liable to being misrepresented as—party political”.

In 2019, a Freedom House report entitled *Media Freedom: A Downward Spiral* stated:

“The fundamental right to seek and disseminate information through an independent press is under attack, and part of the assault has come from an unexpected source. Elected leaders in many democracies, who should be press freedom’s staunchest defenders, have made explicit attempts to silence critical media voices and strengthen outlets that serve up favorable coverage”.

This is sadly now true of us.

When the former Home Secretary Suella Braverman flew to Rwanda, the *Guardian*, the *Mirror*, the *i* and the *Independent* were all excluded, and initially also the BBC. That happened less than a year after journalists from the *Guardian*, the *Financial Times* and the *Mirror* were blocked from joining the then Home Secretary Priti Patel’s trip to Rwanda to sign the original asylum deal. In 2020, political journalists, including the BBC’s

Laura Kuenssberg and ITV's Robert Peston, staged a walkout after Downing Street communication staff attempted to brief some journalists but not others. Those excluded by former *Mirror* and *Sun* journalist Lee Cain—and that revolving door itself is incestuous—included journalists from PA, the *Mirror*, the *i*, HuffPost UK, PoliticsHome and the *Independent*.

That got me thinking about the state of us, and not in a good way. It is clearly not just me. This debate is not the first on the subject, both here and in the other place. Many voices are now speaking out about the need for change, and many of us who went into politics are sad at what has happened to it. This is a *cri de coeur* from me and my colleagues, and, I would hope and expect, from many across this Chamber.

On the rule of law and independence of the judiciary, the extraordinarily wise and now sadly late Lord Judge believed that we were ceding too much power to the Executive, power that should and must be retained by Parliament. In a lecture he gave, he said that

“what Parliamentary sovereignty never has been is executive sovereignty, or ministerial or government sovereignty. Indeed Parliamentary sovereignty is the antithesis of executive sovereignty. The two concepts are mutually contradictory. The democratic process is not meant to give, and our constitutional arrangements were not intended to provide us with executive sovereignty. No Prime Minister is a monarch, or president, not even the head of state ... At the heart of the development of our constitutional arrangements, Parliament is there to protect us from authoritarianism, from despotism, from an over mighty monarch, but also from an over mighty executive ... in the last session of Parliament just over one hundred Henry VIII clauses had been enacted ... proliferation of clauses like these will have the inevitable consequence of yet further damaging the sovereignty of Parliament, and increasing yet further the authority of the executive over the legislature ... Henry VIII clauses should be confined to the dustbin of history”.

I could not agree more.

Only recently we have seen machinations to subvert the Supreme Court holding unanimously that the Government's Rwanda scheme was unlawful, by bringing forward legislation declaring Rwanda a safe country. This move is scarily reminiscent of George Orwell's *1984*, when party member O'Brien tests Winston Smith's allegiance to party truth, insisting that Winston sees five fingers when he holds up only four—that is, the truth is what I say it is. We have seen contempt for international courts, such as the ECHR, which is the embodiment of high ideals of internationalist values and constants that remain today hugely important in guaranteeing peoples' fundamental human rights in law. It came as a surprise to some in government that it was nothing to do with the European Union.

The Government have acted to strengthen their power over the judiciary in the Judicial Review and Courts Act by reducing the scope of judicial review. The Government have severely restricted legal aid, making access to justice uneven and unfair. Members of the legal profession are exhausted and court backlogs deny justice. The breaking of treaties such as the Northern Ireland protocol was once unthinkable. Mrs May spoke for many when she asked

“how can the Government reassure future international partners that the UK can be trusted to abide by the legal obligations in the agreements it signs?”—[*Official Report*, Commons, 8/9/20; col. 499.]

This is not to mention the illegal proroguing of Parliament.

The phrase “free and fair election” is dashed off so easily, but it is the heart and soul of our democracy. The Government compromised that in the Elections Act 2022, by giving themselves the right to intervene and to direct or guide the Electoral Commission's strategy and priorities. Those changes went through—of course—via a statutory instrument, the excess use of which is the preferred tool of a Government who will not be thwarted. The ability to thwart a Government acting in an overweening and injudicial way is the absolute strength of our democracy.

As to the operational independence of the police, it is a fundamental principle of British policing that sits alongside the important principle of policing by consent. The ex-Home Secretary did not approve of the Metropolitan Police's handling of pro-Palestinian protests and went into print to criticise the police force for applying “double standards” and being “more sympathetic to the left”. To attack the police publicly is just not acceptable, let alone to accuse them of political bias. She is entitled to that view but, regardless of whether she was right or wrong, she was not entitled to say so publicly.

On the public right to protest, it has always been recognised that the right of people to criticise Governments, laws and social conditions is fundamental to democracy. Via regulation yet again we have a new definition of what “serious disruption” means: a new and astonishing threshold at which police can restrict protest for any obstruction which causes more than minor hindrance to day-to-day activities, meaning that police restrictions can effectively ban a protest. If those restrictions are breached, we are now in criminal offence territory. Exactly what does the right to protest mean when the enactment of that right is criminalised?

Britain is now a country where only 9% of people say they generally trust political leaders—that is the lowest since records began. How we do our politics really matters, both inside Parliament and in the country. Standards in public life, the Nolan principles, are not going well. Selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership are a crucial part of our responsibility and are literally the antithesis of Boris Johnson, our former Prime Minister. Before I get to the deleterious effect of his behaviour, I point out that the *Financial Times* published an article on 16 December about the loss of trust in Parliament. More than one in 20 MPs has been suspended from the House of Commons, left Parliament altogether or been stripped of their party whip in the wake of misconduct allegations—just since the last general election. I am sure your Lordships remember the expenses scandal. We have still not recovered from that low base. That rocked public faith in all of us. Whether innocent or guilty, we were all guilty. On the doorstep, we were all scum.

Our constitutional protections have been put under huge strain because of major breaches of the standards in public office, with concerns about corruption and conflict of interest at the most senior levels. Boris Johnson's changes to the Ministerial Code were detrimental to standards in public life. His lying, obfuscation and belief that the rules did not apply to him were shameful. He blocked his independent ethics

[BARONESS FEATHERSTONE]

adviser from being able to initiate his own investigations, and he rewrote the foreword to the Ministerial Code, removing all references to honesty, integrity, transparency and accountability.

In recent days, thanks to the Covid inquiry, we have seen the scale of the PPE scandal. Yes, it was an emergency, and yes, abnormal procedures were needed to facilitate that urgency, but what is a VIP lane? I would have hoped that a VIP lane was a lane that gave priority to those who came forward to help because they had the know-how, not the know-who.

As for the charade in the No. 10 garden, and the absurdity of the Barnard Castle fairy tale, what contempt for the truth and the people of this country. We all saw Allegra Stratton, then the Prime Minister's press secretary, laughing and joking during a mock televised press briefing about a Downing Street Christmas party. Anyone who saw that clip knew in an instant what was really going on in No. 10.

This is decline and fall. We have not even recovered as a country from the way Brexit was conducted. It harmed us as a nation. Truth was a victim, and people felt empowered not only to lie but to hate the other side. Political protagonists peddled dislike, disdain, denigration of other, and fear. We created an unhappy and angry nation. We are bombarded with hate. Hate sells; hate works; hate garners votes; hate strikes emotion in us. There is hatred of other—foreigners, immigrants, scroungers, Muslims, Jews, the rich, the lazy, the lucky: we hate them all. Years of the drip-drip poison of “enemies of the people” and negative political campaigning has taken its toll on all of us.

Politicians have become reductionist in order to find simplistic messages that focus groups tell us will win votes. To win, lies do not matter any more. Truth is fake news. Facts—who cares? Experts with real knowledge are disparaged. To win, the common good comes way down the list, after party good, and public discourse is driven now by heat, not light, with the media feeding a frenzy of the negative and the nasty, amplified by the Twittersphere but led by us politicians.

Fifteen minutes was inadequate—although I understand I am running ahead of my schedule—because I have not even touched on reform of our own House, the use of hate speech by politicians in the media, nor the part that the “winner takes all” nature of our Commons elections plays in our behaviour. Yet I am absolutely sure that noble Lords across this House will fill in any gaps I may have left.

There has not even been time to lay out a prospectus for us moving to happier territory, but we have an opportunity—with an election year ahead—to demonstrate change for the better. I beg to move.

12.05 pm

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean (Con): My Lords, I know that the noble Baroness, Lady Featherstone, told the Liberal Democrat conference in 2011 that men made bad decisions, but I have to say that even by that standard, that speech was a dreadful calumny of the performance of Parliament as a whole. I am sorry that she chose to make a highly tendentious and political attack in what should be a serious debate. She complains

she has only 15 minutes; I have only three minutes. That says everything about the accountability which Parliament has been able to bring to the Executive. For all her talk of parliamentary sovereignty, this is the party which actually wants to set up bodies which will hold Parliament to account and create a situation where folk in public life are accountable to unelected regulators for compliance with detailed rules—which would be utterly disastrous.

We need to restore the sovereignty and reputation of Parliament, but we certainly will not do it with this kind of speech coming from the noble Baroness. I give her a piece of advice. She talks about how people ought to be able to make protests, but let us look at the conduct of her leader on the Post Office matter. He would not even see the postmasters and, when he had finished being in charge of that, went off to work at a considerable salary for the lawyers responsible for advising the Post Office. If she wants to have a debate where she throws mud, she should start with her own backyard.

The noble Baroness is of course right that Parliament's ability to hold the Executive to account has declined, and she is right that we need to look at that. Looking at the recent dreadful news we have had on the Post Office, what lessons are to be learned? The lesson to be learned—no doubt, as I said the other day, in defence of her leader—is that we have created a whole load of quangos and agencies or nationalised organisations which are not directly accountable to Ministers and run on an arm's-length basis. That is the point about the Post Office: it is a nationalised body. We have the situation where Ministers have to answer for bodies over which they have no executive control. That is one of the lessons that needs to come out of this.

The noble Baroness is right about Henry VIII clauses, and she is right about accountability. There is still the scandal in this House of a third of our Ministers being unpaid, because so many Ministers have been appointed in the other place. That is to do not just with pay in this House but pay in the other place. If we are to address these problems, we need to do so in a non-partisan matter.

I have only three minutes, so I am over my time, but there is a very splendid pamphlet produced by Policy Exchange called *Upholding Standards; Unsettling Conventions* which sets out a coherent and sensible approach to this issue, not making party-political points for election purposes and then complaining about it. If the noble Baroness is worried about democratic accountability, why on earth have we got so many Liberal Democrats on these Benches when their representation in the House of Commons is derisory?

12.09 pm

Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe (Lab): My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Featherstone, for prompting this debate.

In October it will be 30 years since the Committee on Standards in Public Life was established. I sat on the original committee in 1994—I think I was its youngest member—and our first report in May 1995 set out the seven Nolan principles of public life, which were enumerated by the noble Baroness. Their purpose

was to ensure the highest standards of propriety in public life. As a code of conduct, they are still a lodestar for all those who serve the public in any way.

Yet, 30 years on, the need for scrutiny seems ever greater. I want to believe that having the Nolan principles has made people more aware and thus more likely to call out poor standards. I am reluctant to accept that malpractice, chancing your arm or even headline-hitting scandals, which we have unfortunately had close to home in this House, are inevitable. However, while it would be naive not to acknowledge the tensions that exist between power and doing the right thing, the last few years have exposed too many instances where those in political life have fallen short of the Nolan principles. The litany includes lying, bullying, poor leadership, the breaching of lockdown rules, dubious lobbying practices, the Owen Paterson issue, public procurement scandals and partygate. While these fall foul of just about every one of the seven principles, what links them all is a lack of integrity in recent leadership.

Frankly, I am not surprised by the current dismal standing of our parliamentary democracy. A recent World Values Survey from the Policy Institute at King's College London shows that the percentage of the British public who had confidence in Parliament has halved since 1990, from 46% that year to 23% in 2022. Among young people—millennials and Generation X—the percentages are even lower.

In 2021, the CSPL reported on

“the importance of high ethical standards, the continuing relevance of the”

Nolan principles,

“and the effectiveness of the rules, regulators, policies and processes related to upholding standards”.

It made 34 recommendations for reform, including a call for more power to be given to the independent adviser on ministerial standards. This recommendation was rejected. Can the Minister give us any assurance that the Government will keep the CSPL's remaining recommendations under review, particularly that the independent adviser should have the authority to determine breaches of the Ministerial Code?

In July last year, the Opposition in the other place outlined their plans for a new independent ethics and integrity commission. I hope that this remains a high priority for any future change in government. Integrity is the overriding principle without which none of the others can be sustained. Redressing the lack of integrity in recent leadership is vital, not just for our parliamentary democracy but for our international reputation. We must not allow the damage done in the last few years to lead to any further weakening of trust in public institutions and those who work in them.

12.13 pm

Lord Beith (LD): My Lords, my noble friend made a superb speech, which was not partisan and covered ground that is common to all parties.

I will pick up first on her point about law-making by statutory instrument—by powers given to Ministers—with only very limited parliamentary scrutiny. On the only occasion during my time here when this House used that power effectively, the Government went ballistic and wheeled in the noble Lord, Lord Strathclyde,

to tell us that we should all be abolished or in some way have our powers reduced. A power which is never used is not a power. In this case, whenever these powers are introduced in Bills, they come with explanations that the matter has to be considered by, and requires a resolution of, both Houses of Parliament. If we never deny that resolution, we do not exercise the power. It is a great weakness in our system, which is more important now that the Commons devotes so little time to the proper study of legislation and sits for fewer hours than we do.

My other point is the system of appointment to this House. We have had 17 new Conservative Peers—the Liz Truss list, the Boris Johnson list and then all those who were brought into this House to serve as Ministers, perhaps for less than a year, and are Peers for life as a result. It is a completely distorted system and we need to change it to an orderly one. The Burns committee produced a system which could be used, in the absence of any more fundamental reform of the House of Lords, to give some coherence and fairness to that system of appointment. It was widely accepted right across the House, but the Government have not acted on it. Theresa May did when she was in office but subsequent Prime Ministers have not done so, and they ought to. The continuing absurdity of the nomination system brings the House into disrepute.

Across the free world of parliamentary democracies there is a very real threat. We are seeing it in France, Germany and the United States, where ex-President Trump says he wants to be a dictator for one day so that he can entirely reverse US policy on climate change. This is dangerous territory. We have got to make the parliamentary democracy system deliver and get it to the point where people find that it properly deals with their concerns. We should not treat attempts to achieve that as partisan; they are very necessary to our democracy.

12.15 pm

Baroness D'Souza (CB): My Lords, the democratic system is pretty robust and parliamentary democracy has survived, albeit in a less authoritative form. Democracy, however, being a process rather than a state, is fragile and needs constant vigilance. The media is awash with reports on the demise of democracy the world over, but especially parliamentary democracy in the UK. Lord Sumption has referred to “a developing totalitarian tendency”. That there are too many unfortunate examples of these tendencies has allowed an attitude of regretful acceptance of the increasing power of the Executive.

Recent legislation has included clauses that either unduly restrict current individual freedoms, infringe obligations set under international treaties or increase the power of the Government to alter clauses at will without proper parliamentary scrutiny. These actions add up to a public perception of a lack of transparency and good faith on the part of the Government and a consequent fall in public confidence in, and respect for, the integrity and credibility of the UK's political institutions.

Parliament is one of the key institutions of democracy in the UK, along with regular elections, the independent law courts and a free press. The Westminster model is

[BARONESS D'SOUZA]

renowned throughout the world; it is one of our most potent symbols of fairness and a key instrument of soft power. It allows the UK to punch well above its weight. It is worth preserving. As the historian David Runciman has said, the end of democracy will not be signalled by tanks on the lawn but by the slow, almost imperceptible erosion of our democratic institutions. No matter how much these values are reiterated, recent history has shown that in each House profoundly undemocratic legislative clauses have been passed.

There may be those in this House today who disagree that there is any real threat to our ancient institutions. However, are these institutions in fact able to do the job for which they exist? They may well continue to function, but are they delivering? Are we noticing that institutional arrangements may be breaking down?

The role of Parliament has come under almost unprecedented scrutiny and criticism in recent months, and the calls for a rebalancing of power between the legislature and the Executive are loud. Perhaps we should resist pressures to be reticent as non-elected parliamentarians and insist on curbing executive power and the return of our parliamentary institutions to full democratic strength. That seems to be the fundamental task of both Houses of Parliament.

12.18 pm

Baroness Stowell of Beeston (Con): My Lords, I too think the Post Office scandal is instructive and I will use it to make my point, which is different to my noble friend's.

The excellent ITV drama illustrates powerfully what many voters already think about those of us in positions of authority—that too often we do not listen to or take seriously what voters are telling us if what they say or want does not correspond with what we have decided is right and want to do. The travesty was sub-postmasters, the kind of people who represent the epitome of good character in communities, having their concerns dismissed time and again in favour of sophisticated arguments from Fujitsu, Post Office executives, civil servants and lawyers.

What this saga shows is how we—the powerful decision-making class—lose sight of what matters when dealing with complex challenges. While the individuals responsible for the Post Office scandal must be held to account and face the consequences of their failure, we must all understand that this event goes wider than an example of injustice—even though it is the worst of its kind. What it represents is the division between insiders and outsiders that led to Brexit and other democratic shocks that followed in 2017 and 2019.

Too often, we complain that people call for simple solutions to complex problems because “they don't understand”. People do not expect simple solutions to complex problems, but they do expect people such as us to be motivated by the kinds of simple values that any decent, upstanding citizen instinctively shares. We evidence that by how we do our job, which must include listening and understanding their experience of the problem that only we have the power to fix.

In short, if we want to change the standing of parliamentary democracy and our politics, we must take far more seriously the views and demands of the people we rely on for support and are here to serve. They want us to uphold and share their standards in how we go about our work. If we do not learn the lessons of our collective failure, we would be unwise to believe it will be business as usual at the ballot box when the current Parliament ends.

12.20 pm

Lord Howarth of Newport (Lab) [V]: My Lords, in 2019, when Parliament was certainly not at its best, the think tank Onward found that two-thirds of younger voters were in favour of a strong man leader prepared to defy Parliament. We had a leader, Boris Johnson, who flagrantly broke the rules and lied. The Hallett inquiry has exposed habitual use of foul-mouthed language in No. 10. Civil servants in No. 10 colluded with the rule-breaking by the Prime Minister. A senior Minister unblushingly told the House of Commons that the Government intended to break international law. Two independent advisers on ministerial interests have resigned. There has been the affair of PPE procurement, the VIP channel and the bounce-back loans—an issue that the noble Baroness, Lady Featherstone, referred to in her admirable speech.

In 2021, a Savanta ComRes poll showed that 76% of voters were concerned about corruption in government. A series of parliamentary by-elections has been precipitated by episodes of sexual abuse and other bullying, and by improper lobbying. There are institutional reforms that a new Prime Minister intent on restoring the integrity of public life, as Keir Starmer is, could implement. The so-called Independent Adviser on Ministers' Interests should be given power to initiate inquiries and his recommendations should be enforceable other than at the caprice of the Prime Minister. The admirable but airy Nolan principles should be given teeth through new powers for the Committee on Standards in Public Life to investigate and regulate; the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments, ditto. The revolving door of lucrative opportunities for both Ministers and officials scandalises the public. The existing feeble legislation on lobbying should be toughened up.

A new Prime Minister could refrain from constantly playing musical chairs with ministerial appointments. If Ministers stay in office for only five minutes, they cannot do the job properly and the public feel let down. Similarly, for confidence in the competence of government to be restored, civil servants should stay longer in the same post. There should be a new dispensation for local government, with radical decentralisation of power to revitalise democracy at the grass roots. Supercilious attitudes at the centre to the mayoralities and devolved Administrations should end.

A new Government must grasp the nettle of the funding of political parties. Consensus seems unobtainable. Such is the urgency of dispelling the public's perception that political donations buy power, policy and honours that a new Government should legislate with no further ado for public funding of political parties.

If we want politics and government to be respected, Ministers must tell people the realities and not run scared of focus groups. Leaders should lead. Whatever institutional changes are made, there is no substitute for good government.

12.25 pm

The Lord Bishop of Chelmsford: My Lords, like others, I contribute to this discussion with a great amount of feeling, because the debate goes right to the heart of the integrity of public institutions, including both Chambers of our Parliament. After Sue Gray's report on parties in Downing Street during lockdown, my most reverend friend the Archbishop of Canterbury described standards in public life as

"the glue that holds us together"

and called for a "rediscovery" of these standards. That was in May 2022, but since then, it can feel like little has changed.

There are now 18 MPs sitting as independents in the other place, outnumbering the number of Liberal Democrat MPs. All 18 have been suspended from their party. Whatever the reason—lobbying, leaking, sexual misconduct or bullying—it is clear that standards are not being observed in every case. While it is impossible to create a world where no individual breaches will ever occur, we can and absolutely should create a robust system which minimises the risk of slipping standards and deals quickly and efficiently with situations where this does occur.

Standards in public life matter. This is not just a topic for the so-called Westminster bubble. When standards are not observed by those with the privilege of sitting in this House or the other place, trust in our whole democratic institution begins to crumble. Whether we like it or not, Parliament and parliamentarians act as role models, including for children and young people. People especially notice how we behave. What we say and how we say it, as well as how we behave more widely and how we ensure that standards of behaviour are maintained, have an effect far beyond the immediate and can over time erode society. Clearly, it is a small minority who do not live up to the standards that we expect of those in public life, but the effect remains. The British public's trust in the political system has fallen significantly. A poll earlier this year for the Institute for Public Policy Research showed that only 6% of the public have full trust in the current political system. This is not just down to standards in public life, but it is certainly not unrelated.

I cannot exempt the Church of England from this discussion either, given that when More in Common recently polled relative trust in British institutions, the Church came easily in the bottom half. Governance should be for the public good, to enable the flourishing of all life. We needed, in the words of my most reverend friend the Archbishop, a rediscovery of public standards back in 2022. Eighteen months on, we still need it, so today I reiterate this call for personal and institutional integrity.

12.28 pm

Lord Young of Cookham (Con): My Lords, I endorse everything that the right reverend Prelate and others have said about the need for integrity and high standards

in public life, but what I found so dispiriting over the festive season was to read constant reports that the next general election will be the dirtiest ever. I quote from Oliver Shah, writing in the *Times*:

"It raises the prospect of the most expensive and dirtiest election battle in British history. The two main parties have already traded highly personal blows, with Labour running attack ads claiming that Sunak did not believe paedophiles should go to prison and Sunak accusing Labour of being in cahoots with criminal gangs in the perpetuation of illegal immigration".

Then on Tuesday in the *Times*, Katy Balls wrote:

"Such tactics, though, are here to stay. While Labour and the Tories do not agree on much, strategists on both sides believe that this will be the dirtiest election to date".

I believe that the leaders of our three main parties are decent people who have no appetite for this sort of campaign and realise the damage that it can do. It devalues the political currency, debases people in public life and discourages good people from standing. I do not believe that this is what the public want or deserve. I urge my noble friend the Leader to make the case for moderation in language. Theresa May's book is called *The Abuse of Power*, but too many advisers seem to believe in the power of abuse.

Secondly, people do not trust government. Noble Lords have mentioned the Post Office scandal. What people want is competence, and failure to deliver generates disillusion. One reason for underperformance, as mentioned by the noble Lord, Lord Howarth, is the high turnover of Ministers and senior civil servants. Who has been the most competent Minister in recent years? Ben Wallace. He was there for four years. Where is my party most exposed? On housing. We have had 16 Ministers there since 2010. When I was first elected, there were two Housing Ministers in nine years. Denis Healey was Defence Secretary for five years and Chancellor of the Exchequer for six. We then had two Chancellors in the next nine years. We have had six since 2016. This turnover has consequences. The same criticism was made in my noble friend Lord Maude's excellent report on the Civil Service, which criticised

"the frequent and unplanned movement of officials from post to post, without regard to business need, at the expense of continuity and of developing and maintaining specialist knowledge and expertise".

So I have two resolutions for promoting democracy in 2024: decency in political discourse; and stability and competence in government.

12.31 pm

Lord Browne of Ladyton (Lab): My Lords, as I expect all Back-Bench noble Lords have done, I have thought long and hard about how best to use my three minutes. I have chosen to devote a large part of them to repeating the words of Julie Hesmondhalgh, the actress who played Suzanne Sercombe—the partner and now wife of Alan Bates—in "Mr Bates vs The Post Office". On "The World at One" on Monday, 13 minutes into her interview she was asked why she thought this drama had been so spectacularly influential. She responded insightfully. I will read her words in part:

"It is really important to remember that this was a systemic failure ... it's about lies and corruptions on a systemic level. I think part of why this series has been so popular is that we're at peak lies and corruption and that people have had enough and

[LORD BROWNE OF LADYTON]

that this has ... been the ... final straw. The expression of that and the representation of that on screen has made people say, 'That's enough now'."

In these words, Julie Hesmondhalgh is speaking for the nation. We, the political classes, need to pay attention to that state of mind—particularly so in this election year as it will naturally affect how people will vote. This therefore demands a collective and corrective response.

The extent of the lies and corruption to which Julie Hesmondhalgh referred is captured in a briefing from Spotlight on Corruption and Transparency International that we all—with the exception of the Leader—received on Tuesday. It accurately and compellingly sets out the recent extent of scandal and impropriety in Westminster and Whitehall, including:

"the sale of privileged access to the Prime Minister ... government awarding £1.6 billion in PPE contracts based on political connections ... ministers making 'unlawful' decisions to favour party donors ... the award of life peerages to those who have made generous political donations ... An MP caught lobbying ministers in return for cash ... secretive lobbying by a former Prime Minister seeking commitments ... that would put tens billions of pounds of taxpayers' funds at risk ... These follow decades of scandal over expenses, cash for questions and cash for honours".

Helpfully, the briefing also contains clear recommendations about what needs to be done to respond to the public's strong appetite for significant reforms to uphold public integrity. Many of them are recommendations from the Committee on Standards in Public Life.

As it is impossible for me to do justice to this excellent briefing in the time available, I shall ensure that the Leader gets a copy. To the extent that he does not cover the recommendations in his winding-up speech, I ask that he treats them as my questions to him and writes.

Baroness Fox of Buckley (Non-Afl): My Lords—

12.34 pm

Lord McNally (LD): We are out of order; it is me next. I am always eager to hear the words of the noble Baroness, Lady Fox, but I would like to say a few words myself. It is a pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Browne, and to anticipate the noble Baroness's speech. I congratulate my noble friend Lady Featherstone on her formidable speech. Do not take too much notice of the noble Lord, Lord Forsyth—he has never been able to see a belt without wanting to hit below it.

I will first refer to the points made by the noble Baroness, Lady Stowell, and the noble Lord, Lord Browne. It is not the time for complacency by Parliament or investigative journalism when a television play achieves more in a week than other parts of our governance have achieved in 20 years. That is not to take any credit away from parliamentarians such as the noble Lord, Lord Arbuthnot, who pressed for justice for those damaged by this scandal.

The noble Lord, Lord Dobbs, called his seminal political novel *House of Cards*. That is a good description of liberal democracy—the concept, not the party. We are all familiar with Churchill's famous quote that "democracy is the worst form of Government"—[*Official Report*, Commons, 11/11/1947; col. 207.]

until you have tried the others. It functions best when its various components—a democratically elected Parliament, a Government, an independent judiciary, a media that adheres to the highest standards of truth and accuracy, and a Civil Service selected and promoted on merit—deliver open government and are underpinned by a robust and wide-ranging Freedom of Information Act. Each of those elements stands alone in a functioning democracy, yet each gives strength to that democracy by helping to strengthen the others. At the apex of that house of cards are this Parliament and the determination of each one of us to protect a democracy that, at its most generous, can be described as fraying at the edges.

In my three minutes, there is no time to set out a detailed programme of reform. Like the noble Lord, Lord Browne, I refer the House to the excellent briefing from Transparency International UK and Spotlight on Corruption. It sets out a programme of reform against which all parties should be tested at the next election and against which individuals should be judged. I hope that, in his extended 20 minutes, the Leader of the House—I am glad to see that he agreed to respond to this debate—will assess the progress on the Government's Command Paper that was published last July, *Strengthening Ethics and Integrity in Central Government*, and then promise us a full day's debate on that document so that we may return to this issue.

It is a daunting agenda that faces the democracies. As so often, Shakespeare got it right when he wrote:

"The fault ... is not in our stars, But in ourselves".

12.38 pm

Baroness Fox of Buckley (Non-Afl): My Lords, the Library briefing for this important debate from the noble Baroness, Lady Featherstone, notes that the distinctive feature of parliamentary democracies

"is that the executive receives its mandate from, and is responsible to, the legislature",

but there is a revealing omission here. Actually, the distinctive feature of democracy is that Parliament receives its mandate from, and is responsible to, the demos—half of the word "democracy" along with *kratos*, meaning "power".

Yet "people power" is the opposite of the public's experience of late; indeed, it is disparaged as populism. Voter-mandated manifesto legislation is blocked by forces beyond the electorate's control while national and local government frequently outsource decision-making to arm's-length bodies, unelected quangos and consultants ring-fenced away from popular pressure. The public feel sidelined. Like other noble Lords, I suspect that that is one reason why the plight of the sub-postmasters has so captured the public's imagination, way beyond the atrocious miscarriage of justice. Millions identified with the sheer frustration of being ignored and shouting into the void as the computer, the bureaucrats and the establishment machine say, "No". Talk to a vast array of grass-roots campaigners, service users and parents' groups: many of them also feel that they are battling against a technocracy that acts as though it knows best. Although they are not branded as criminals or frauds, as the sub-postmasters were, citizens are branded as everything from ill-informed

dupes to extremist bigots because they are concerned about ULEZ, rip-off leaseholds, the politicised school curriculum or whatever.

What does it say about attitudes towards the demos that, beyond the self-interested Post Office management, so many in the judiciary, political life, corporate tech and auditor companies did not question when suddenly hundreds of decent postmasters had become venal thieves? To restore trust in democracy, it is essential that parliamentarians—the establishment—restore trust in the demos.

On the other aspect of this debate—how to halt declining standards in public life—I issue a note of caution. Many proposed solutions—such as more stringent codes of conduct and endless training courses and ethics committees—seem more like process-driven bureaucratic box-ticking than a real enriching of public service. We should also acknowledge that initiatives to regulate standards themselves have become mired in contentious ideological scandals—for example, pushing values such as diversity, inclusion and equity, as though they were interchangeable with improving standards in public life.

In the last few days, there was an apocryphal DIE tale. Rachel Meade, a Kent social worker for 20 years, won a landmark claim after being subjected to a lengthy “fitness to practice” investigation by her own professional regulator, Social Work England, because she posted legal expressions of her belief that a person cannot change biological sex. A 51-page judgment described the standards disciplinary process itself as a form of harassment. We saw similar with the hounding of the now totally exonerated noble Baroness, Lady Falkner, where unfounded allegations of bullying at the EHRC were used to mount an ill-judged process. We must beware these processes, set up to police standards, being weaponised for malicious and politicised reasons, or we will inadvertently create even more miscarriages of justice than we have seen at the Post Office.

12.42 pm

Baroness Finn (Con): My Lords, I declare my interest as the Conservative member of the Committee on Standards in Public Life. The CSPL has occupied a unique position in the standards landscape since its formation in 1994. Although it includes cross-party representation, the majority of its members are independent. It provides advice for maintaining and improving standards, based on evidence gathered from a wide range of people. The most recent report, *Leading in Practice*, published in 2022, looked at how a variety of organisations have sought to integrate ethical values into their policies and ways of working. It has been widely welcomed across the public sector. I pay tribute to the noble Lord, Lord Evans, who led the committee with distinction over the last five years, and welcome our new chair, Doug Chalmers, who is already starting a programme of engagement with regulators and those responsible for standards across the United Kingdom.

The late Lord Nolan set out three golden threads for standards: codes of conduct, independent scrutiny and education. The key question for your Lordships’ House is who should exercise that independent scrutiny, especially when ministerial conduct has been called

into question. One of the central pillars of our unwritten constitution is that the Prime Minister, appointed by and chief adviser to the sovereign, remains in that position for as long as he or she commands the confidence of the other place. Other Ministers remain in post for as long as they retain the confidence of the Prime Minister. Not one of us in this place would object to raising standards in public life or disagree with the Nolan principles, but the Nolan principles work precisely because they are just that—principles and not rules. My noble friend Lord Forsyth mentioned the recent excellent Policy Exchange report on upholding standards, which deals with this. My fear is that, by the patchwork codification of standards, whether statutory or quasi-statutory, covert or overt, we erode the functions of political accountability that are the proper province of Parliament.

These political mechanisms of accountability are a great success of the British constitution and one that other countries struggle to emulate. We should not abdicate standards enforcements to ethics tsars or unelected regulators who are accountable to no one. If we do, we invite the unedifying prospect of judicial or regulatory pronouncement on ministerial appointments and dismissals. This, I fear, will not improve the standing of parliamentary democracy but diminish it.

12.44 pm

Lord Parekh (Lab): My Lords, we are discussing very serious issues, and therefore it is important that they are tackled in a meaningful way. One way would be to have some kind of constitutional convention, like the one that the Scots had, where we might debate these issues more sensibly and rationally.

I want to talk about parliamentary democracy and how we can steer our way out of some of the mess that we seem to be facing. When we say that we are a democracy, what do we mean? Minimally, we mean two things, which is why we desire democracy as a form of government: equal rights to all citizens and benefits to all citizens. It is a system of government where people decide things themselves and which promotes public interest and benefits to all.

Parliamentary democracy is one form of democracy. It is not the only one; there are many others. What distinguishes parliamentary democracy and makes the element of trust particularly relevant to parliamentary democracy is that power lies with the people, but it is not exercised directly by the people but through their elected representatives. It is a mediated democracy—a democracy in which power is mediated through Parliament. That means that to talk about parliamentary sovereignty would be a serious mistake. It would mean that Parliament replaces people and begins to take all kinds of decisions that should be taken by people. I suggest that what we want is a robust parliamentary democracy in which people are as well organised, alert and capable of controlling their destiny as Parliament itself.

My second point is that in a parliamentary democracy there is an expectation that Parliament will continue to monitor the system of governance and how the Executive exercise their powers. With parliamentary sovereignty, whoever controls Parliament is sovereign, so the party in power in the House of Commons

[LORD PAREKH]

becomes sovereign. That is exactly what we want to avoid. In my view, we should have a parliamentary democracy in which people control their own affairs through the mediation of Parliament and in which Parliament can control and monitor the system of governance—how Ministers behave, how public appointments are made, how government money is contracted out and so on. These have been the causes of recent troubles. It is very important that Parliament should be strengthened, but not at the cost of people themselves.

12.48 pm

Baroness Stuart of Edgbaston (CB): My Lords, today's is a debate in which we all must declare an interest, as well as a responsibility. We are part of structures that are essential to making democracy work and we are all public figures, and we share standards that are expected of professionals. Even though we sometimes would like to think that we are different, when it comes to standards, we are not.

I want to talk about the Civil Service in general and my role as the first Civil Service Commissioner in particular. An effective, capable and impartial Civil Service, guided by the Nolan principles, which include honesty, integrity, objectivity and impartiality, is essential—but remember, being impartial does not mean being irrelevant or ineffective. It means serving the Government of the day. The Civil Service Commission has a statutory basis in the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act. We ensure that recruitment into the Civil Service is fair, open and based on merit, and we hear complaints brought by civil servants regarding conduct that is thought to conflict with Civil Service codes of conduct.

It is important that staff know who to turn to if they feel that they are being asked to do something which would be outside the code. In the first instance, they turn to their department, but, if it is still unresolved, the commission is a statutory independent body. The annual staff survey shows a very high awareness of the existence of the code in England, Scotland and Wales. There is a little less confidence that complaints will be dealt with speedily, but it is still between 70% and 80%.

In the last five years, we have received some 500 complaints, but the vast majority of them were outside the scope. The resolution of these things really has to be within departments and I am very confident that it is.

An effective, modern Civil Service requires people to move between the private and the public sectors. Entry into the Civil Service is just as important as exit, and that is why I am very grateful for the work of the noble Lord, Lord Pickles, and his committee. It may be appropriate to say that ACOBA, the Civil Service Commission and the Commissioner for Public Appointments share secretarial and back-office staff.

I will say something about Civil Service impartiality compared to the independence of regulators. There is an important difference. Irrespective of the legal basis of institutions, there are three essential requirements to ensure independence. The first is the conduct of

individual officeholders. For the commission, this is when we chair interview panels. The second is adequate resourcing that allows the regulators to plan their staff and workload in a consistent and strategic manner. The third is to fill officeholders' vacancies as they arise. Basically, failures of standards cost time and money, and ultimately undermine confidence.

I conclude by paying tribute to the work of my fellow commissioners and a lot of very hard-working members of staff in the Civil Service.

12.51 pm

Lord Pickles (Con): My Lords, it is a particular pleasure to follow the noble Baroness, with whom I have very much enjoyed working and moving forward the agenda for improvement and change. I draw attention to my entry in the register of interests: I am the chair of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments—ACOBA. The committee provides independent advice to former Ministers and senior civil servants when they leave government.

Approximately 40,000 officials left the Civil Service last year. The majority of these cases are considered by government departments themselves, under the business appointments rules, without formal reference to ACOBA. The rules are not fit for purpose; they have not kept up with modern career patterns and leave open major risks to the integrity of government. This failure has been apparent for years, and I welcome the commitment of the Government to reform the system announced last year.

Now is the time to get on with it for, in truth, the reforms differ little from the measures devised by me and my noble friend the present Leader of the House, a few years back. I pay tribute to my noble friend's commitment to reform. The revised business rules need not just the confidence of the Prime Minister and your Lordships but, more importantly, credibility in the eyes of the public. To get over the threshold of credibility to be listened to by the public, there need to be consequences for breaking the rules. Currently, there are none, save an unpleasant letter from me and a couple of days of bad publicity in the press.

The revised rules will rightly be enforced through the Civil Service contract and a ministerial bond, up to and including a fine. The latter is crucial, because it goes to the often-neglected part of Nolan's Seven Principles of Public Life—leadership. Ministers must set an example and lead from the front. They cannot expect others to follow the rules unless they are prepared to do it first.

Reform will bring sense to the system. It is not a good use of public money when we are currently forced to consider the merits of an ex-Minister consuming the more intimate parts of some luckless marsupial on television. There is no government interest here to protect. It is far better that there should be a light touch on journalism, entertainment, voluntary work or transfers to other parts of the public service, that those coming from the private sector have a clear idea of the restrictions they will face on leaving the Civil Service and for ACOBA to concentrate on more complicated cases that protect the interest and probity of government.

12.55 pm

Lord Stunell (LD): My Lords, it is a privilege to take part in this debate and to follow the noble Lord, Lord Pickles, and his excellent words about ACOBA. I was a member of the Committee on Standards in Public Life when it published its reports *Standards Matter 2* and *Upholding Standards in Public Life*, and I strongly commend all their recommendations to noble Lords for implementation.

Of the latter report's 34 recommendations, the Government at the time accepted 14, partially met 10 and rejected 10. When you look at the detail, you can see that the Government accepted all the recommendations that would restrict other persons or bodies from crossing ethical red lines, rejected all those that would limit their own scope to transgress ethical boundaries and kicked into the long grass any idea of embedding any of the existing ethical guidance mechanisms into primary legislation. It is easy to be cynical about the motivation of that, but I want to be constructive and look forward to how we can genuinely improve the current ethical framework, which is far too dependent on the integrity of those it is intended to restrain who, in the past, have all too often finished by being judge and jury in their own cases.

The committee's other report, *Standards Matter 2*, reinforced the urgency of safeguarding all ethics regulators from interference in both their initial appointment and their scope and power when operating. That report was triggered by the fiasco of the treatment of the Independent Adviser on Ministers' Interests by the Government of the day, and it set out the overwhelming case for embedding our ethical guidance framework in legislation and for the appointment process of ethical regulators themselves to be properly insulated from malign political veto.

The very disappointing government response to those reports came several Prime Ministers ago. Today, we have had multiple public resets of government, and I hope that the Leader of the House, in replying, will take the opportunity to give a more rounded response than was given then and to give noble Lords a strong signal that this Government accept that further reform is now urgently necessary.

When the political wheel turns and today's Government become tomorrow's Opposition, I predict that they will, in any case, be rapidly converted to the importance of having a statutorily embedded ethical system in our public life—when they are no longer in charge of running it. In short, it is in the interests of all parties for each Front Bench to declare today that they now heartily endorse the CSPL's package of reforms and will set out a plan to deliver them. I look forward to hearing it in the winding-up speeches.

12.58 pm

Lord Leong (Lab): My Lords, public trust in the individuals and institutions that govern this country—those that have the power to affect millions of lives and to spend billions of pounds—rests on a sacred trust that those in power will act in accordance with the Nolan principles. Those principles, as set out by my noble friend Lady Warwick and the noble Baroness, Lady Stuart, were established 30 years ago by then Prime Minister John Major.

In return, members of the public obey the law and expect others to do so, without a constant police presence. We all follow the Highway Code and expect others to do so, even when there are no traffic cameras. The British people will always do the right thing if they believe that others are doing the same. So much about Britain—our national character, constitution and reputation on the international stage—is vitally dependent upon a sense of trust and fairness. Our reputation has been hard won but is in danger of being too easily lost. In China, Russia and elsewhere, authoritarian leaders are blurring the boundaries between state and party interests, overriding judicial process with political convenience and prioritising the interests of their leaders over the welfare of their citizens.

Remarkably, China is exporting anti-democratic training and formally instructing its more repressive allies. Last year, it opened a so-called school for despots in Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, teaching officials from governing parties who have held power for decades—often via fraudulent elections, electoral violence and grand corruption—how to tighten their grip still further and eliminate their domestic political opponents. We can combat this rising tide of oppression by ensuring that our values—fairness and freedom for all, democracy and the rule of law—are upheld at home and unquestioned abroad.

The noble Lord, Lord Evans, has given us a clear warning: the public believe that, overall, standards in public life have “gone backwards”. We are collectively wincing in anticipation of the next political scandal, fearing that public trust in politics may finally snap like an overstretched elastic band. Those of us in public life in Britain bear a great responsibility to our fellow citizens and to the wider world to act according to the Nolan principles and to ensure that we remain a beacon of hope. The world will be a far more dangerous place if trust in Britain breaks.

1.01 pm

Lord Howell of Guildford (Con): My Lords, I will concentrate on the parliamentary democracy side of our debate, since others have eloquently put the obvious point that, unless we maintain the highest standards of behaviour in Parliament and ensure that Parliament itself upholds these standards, as the noble Baroness, Lady Finn, rightly reminded us, no one will renew the much-diminished trust in and respect for parliamentary institutions today, whatever the circumstances.

For a gloomy and very serious subject, this has been quite an enjoyable debate so far. Everyone knows that we are facing an age of disorder and potential disintegration, but my worry is that far too few people in practising politics, the media or the so-called influencer class, whoever they are, recognise the causes or consequences of just drifting along on the technological tide. Some people are now calling for something akin to a new Enlightenment, with the philosophers stepping forward where the politicians and parties are so obviously and clearly failing to make an impact, or merely trading stale abuse and accusations while the world rolls away from them and us.

All aspects of this scene are in a state of flux. All pave the way for multiplying grievances, for placard politics in place of argument, for dissent shading into

[LORD HOWELL OF GUILDFORD]

hate and for unrepresentative democracy to worm its way in. All these trends are already being fundamentally twisted in new directions by the communications revolution, the loss of deliberation in the immediacy of online response, the ugly intolerance of polarisation, the demands of uninhibited transparency and the general evaporation of trust in and respect for everyone and everything. If we add in a new universal balloon of fakery and misinformation, now being further inflated by the misuse of AI, that makes it all the worse.

I have only two immediate answers to this fragile and dangerous situation in the few minutes that I have to speak. The first is to take our parliamentary committee structure far more seriously if we want to keep pace with and get to the bottom of ever-swelling executive activity. That requires our committees to be properly resourced and empowered, as they are in many other democracies but not here. The second is to give maximum encouragement and space to deep channels of discussion throughout the UK, often far from the public gaze and well away from the media, where new thoughts may be taking shape.

Whoever forms a Government at Westminster, most of the major issues of our time are well outside the control of our national government. The levers of growth which are believed to exist—I believe that Sir Keir Starmer believes in them—are now in practice outside the state's diminished reach, as it tries to do more and more but with less success. If that reality alone is grasped by Parliament and its leaders, then order and a mannered public debate can continue to be combined with freedom of thought, speech and ambition for our institutions and constitution—and, above all, with trust, which is so obviously missing from the whole parliamentary and political scene.

1.05 pm

Lord Davies of Brixton (Lab): My Lords, we must thank the noble Baroness, Lady Featherstone, for introducing what has become an interesting debate. I agree with much, although not quite all, of what has been said. I will simply express my concern about the trend towards plutocracy, the rule by the richest in our society, and the overweening power of money and capital in relation to our parliamentary democracy.

The undue influence of well-funded special interests can distort policy-making and compromise the public interest. The only answer to this is greater exposure and more openness. We need regulations and transparency to curb the corrosive impact of money on our democratic institutions. We need to be concerned about the pervasive impact of those who have the financial resources to influence policy-making. We all see it in this building: the people who have the time and resources to influence policy are those with money. It is a simple equation. We need to be concerned about corporate lobbying, special interest groups, campaign financing, the revolving door phenomenon and the wealth gap's influence on policy-making. These elements collectively undermine democratic principles, causing real concern about fairness, transparency and public trust.

A particular concern worth mentioning is the funding of so-called think tanks. I pay tribute to the work of openDemocracy and its "Who Funds You?" exercise,

which looks at who pays for these people popping up on our television screens and opining about this, that and the other. It is a crucial issue—who funds them? There is a simple answer. We do not know where the money of right-wing think tanks comes from. I could list a whole group of them, such as the Adam Smith Institute and the TaxPayers' Alliance. They do not tell us who funds them, so we have to draw our own conclusions—it is the power of big money. The answer to this is greater openness and disclosure.

1.08 pm

Lord Cormack (Con): My Lords, I will not follow the noble Lord, although he made some interesting and powerful points. It struck me while my noble friend Lord Young of Cookham, who always brings wisdom to our debates, was speaking, that what we have really lost in this country and Parliament is the ability to disagree agreeably. That is fuelled by social media and has done enormous damage to our public life.

I am grateful to the noble Baroness, Lady Featherstone: she made a far-ranging and very interesting speech. She talked about Lord Judge. In the next couple of weeks, we will have the opportunity to remember at thanksgiving services two remarkable parliamentarians: Baroness Boothroyd, one of the greatest Speakers that the other place has ever had, and Lord Judge, who, although a great judge, was a parliamentarian to his fingertips. He understood the most important fact of all: the Executive are answerable to Parliament, not the other way around.

I will just touch on one other thing—this House. I have been in Parliament getting on for 54 years now, including just over 13 in your Lordships' House. I believe in it. I believe that it does a very good job, and I believe that we have some remarkable Members in our midst. But we have to look at ourselves and the way we refresh ourselves. I beg my noble friend who will be winding up this debate to give further thought to the Bill of the noble Lord, Lord Norton. Doubtless he will say more about it when he speaks.

We cannot refresh ourselves by continuing to have resignation lists produced by a Prime Minister who has had barely 40 days and 40 nights in power. I say nothing about the individuals concerned—I will give them a courteous welcome; of course I will—but we have to look at this. The way this has been handled has done damage to our parliamentary democracy. We must look at the power of Prime Ministers. Of course, they must have the opportunity to nominate—although I am not sure they should if they have had only 40 days and 40 nights—but there should be a statutory appointments commission which has the final say on the integrity of those who come to this House.

We have many tasks before us. I am grateful to the noble Baroness, Lady Featherstone, for giving us the chance to air some of these things, although I am sorry that our rules mean we have had such a short time to do so.

1.11 pm

Lord Harries of Pentregarth (CB): My Lords, the Motion before us contains two key words: democracy and standards. I hope to say something briefly about

each of them, and then to show they are fundamentally linked. Democracy is a precarious and precious achievement which is under threat in many places around the world—not just overt dictatorships but managed democracies, which have elections but then lock up political opponents, and which have a media, but one largely controlled by the Government or Government supporters.

We need to rediscover a real belief in the system we have in this country, because it actually allows us to express the better side of our nature—the desire for the common good—but also takes fully into account the darker side of our nature: our desire too often to pursue our own interests at the expense of other people, particularly organised groups pursuing their interests. As a great American theologian and political thinker, Reinhold Neibuhr, put it, the human

“capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man’s inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary”.

People should be learning about this in schools, but the trouble is that citizenship education, which ought to be taught, is in a “parlous state”. Those are the words of your Lordships’ committee report, *The Ties that Bind*, which we have brought before the House a number of times. It says that citizenship education in schools has been degraded to a parlous state and needs to be radically and totally revised. I very much hope it is not too late for the present Government once again to look at citizenship education in schools, so that pupils come out of schools actually believing in the society in which we live and willing to take part in it.

Secondly, I will say something about standards. Even in a dictatorship, some moral principles are possible. There is a limit to the degree of corruption that even a dictatorship can put up with, but there is an integral link between moral principles and democracy. In much the same way that Adam Smith argued that moral principles were fundamental to the proper working of a free market, so they are absolutely fundamental to the proper working of democracy, quite simply because the people who rule us are elected. When we elect people, we do so because we desire to trust them: we want them to be trustworthy. We want them actually to try to put into practice the policies on which we have elected them. Unfortunately, as we have heard so often around the House today, that fundamental trustworthiness is no longer believed in by many people in our society—sadly and wrongly, perhaps, but that is the case.

I wonder whether, perhaps at the beginning of the new Parliament, the Lord Speaker in this House and the Speaker in the House of Commons might call a meeting in Westminster Hall where we can once again look at and think through those wonderful Nolan principles.

1.15 pm

Viscount Stansgate (Lab): My Lords, I commend the noble Baroness, Lady Featherstone, for today’s debate and I am glad to make a contribution to it. Debates of this kind are a bit like taking the temperature of our democracy. I am very interested in all the things that have been said so far, and I need hardly remind

your Lordships that around the world today democracy itself is under attack, including in countries we count among our closest allies.

I grew up in a family that for generations had the greatest possible respect for the democratic legitimacy of the elected House of Commons. But I can also say that since being elected to this House, I have come to understand, appreciate and respect the role it plays and the very good work that can be and is done here. Both Houses complement each other, but they are not perfect.

Interestingly, as recently as Tuesday of this week, the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee of another place conducted its second evidence session and took evidence from former Speakers of this House and others on the size, role, composition and purpose of the House of Lords. We might like to reciprocate by our Constitution Committee conducting an inquiry into the nature, purposes, role and activity of the House of Commons.

I will say a word or two about the legislative process. As others have said, we live at a time of skeleton Bills and Henry VIII clauses, and the result is that Bills can be either absurdly large or ridiculously short. Either way, huge quantities of detailed policy are forced through Parliament by secondary legislation and SIs, which this House theoretically could amend but in practice does not. This is a pressure cooker waiting to burst. The balance of power between the Executive and the legislature—reference was made, of course, to our dear departed, collective noble friend Lord Judge—has gone too far in favour of the Executive.

I will say something about the electoral process. There is something so simple and powerful about the act of marking a cross with a pencil on a ballot paper and putting it into a ballot box, but I regret to say that the integrity of our own voting system has been put at needless risk in recent years. All sides of this House had reservations about the recent measure to introduce ID for voting. The evidence of fraud under the old system was certainly less than the evidence so far of the deterrent effect under the new system. I do not want our country ever to be accused of voter suppression. That is very bad for our democracy—and we have enough threats as it is.

For example, looking forward, many have warned, including our National Cyber Security Centre, that the coming general election will feature AI-generated deepfakes designed to unsettle us. The sophistication of deepfaked videos is such that, to take a random example, you could make a deepfake video of the Leader of the House ardently advocating the return of a Labour Government. I suppose this would be the equivalent of the Zinoviev Letter, whose 100th anniversary we are celebrating this year, but much more powerful because of the effectiveness of the technology and the power of social media to amplify fake messages. The World Economic Forum has just announced that disinformation from AI is regarded as one of the greatest global risks.

My time has run out, but I wanted to say this. Like other Members, I enjoy going to talk to schools. Before Christmas, I went to Chiswick School. Its sixth form asked excellent questions, but one of the things

[VISCOUNT STANSGATE]

that was uncovered in our discussion was cynicism, which I think is the greatest threat to our parliamentary democracy. We all support the principles of Nolan, which are in our code of conduct, but we must protect the new generation of voters from the cynicism that would otherwise undermine their support for the parliamentary democracy we are debating today. I very much hope that the new generation will take comfort from the fact that we need to uphold the greatest possible standards in public life, and that they will benefit from it when the time comes.

1.19 pm

Lord Shipley (LD): My Lords, this debate is about standards in public life. I want to focus on audit and risk management in the public sector, particularly in local government. I should remind the House that I am a vice president of the Local Government Association, but I should make it clear that it has had no role in what I will say.

I mentioned audit when we debated the gracious Speech because the hoped-for Bill was absent. Since then, audit has been in the spotlight as never before. Robust audit is central to building public confidence in decision-making and particularly in major investment decisions by public bodies. Yet, too often, audit has become part of the problem. Since the abolition of the Audit Commission 10 years ago and the increased role for private audit companies, standards have slipped. Audits are delayed, too many local authorities have dangerously high levels of debt and risky investments are ploughed ahead without proper scrutiny. Earlier this week, the Financial Reporting Council imposed penalties totalling some £40 million, including costs, for audit failures in 2023. In so doing, its aim is to improve the quality of audits, whatever the sector, and it is right to do so. In local government, the timeliness and quality of audits have declined. Only five local authority audits for 2022-23 were completed by the deadline of September 2023. The Public Accounts Committee had previously expressed concern in June 2023 that only 12% of local government audits for 2021-22 had been delivered on time. There is a problem and it is getting worse.

I want to acknowledge the importance of the work of Oflog, the newly established Office for Local Government, in devising and publishing metrics that will lead to improvement by councils, which can compare themselves with other local authorities, as can the public and journalists. I welcome that, but I have two concerns. What will Oflog do to stop local authorities, such as Woking or Thurrock, getting into unacceptable and unmanageable levels of debt? Will Oflog examine the adequacy of local authority financial controls to prevent huge errors being made in the first place?

A moment ago, I mentioned journalists. When I entered local government, there were two full-time journalists reporting on Newcastle-upon-Tyne City Council. They were part of the checks and balances of our local democracy. Today, a reporter in local government is rare. A few years ago, the BBC funded support for local reporting, but it appears that it is now being replaced by BBC online reporting, in direct competition

with the webpages of local newspapers and their advertising revenue. What in this scenario is going to happen to investigative journalism?

1.22 pm

Lord Norton of Louth (Con): My Lords, I congratulate the noble Baroness on initiating this debate. She raises some important questions. Parliamentary democracy is now under threat, not least as elected Governments seek to tackle problems that often go beyond their borders and with a public who respond to the failure to tackle those problems by embracing the calls of populist politicians. Some democracies, such as the United States, have a history of populist movements—a tendency now writ large—but we see it elsewhere as well, not least in some nations of Europe.

In the United Kingdom, we have largely managed, so far, to resist that trend, and the reason for that rests in the fundamental nature of our parliamentary democracy. Those calling for a codified constitution largely miss the point of what sustains the institutions of the state. Some nations have codified constitutions, but no culture of constitutionalism. By that, I mean an acceptance at mass and elite level of the legitimacy of the constitutional processes. That is what underpins the rule of law. We have a culture of constitutionalism that is so well embedded that it has facilitated our uncodified constitution and has provided stability through the fact that the constitution does not impose an unwieldy straitjacket. We benefit from a culture that has reinforced the value of that system. Some of the basic rules of society are so well ingrained that it is not necessary to enshrine them formally.

That culture still pertains, and it is essential to our well-being as a nation. If we start to move to a more formalised system, we are in danger of creating a society with some degree of rigidity. Problems with maintaining standards in public life have undermined confidence in the system, but that is an argument for recognising and bolstering the core culture, not an argument for eroding it.

Institutions matter, but in terms of public trust, the focus is on those who occupy them. We have seen some officeholders exhibit an egregious disregard of standards in recent years. We need to avoid displacement activity—advancing constitutional reform as if that is the answer—and instead we need to focus on behaviour. We need to embed a culture of responsibility and, instead of blaming our constitution, we need to be reflecting on how we recruit public officials, how we tighten the regulatory framework and how we inculcate a commitment to delivering outputs in the best interests of the nation.

1.25 pm

Lord Sahota (Lab): My Lords, our parliamentary democracy and our standards in public life are things that have always been admired and envied throughout the world by other parliamentarians and the public alike. They look to us for guidance and advice as the mother of all Parliaments. When they visit our Parliament, they are in awe of our system and institutions, but, sadly, in the past few years some of our politicians in the Government have let that gold standard fall. Some

of our politicians are as dodgy as that Post Office computer. In some quarters of the media, our democracy is now being compared with a banana republic. Some of our politicians have that third-world politician attitude towards their jobs: “Never mind my constituents or my country, what’s in it for me?” I am sorry to say this, but even our present Foreign Secretary, before he joined us, dipped his toe in some secret lobbying of Ministers.

There was a time when our Prime Minister stood up at the Dispatch Box and his or her words were the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. But, as we all know, our Prime Minister has recently been found by the standards committee to be wanting on that. He repeated those words over and over again. During Covid-19 he was fined for breaching his own rules. Our present Prime Minister was no better. He was fined as well. More people were fined at the address of our Prime Minister’s residence than at any other address in this country. That says something about our politics and Government.

In an investigation by a civil servant, a former Home Secretary was found guilty of bullying her staff, yet she stayed in her job with the blessing of the Prime Minister. It was the civil servant who had to resign. Many MPs have been investigated by the standards committee over the years. I have lost count of them now. Why is it that our MPs have to have second jobs? They are elected to serve their constituents and to legislate, not to sit on foreign advisory bodies and lobby for companies that have no connection to their constituents to make money. Whatever happened to the Nolan principles of accountability, integrity, selflessness, objectivity, honesty, leadership and openness? We have to restore faith in our democracy before it becomes the laughing stock of the world.

1.28 pm

Baroness Prashar (CB): My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Featherstone, for securing this debate. As evidenced by many reports, disillusionment and dissatisfaction with the political process, pronounced deviation from standards in public life, perceptions of corruption in government and low trust in politicians are having an adverse impact on our democratic system. Trust is at an all-time low, which is leading to levels of political disengagement and cynicism.

As we have heard in the debate, there is no shortage of recommendations which have been made for improving matters and restoring public trust. Regrettably, the Government have been slow to take comprehensive and urgent action. They appear reluctant to grasp fully that bold, comprehensive and decisive action is needed if we are to arrest this decline. Perhaps the Minister can explain why.

Recommendations, which have been made by various bodies and will be made later this month by a governance commission chaired by the right honourable Dominic Grieve, of which I am a member, to improve the governance of our country, are now, regrettably, absolutely necessary. But, as we have heard, they alone will not be sufficient. They will need to be sustained through self-supervision, constant vigilance, strong leadership and a culture which encourages adherence to standards

and compliance with codes and instils the importance of good governance and why it is important for the proper and effective functioning of democracy.

Rules, regulations and codes should not absolve those in public life from taking personal responsibility for good behaviour and setting an example. They should not lead to a culture where rules are seen as irritable constraints and that encourages minimum adherence just to stay within the rules. Currently there seems to be a lack of understanding about the connection between constitutional principles, standards and integrity. Such attitudes have led to adversarial behaviour, where breaches are contested to defend actions and justify bad behaviour. This leads to a blame culture, which undermines relationships, morale and the standing of crucial organisations while feeding public cynicism. Will the Minister please tell the House what action, if any, the Government are taking to counter this culture and to ensure compliance, an area which seems to have low priority and to be seen as an irritant?

Finally, in an election year, can the Minister—and perhaps the leaders of the Opposition in this House—tell the House what priority will be given to governance and standards in public life in their manifestos and in the way that elections are conducted? Are they or will they be taking steps to impress upon prospective parliamentary candidates the importance of ethical behaviour, what it means to be in public life and what the Nolan principles mean in practice?

1.32 pm

Lord Whitty (Lab): My Lords, as the final Back-Bench speaker, I will try to say something original. It is difficult, but I will try. Much of what has been said about the attitudes of the population to politicians and the political process is true. The noble Baroness, Lady Prashar, has just said that it is at an all-time low, which I am not sure is quite historically true. Even I was not here then, but the politicians of the 19th century were held in pretty low esteem, which is why we had the Great Reform Act, although that never fully affected the House of Lords. Nevertheless, at times we have had to change our system.

What has been missing from the debate is the fact that we have to recognise what is going on in society. It is true, as the noble Baroness, Lady Featherstone, and others have said, that some of the lack of respect for our system and individual parliamentarians is due to the mistakes of recent Administrations and recent scandals such as the Post Office one, but much of it is due to changes in society itself. Deference and respect are no longer there in society. It is easier to access all sorts of information thanks to changes in technology, the growth of social media and more scandal-orientated mainstream and social media. All of this means that issues which were never really known to the public have become very well known, sometimes exaggeratedly so. That societal change has its drawbacks, but by and large I approve of a society that is that sceptical and that questioning of its so-called betters.

What is lacking is an effective response by the legislature, in particular, to those changes in society and those questions which society now raises. The bodies that government and the legislature have set up

[LORD WHITTY]

are inadequate to meet these concerns. I note the description given by the noble Lord, Lord Pickles, of why ACOBA does not have adequate powers. I pay tribute to the noble Lord and his predecessor, the noble Baroness, Lady Browning, and to the staff who service the committee, on which I sat until last year, for all the systems that they have devised for making sure that potential jobs for retiring politicians and senior civil servants are not subject to corruption, potential corruption or the perception of corruption.

At the end of the day, ACOBA and the other bodies do not have the powers. Unless they are put fully on a statutory basis—let us say that those terms are written into the contractual terms of Ministers and senior civil servants—they will not have those powers. There will be no enforcement or penalties, and those sanctions need to be there. I hope that when we move to consider the constitution and indeed the reform of this Chamber, as I hope we will, we recognise that there is a special responsibility of the second Chamber, whatever its form, to ensure that the constitutional priorities as well as the personal priorities are met, and that there is a way of enforcing the standards in public life.

1.35 pm

Lord Newby (LD): My Lords, I thank my noble friend Lady Featherstone for initiating today's debate. The number of speakers demonstrates how much concern there is across the House about the issues we are discussing. I also thank the noble Lord, Lord True, for responding on behalf of the Government. I know him to be a firm champion of democratic values and the need for all of us to follow the highest possible standards in our public life.

As has been made clear in today's debate, there are widespread concerns about the way we run our parliamentary democracy in the UK and concerns that standards in public life in recent years have left much to be desired, to put it mildly. Indeed, I do not think it unfair to say that we currently face a crisis in terms of both the quality of our democracy and the standards in our public life. But there is a big difference in dealing with this crisis compared with the other major challenges which we face as a country, whether that is reigniting economic growth, getting towards net zero, rebuilding public services or dealing with major international crises such as Ukraine or Gaza. Unlike those challenges, the way we run our parliamentary democracy and the standards which we set for those involved in public life are entirely within our hands as parliamentarians to resolve. We do not need complicated international agreements to do so; we do not need to energise the private sector or to spend billions of pounds which we currently do not have. All we need is the political will to make the changes needed.

It is the lack of political will either to maintain or enhance standards, or to rejuvenate our democracy, which has characterised this Government. Remember the grand pledge in the 2019 Conservative manifesto: to establish a constitution, democracy and rights commission to look at the way we run our democracy. The day after polling day, it was quietly scrapped and the measures which we have seen, such as compulsory

ID at polling stations, the reversion to first past the post voting for mayors and curbing the independence of the Electoral Commission, appear to have more to do with the Conservatives' narrow party interests than with strengthening our democracy.

The debate has covered many specific issues and proposals for dealing with them. I cannot possibly cover them all today, but I agree that some of them need further and separate debate, not least the point raised by the noble Lord, Lord Forsyth, about the relationship between government and arm's-length bodies—an issue which the Post Office crisis has illuminated but which we have, as far as I can recall, hardly debated in your Lordships' House at all.

The issues that we have debated fall into two separate but interrelated strands. The first is how to improve standards. It is tempting, if facile, to say that those engaged in public life, particularly in Parliament and government, need to behave honestly and in accordance with the Nolan principles. If they did so, there would be no need for reform but, given recent experience, it is clear that without reform high standards are unlikely to be consistently met. There is quite a wide range of proposals for doing this which are relatively uncontentious and have been set out in our debate.

We could start by implementing the ethics reforms recommended by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, which are now incorporated into the Private Member's Bill in the name of the noble Lord, Lord Anderson of Ipswich. We could do that, and I hope that we will in this Session. There are lots more things we could do. We should make the appointments process for significant public roles include a confirmatory vote by the relevant parliamentary Select Committee. We should also strengthen and expand the lobbyists' registers. There are more points like that, all of which can easily be done. As chair of my party's manifesto process, I think I can give the noble Baroness, Lady Prashar, an assurance that we will be setting out our commitment to many of those things when our manifesto is produced.

The second strand covered by today's debate, though less discussed than the issue of standards, relates to how our democracy works and how we can better involve citizens in the process. The need for this is clear and pressing. As the noble Lord, Lord Howarth of Newport, pointed out, recent polling shows that some 60% of young people think we would be better off if we were run simply by a strong leader and did not have to bother with Parliament or elections at all. The reasons for such views are no doubt many and various, but they undoubtedly, as a number of noble Lords have mentioned, include the increasing use of strident language and a declining willingness to listen to other people's points of view. This point was made by the noble Lord, Lord Cormack. There is now a general sense of detachment from the political process, one which is forcibly expressed whenever you go knocking on doors. Many people are angry with all politicians, not just Liberal Democrats, and this sense is increasing, so what should be done about it?

I would like to suggest five things. First, all votes have to matter. The first past the post system means that many people rightly believe that their vote will

have no impact on the result, so they are increasingly disinclined to vote at all. The introduction of PR to the Commons is the first big change needed to hand more power back to the citizen.

Secondly, your Lordships' House must be reformed. Again, we believe that there are compelling arguments for electing this House on a regional basis, on the basis that in a democracy those who make the laws should be chosen by the people, not by party leaders. In the shorter term, given that I cannot see such a wide-ranging reform happening as far as I can see in the future, changes such as ending the hereditary Peers' by-elections and introducing a retirement age would at least begin to tackle our bloated size.

Thirdly, local and regional tiers of government should be given more powers and resources. Far too many decisions in England are taken in Whitehall. This is a recipe neither for a responsive democracy nor for citizens feeling that they have any control over policies that most directly affect their localities and their daily lives.

Fourthly, our constitution is based on conventions and not clear rules. In recent years, many of these conventions have been torn up by arrogant and devil-may-care Prime Ministers. I am afraid I disagree with the noble Lord, Lord Norton of Louth, as I believe we need a written constitution to ensure that everybody is clear what the rules are and that they then have to abide by them.

Fifthly, we have reached a point where there are some decisions from which Parliament shies away but which need to be resolved. Assisted dying is a current prime example of this. We should take a leaf out of the book of Ireland, France, Canada and elsewhere and introduce citizens assemblies to debate and make recommendations on such issues. The case for doing so was compellingly argued by the noble Lord, Lord Hague of Richmond, in a recent newspaper article. He concluded:

"This is a time of year to enjoy some trust in each other, with a generous spirit. ... A bigger role for citizens is not the whole answer to the problems that will assail free societies in the year about to begin. But it's part of the answer".

I agree with him.

Obviously, there is little chance of any changes of substance on any of the issues which we have been discussing today happening before the imminent election. Beyond the election, however, a new Government will have the authority to make whichever of the changes proposed in today's debate they wish. It is purely a matter of whether they will have the political will to do so. For the sake of our parliamentary democracy and the standards followed in our public life, we must hope that they do.

1.45 pm

Baroness Chapman of Darlington (Lab): My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Newby. He described the "detachment" many people feel from our democracy, which was exactly the right word to use. We could have a longer debate on electoral reform and some of the other issues he raised, and I look forward to that, but he is right to express that in the way he did.

I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Featherstone, on her introductory speech. I particularly enjoyed her urging us at the beginning to resist the temptation to simply throw stones at the current Government but then doing an absolutely brilliant job of doing just that; I thought it was absolutely fantastic. I agree with whoever said not to mind too much what the noble Lord, Lord Forsyth, said. If you cannot turn up to your place in Parliament and say what you really think, then we have a big problem on our hands. She has every right to say what she believes to be true.

This has been a helpful and in many ways timely debate. We have heard how personal integrity, robust and responsive institutions, and public confidence go hand in hand. I would add to that list effective public services, because democracy and Governments need to be seen to deliver in order to be seen as credible by the public who elect them.

Much has been said and written on standards in public life in recent years, most notably perhaps on the conduct of the former Prime Minister Boris Johnson during the Covid pandemic. I will not dwell on this, but it would be bizarre not to acknowledge the damage that episode has done. Rules were made and broken by the same people, and a spotlight was shone on the behaviour of people who were supposed to be in command of the country and themselves at a time of great uncertainty. Lies were told on parties, PPE, lobbying and Christopher Pincher, and resignations followed, eventually, but the damage was done.

That damage is done to all in public office, the vast majority of whom are decent, hard-working, honest and committed—although they often go unthanked—in this place, in the Commons, and up and down the country, particularly in local government. I would add that it takes courage now to put yourself forward for elected office. Two Members of our Parliament have been killed in recent years, and it takes courage for women in particular to step up in their community and put themselves forward. We should acknowledge that, thank them and respect them for what they do.

As with other episodes, such as the expenses scandal, the infected blood scandal, Hillsborough and now the Post Office, it has become clear to many that some in powerful positions use their authority to ignore, or even commit, blatant wrongs, and that it takes an almighty effort, and usually a great deal of time, before action happens. There is no doubt that these and other scandals have damaged confidence in our democracy, but for years there have been other warnings: low voter turnout, an unrepresentative political and media class, and the tragic hollowing out of local and regional media. Those in authority have sometimes behaved as though the institutions should be defended before they try to defend sufficiently our citizens. That is what lies behind the anger being felt on behalf of the sub-postmasters. There is also the collapse of Greensill Capital, resulting in the loss of hundreds of jobs and questions arising about lobbying and the oversight of financial institutions.

It is unsurprising, as my noble friend Lady Warwick reminded us, that investigations into public attitude towards our democracy reveal very high levels of

[BARONESS CHAPMAN OF DARLINGTON]
 dissatisfaction. My noble friends Lord Stansgate, Lord Sahota and Lord Leong, the noble Lord, Lord Norton, and the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Harries, reminded us of the dire situation in other countries and our duty to uphold the highest standards here in the United Kingdom. Thankfully—not thankfully; that is the start of a paragraph I was going to read but now will not because of the shortage of time—the majority of those surveyed by the Constitution Unit here expressed the view that politicians have lower ethical standards than ordinary citizens. Having said that, the overwhelming majority of people in the UK still support parliamentary democracy; they just want it to deliver, and they want effective government and effective public services.

The effectiveness of government and confidence in our democracy go together. When accessing public services for your family can feel more like a battle than an entitlement, it is not difficult to understand why people feel frustrated, disillusioned and let down. Too many of the basics are not getting done, whether that is fixing potholes or providing access to dentistry. The experience for too many people in Britain today is that nothing works quite as well as it should, and pretending that everything is fine only makes things worse. The Constitution Unit found that being honest and owning up to mistakes was the most desired characteristic in politicians, and the same could be said for Governments. Citizens have not yet turned their backs entirely on democracy; they just want it to work a bit better.

Sadly, some of the safeguards that are supposed to protect the integrity of our institutions have been weakened in recent years, and now is the right time to reassess. An incoming Labour Government would make changes. ACOBA and the Independent Adviser on Ministers' Interests need to be overhauled and subsumed into a new ethics and integrity commission, operationally independent and free from government control. Reform of your Lordships' House and further devolving power to our regions and nations are also needed.

Protecting our democracy means changing and updating it. We have done this previously and we can do it again. Intense media scrutiny can make political life uncomfortable, but the fact is that the increased accountability we have today, as my noble friend Lord Whitty said, means that more wrongdoing is exposed than in previous decades. That is a very good thing—I am glad that the age of deference is well behind us—but it means we need processes that can act when needed. Nobody argues now that the recall of MPs should be abolished. That process is relatively new; it has led to by-elections and, with it, the engagement of local people. It proves that it is up to constituents to decide whether an MP continues to represent them or not, which is a very good thing. Change is possible. It is necessary, and it needs leaders willing to fight for it, along with rigorous vetting of parliamentary candidates and swift action when things go wrong.

There must be no despair here. I have sensed a little despair this afternoon, and I understand where it comes from, but despair leads to paralysis and a lack of action. We need that clear leadership, a fresh start and a rediscovery of integrity in public life to restore

confidence in us—we are not elected, but perhaps one day soon we will be—as people in political office and in our democratic institutions.

1.54 pm

The Lord Privy Seal (Lord True) (Con): My Lords, I am grateful for the opportunity to be here and listen to a most interesting debate, and I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Featherstone, for securing it and making this possible. I did not greet some of her sallies with the same rapture of the noble Baroness opposite, nor did I agree that they were justified—but we will leave it at that. It has been a most interesting debate, including the proposition from the noble Viscount. I draw attention early to his interesting suggestion that the Select Committee on the Constitution of this House might have a look at the effectiveness of the other Chamber. That is not something that I shall be proposing to my colleagues in government, but I shall be interested to see if he takes that forward, in the light of their activities.

Parliament is a human institution, and we are, as Parliament and as individuals, who we are, with all the frailties that come from the human condition—and all the genius, remarkable gifts, insights, passions and commitments that come from the human condition. We are not perfect. In Parliament, we are the duties we perform and how well we perform them. As your Lordships' Leader, my judgment is that, in this place, we perform those duties well, to a high standard that deserves respect.

But there is a third thing we are. We are also seen by the outsider as who we ourselves say we are. While I think we should be extraordinarily conscious of our frailties—and I own to and condemn where people fall short of those high standards, of course, because I believe that high standards in public life are essential—sometimes in politics we throw so many stones at each other. I heard what my noble friend Lord Young of Cookham said about expecting dirty campaigning; he can include me out on that one. There have been some in this debate who have thrown stones, and we contribute to a perception that Parliament is corrupt and that parliamentarians are interested only in themselves, are bad and not interested, et cetera. The more we contribute to that narrative—and you can make a case in a research paper for this, that and the other, and in footnotes—the more we contribute to the lowering of the esteem of Parliament, which includes this place.

In so much of this debate, with constructive suggestions, we have done that. I wish only that we would actually accentuate the positive about all that we do. I do not believe that the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrat Party or the Conservative Party are corrupt—nor, indeed, do I believe that the Church of England is corrupt. There are bad apples, but I refer to what the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Harries, said about helping people to understand civility, civics and citizenship. We need to help people to understand the good that Parliament does, as well as the follies that it may contain.

There were so many brilliant suggestions that came out in this debate. In saying that, I am not complacent or wanting to be Panglossian. There are changes that

could and should be made. As my noble friend Lady Stowell said, it is true that we are seen as insiders by outsiders—we are seen sometimes as people “up there” who do not take an interest and do not do enough. We must always be mindful of our first and only duty if we are called to the high responsibility of being in Parliament, which is a duty to be public servants and to serve. I thought that my noble friend made a very powerful speech on that subject, as did others who spoke, as a matter of fact.

Having made those preliminary remarks, there are things that I do believe. I think that, really, in all our hearts, we do not believe we are as bad as we sometimes say we are, but we do believe that we could do and must do better. I believe also that we must not always privilege those who shout in the corner of the room. When I was a council leader and had young councillors come to ask me how you should address the business of service and the business of politics, I would say, think of public life and public service as a public meeting. You go into a great hall and start speaking—we have all experienced it; at least, those of us who have sought election or held public office—and someone in the corner of the room starts shouting out noisily, heckling and so on. You let him have one go—sometimes it is her, but usually him—and another go and then, finally, you say, “Look, Sir, we have heard what you think; I want to hear from all these other good people too”.

Sometimes in politics, with the ascendancy of social media and the tribute we pay to it—a point made by a number of those who have spoken in this House—we privilege the shouters in the corner of the room. One great virtue of your Lordships’ House is that, in our careful scrutiny of legislation, we listen to the people who are not the noisy shouters on social media in the corner of the room. It is a vital part of parliamentary democracy that we should listen to that majority who are not always on social media, who are not always shouting and who bring their petitions humbly to the door of Parliament, as they have done for centuries.

The UK’s constitutional and parliamentary democracy is not in as bad a condition as some have said. Of course, it is flawed, like any other institution, and of course it needs consideration. I argued at the start of my remarks that its character is defined by the conduct of its actors, and that is true also of the Civil Service. The noble Baroness, Lady Stuart of Edgbaston, in an important intervention, spoke of the role and duties of the Civil Service. The system must have the capacity to evolve and adapt in order to enable political actors to respond flexibly to the events of the day. But within this system—this was one of the abiding themes of today’s debate—a common set of principles must always underpin the standards expected of public officeholders. It is incumbent on us all to protect the good and to improve things where possible.

There was a distinction in today’s debate between those who believe, as I do, that ultimately, this must come from within us and must be supervised by parliamentary accountability; and those on the other side who said—this was set out in forthright terms by His Majesty’s Opposition—that parliamentarians can never be good enough and must be protected from

themselves, and that we must lend responsibility for policing who we are, how we behave and how we perform our duties to unelected outside panjandrums who are accountable to nobody and known to nobody. Most people in this country could probably name a few politicians. I wonder if any could name a single member of the various bodies that exercise enormous power over Parliament and can make and break parliamentary careers. There are real questions of accountability if you are arguing that we should go forward towards statutory oversight of the activities of Parliament.

We are a representative democracy, and the composition of the elected Chamber reflects the will of the people as most recently expressed at the ballot box. All of us in this House need to remember that, as the noble Lord, Lord Parekh, reminded us. I will come back to the position of the people; the noble Baroness, Lady Fox, spoke powerfully and importantly on that subject. It is germane and underlies the whole debate.

Our parliamentary democracy is effective. I was very struck by the remarks of my noble friend Lord Norton of Louth on this subject in his thoughtful speech. It is effective because it is grounded in a deep constitutionalism born of civil war, conflict, tremendous conflict between the two Houses, a honing of the constitution and a set of constitutional practice which is deep and profound. Anyone who, for example, witnessed the Coronation will have had that sense of the depth of Britain’s great national experience and what we can and have taught the world, and can still lend to the world, with humility. This system, this deep constitutional system, is flexible and adaptable to the circumstances of the day. It allows for the development of policy and the passage of legislation under the careful and proper scrutiny of Parliament. I therefore reject the proposition, put forward by the noble Lord, Lord Newby, that we should frame a written constitution. I am also not greatly attracted to his proportional representation proposition: I think I have heard that one before. Whenever I hear PR mentioned, I always translate it, perhaps from my frailty, as “permanent representation” for the Liberal Democrats, whoever is in office.

We must examine ourselves with humility, self-criticism and so on, but we should not throw away the great strengths of the system we have—certainly not on a coalition deal, I say to the party opposite. I might think, looking at history, that we gave rather too much away in 2010, much as I enjoyed working with my Liberal Democrat colleagues in those days. I single out the noble Lord, Lord Shipley, who was the only one, before the wind-up on the other side, to mention local government, which is such a fundamental part of the warp and woof of democracy: it is the limbs underneath Parliament and is so important. His remarks on audit were important and well taken, and I will certainly reflect on them.

The noble Lord, Lord Sahota, was a bit critical of my noble friend Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton. For my part, I welcome the fact that my noble friend has come to this House. I think it redounds to the credit of this House: it was certainly the practice of the Labour Government after nineteen-ninety-whenever it was.

A noble Lord: 1997.

Lord True (Con): That terrible year; I remember it. It is good that there are senior Ministers in your Lordships' House. We are part of Parliament and there is good accountability: my noble friend appeared before the Foreign Affairs Select Committee of the House of Commons only very recently. I hope other people share my view that having a statesman of such experience here is to the benefit of the House. There is parliamentary accountability.

The other great thread of the debate was questions of behaviour and standards. I am not going to go into the issues of the other place—that is effectively a matter for them. Obviously, in this House, noble Lords are required to sign up to the Code of Conduct, which ensures accountability to parliamentary standards and is enforced by the House of Lords Commissioner for Standards. Members are required to comply with the behaviour code for Parliament. Sanctions can include suspension or expulsion from the House, and those procedures derive from resolutions of the House: they are subject to our judgment and our decisions, but they fall short of the kind of statutory approach the Opposition propose. By the way, I was interested to hear the noble Baroness commit the Labour Party to reform of your Lordships' House in the first term; I am sure that will be examined quite widely.

Throughout this debate, noble Lords, beginning with the noble Baroness, Lady Warwick of Undercliffe, highlighted the important role that the Nolan principles, as articulated by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, play in our political system. I agree that they are fundamental: they are what anybody who aspires to serve in any walk of life, not just politics, should live up to. The current Prime Minister stated in his first speech that his Government

“will have integrity, professionalism and accountability at every level”,

and that “integrity in public life matters”—it does, my Lords.

The Ministerial Code details the Prime Minister's expectations of his Ministers, setting out that they are expected to maintain high standards. Ministers are personally responsible for deciding how to act and conduct themselves in the light of the code, and must be mindful of it in discharging their duties. The code, however, is the Prime Minister's document; he is the ultimate judge of the behaviour expected of a Minister and the appropriate consequences for a breach of standards. Ministers will remain in place only as long as they retain the confidence the Prime Minister. Again, that is where accountability lies in parliamentary democracy. If, as is asserted by some, you give enforcement of that to an unelected, unaccountable, largely unknown body, you may arrive at a point where the judgments of whether somebody or other should be a Minister of the Crown would be decided in a court of law. This would be an unthinkable route to go down.

I am very grateful for the kind remarks of my noble friend Lord Pickles, and his outstanding, persistent and patient work in pushing forward reform of ACOBA will, I hope, be fully and finally recognised. Last July, the Government published *Strengthening Ethics and*

Integrity in Central Government. It was a wide-ranging programme of reform which responded to various reports, including the Boardman report and those from the Committee on Standards in Public Life and the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee. It will mark the introduction of stricter enforcement of the business appointment rules, with a clearer pathway towards sanctions, potentially including financial sanctions, for breaches. As my noble friend knows, that is very much actively under way.

We are increasing transparency and accountability in public appointments. We will be improving the quality and accessibility of departmental transparency releases, including an integrated database which will be put on GOV.UK for the first time. I can tell the noble Lord, Lord McNally, and others that its implementation is under way and proceeding quickly. The revised guidance will apply to all data from January 2024 onwards. We are also tightening up on compliance processes under the existing accounting officer Permanent Secretary system—all to shine more light on some of the recesses of government.

I do not have time to take up the point which my noble friend made, but it is one which has been alluded to so often that it is something we have to think about a lot more: the relationship between government and arm's-length bodies. The process of finding effective accountability there, which has been so brutally illumined in recent weeks and months, is something that we must address and come back to. I will reflect on requests for further opportunities to discuss these matters, although obviously the upcoming Post Office legislation will enable some reflections in that narrow area.

The changes to which I have alluded come in addition to those made in 2022 to strengthen the Ministerial Code, which increased the independence, powers and status of the independent adviser on Ministers' interests and introduced an enhanced process for the independent adviser to initiate investigations, and new details on proportionate sanctions.

There were so many other important speeches made. I alluded earlier to the noble Baroness, Lady Fox of Buckley, who was absolutely right when she picked up on what my noble friend Lady Stowell said: the people must never be allowed to feel that the system does not belong to them. The parliamentary system does not belong to any passing elite, or people who may think they are elite, who wander in here. It belongs to those whom we serve. I also agreed with what my noble friend Lord Howell of Guildford said about the importance of Select Committees in your Lordships' House. We must work to strengthen their effectiveness. Since I have been Leader, and my noble friend Lady Williams has been Captain of the Gentlemen-at-Arms, we have worked much harder to bring committee debates to the Floor of your Lordships' House and I hope very much that that will continue.

Nothing is perfect, not least my timing. I fear that I probably wandered too widely at the start of the debate, but I assure your Lordships that I will study it very carefully. I wanted to come to this debate and hear what noble Lords said. I cannot undertake to respond to documents which are sent to someone else and I will not, unfortunately, be able to accommodate

the noble Lord, Lord Browne of Ladyton. My father taught me never to sign a blank cheque, so I am giving no undertaking I have not seen. But I will have a look at whatever document those people care to send to me.

It has been such a pleasure to have the privilege of responding to your Lordships. I thank all those who have taken part and I can assure noble Lords that I will carefully study *Hansard* in the days ahead.

2.15 pm

Baroness Featherstone (LD): My Lords, I would like to thank all noble Lords for their contributions; they were thoughtful and intelligent. The sense I get from the debate is that we are all struggling in a world where the old ways no longer hold sway, trying to think our way through to making it work for everyone. I also sense that this House really cares about the state of parliamentary democracy and standards in public life—so thank you all.

Motion agreed.

Long-term Plan for Housing Statement

The following Statement was made in the House of Commons on Tuesday 19 December.

“With permission, I would like to make a Statement on the Government’s commitment to housebuilding and the planning policy reforms we are making today.

This Government want to build more homes in the right places, more quickly, more beautifully and more sustainably. We know that the right way to deliver this is through a reformed planning system. Today, the Secretary of State and I are laying out our plan for that reform, and we are clear that it is only through up-to-date local plans that local authorities can deliver for communities, protect the land and the assets that matter most, and create the conditions for more homes to be delivered.

Having plans in place unlocks land for homes, for hospitals and general practitioner centres, for schools, for power grid connections and more. It lays the foundations for our economic growth and the levelling up of our communities. The first change we are making today is to update the National Planning Policy Framework. We consulted on a series of proposals last December and received more than 26,000 responses, which we have worked through in detail.

The resulting update builds on the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 and delivers on the intent set out by the Secretary of State last year, and it does so in a way that will promote building the right homes in the right places with the right infrastructure, which will ensure that the environment is protected and give local people a greater say on where and where not to place new, beautiful development.

I will now summarise the key changes being made to the framework today, and honourable Members should refer to the consultation response and the framework itself for the published policies. First, the standard method for assessing local housing need figures has sometimes been difficult to apply in some

areas and has been blind to the exceptional characteristics of local communities. The new NPPF makes it clear that the outcome of the standard method is an advisory starting point in plan making for establishing an area’s housing requirement.

The revised NPPF also now provides more clarity on what may constitute exceptional circumstances for using an alternative method to assess housing need. The framework is also clear that the urban uplift should be accommodated in the urban areas in which it is applied and should not be exported unless there is a voluntary cross-boundary agreement in place. New homes are most desperately needed in urban areas, so it is essential that city councils plan properly for local people.

Secondly, given the importance of the green belt to so many, the new NPPF is clear that there is generally no requirement on local authorities to review or alter green-belt boundaries. Unlike Labour’s plan to concrete over the countryside, we will not impose top-down release of green-belt land against the wishes of local communities. Where a relevant local planning authority chooses to conduct a review, existing national policy will continue to expect that green-belt boundaries are altered only where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, and this should be only through the preparation or updating of plans. The Government are making no changes to the rules that govern what can and cannot be built on green-belt land, but we are clarifying in guidance where brownfield development can occur on the green belt, provided that the openness of the green belt is not harmed.

Thirdly, the Government are clear that the character of an existing area should be respected, particularly in the historic suburbs of our great towns and cities. The new NPPF therefore recognises that there may be situations in plan making where significant uplifts in urban residential densities would be inappropriate, as they would be wholly out of character with that existing area. In these cases, authorities need not plan for such development. That will apply where there is a design code that is adopted, or will be adopted, as part of the local plan. I know the shadow Minister will sympathise with this change, given that he recently opposed 1,500 new homes in his constituency due to the impact on Greenwich’s local character.

Fourthly, where an up-to-date plan is in place—a plan less than five years old—and contains a deliverable five-year supply of land when examined by the inspector, authorities will no longer be required to update that supply annually. This change provides those authorities with additional protection from the presumption in favour of sustainable development. We are also fully removing what are known as the 5% and 10% buffers, which could be applied to an authority’s housing land supply. A transitional arrangement will ensure that decision making on live applications is not affected, thus avoiding disruption to applications in the system. For authorities that have not yet passed examination but are either at examination, regulation 18 or regulation 19 stage, and have both a policy map and proposed allocations, there will be a two-year grace period in which they need to demonstrate only a four-year housing

[BARONESS FEATHERSTONE]

land supply for decision-making. That is a strong incentive for councils to now do the right thing and agree a local plan.

Fifthly, local communities that have worked hard to put neighbourhood plans in place should not be penalised for the failure of their council to ensure an up-to-date local plan. The new NPPF therefore extends protection for neighbourhood plans from speculative development from two to five years, where those plans allocate at least one housing site. The updated framework also gives greater support to self-build, custom-build and community-led housing, and to encouraging the delivery of older people's housing, including retirement housing, housing with care and care homes.

Next, the NPPF cements the role of beauty and placemaking in the planning system; it now expressly uses the word "beautiful" in relation to "well-designed places". It also now requires greater "visual clarity" on design requirements set out in planning conditions and supports gentle density through the promotion of mansard roof development. Finally, the new NPPF also strengthens protections for agricultural land, by being clear that consideration should be given to the availability of agricultural land for food production in development decisions. The NPPF also supports the Government's energy security strategy, by giving significant weight to the importance of energy efficiency in the adaptation of existing buildings, while protecting heritage.

With the updated NPPF now in place, the other reforms we are making today are focused on setting higher expectations for performance. Those who operationalise the system—local authorities, the Planning Inspectorate and statutory consultees—must live up to their responsibilities. To support that, we are taking action on four fronts. First, we will ensure greater transparency, because exposing what is really going on in a system sparks action. So we will publish a new local authority performance dashboard in 2024, and pull back the veil on the use of extension of time agreements, which in too many instances are concealing poor performance.

Secondly, we have been providing, and will continue to provide, additional financial support. That includes the increased planning fees that went live a fortnight ago, as well as a range of funds to tackle backlogs and improve capability. Thirdly, we will tackle slow processes, with Sam Richards leading a review into the statutory consultee system and a greater focus from the Planning Inspectorate where planning committees are seeing their decisions overturned on appeal.

Finally, we will intervene where we need to. The Secretary of State has issued a direction to seven of the worst authorities in terms of plan making, requiring them to publish a plan timetable within 12 weeks of the publication of the new NPPF. Should they fail, we will consider further intervention. We are also designating two additional authorities for their decision-making performance and we will review the thresholds for designation to make sure we are not letting off the hook authorities that should be doing better.

We are also taking action in London, because the homes needed by the capital are simply not being built and opportunities for urban brownfield regeneration go begging as a result of the Mayor's anti-housing

policy and approach. A review launched today will identify where changes to policy could speed up the delivery of much-needed homes. If directing change in London becomes necessary, this Government will do that.

In designing these reforms we have aimed to facilitate desirable development, constrained only by appropriate protections. That is a balance I am confident we have struck."

2.17 pm

Baroness Taylor of Stevenage (Lab): My Lords, there surely cannot be any debate on the fact that we are in the midst of a catastrophic housing crisis, which figures from Shelter tell us leaves almost 300,000 of our fellow citizens homeless every night, including 123,000 children, and over a million families on social housing waiting lists. A planning policy framework doing its job would at least put the steps in place to start delivering the numbers of homes that would resolve this crisis, but this plan is neither long-term nor a plan to deliver housing.

Sadly, the Government's caving-in to Back-Benchers in the other place, and developers on housing targets, means this planning policy framework will mean housing delivery falling far from the mark for the foreseeable future. Data published this week showed that consents are at an all-time low, 20% down on last year, and the National House Building Council shows a dramatic fall in registrations, down 42% in quarter two compared with last year.

Commitment to delivering real improvement in housing delivery has to be called into question when we have had no less than 16 Housing Ministers since 2010, and when the Secretary of State delivered his statement on this planning policy framework to a press conference, rather than in Parliament. The National Planning Policy Framework should provide the link to ensure that local councils are taking into account the strategic need for housing, industrial and commercial land, food and farming requirements and the whole range of environmental issues as they apply in each area. Local plans are vital to deliver what is needed across the country, but also to engage local communities in how that is done and to provide the protections needed against speculative, unwanted or dangerous development.

However, the level of uncertainty the Government have generated by flip-flopping over their commitment to housing, by failure to create proper industrial strategy and failure to take environmental issues seriously enough, has fatally undermined all of that and has now culminated in 58 local authorities either scrapping or delaying their local plans as they wrestle with the uncertainty over housing targets. Yet this Statement seems to unequivocally point the finger at local authorities.

I suggest that the Minister in the other place might want to look in the mirror here. The example closest to home for me was that after extensive local research, two years of intensive public consultation and partnership working, and an extended three-week public inquiry, our Stevenage local plan was submitted to the Government on time—and then sat on the holding direction on the Secretary of State's desk for 451 days until it was finally approved.

It is not just on housing that this framework fails to deliver. Because we have no proper industrial strategy, it is almost impossible for local plans to meet the needs for industrial commercial permissions, and the honourable Member for Buckingham in the other place raised on 19 December that it does not meet the stronger protections for food production land use either, with a wishy-washy statement quoted by the Minister:

“The availability of agricultural land used for food production should be considered”.

What does that mean? Question after question when the Statement was debated in the other place, largely from Conservative Members, sought clarification of exactly what is meant by the fact that housing targets are an advisory starting point. The best the Minister could come up with was:

“I cannot pre-empt or suggest exactly what that will mean in all instances”.—[*Official Report*, Commons, 19/12/23; cols. 1275-6.]

One senior member of a respected planning stakeholder body told me that they stopped taking notes at the Secretary of State’s press conference on this topic because what he said just did not make any sense. Can the Minister please tell us how this process of advisory starting points for housing targets will deliver the 300,000 homes a year that are so urgently needed? We need to be clear here. There will be no levelling up unless we are at least aiming to provide a safe, secure, affordable and sustainable home for everyone. How does this set of policies deliver that?

On the key issue of resources, this is crippling local authorities’ ability to deliver against their planning obligations; indeed, the Royal Town Planning Institute reports 90% of local authorities as having a backlog of cases and 70% as having difficulties in recruiting. How will the Government support local authorities to resource their planning function as demand increases when their budgets are squeezed by the skyrocketing costs of children’s services, adult social care and, of course, homelessness? How do the Government reconcile their threats to remove planning powers from local authorities that do not meet the three-month deadline for delivery of their plan with the absolute obligation for authorities to consult local people? With a significant change on the issue of housing targets, surely it is understandable that further consultation must be undertaken. Has that been taken into account? If, as the Secretary of State has threatened, recalcitrant local authorities have their planning powers removed, who will undertake the planning work for their area? The Planning Inspectorate is already underresourced and its involvement in local plan-making would be a significant conflict of interest.

Time and again in debates during the passage of the levelling-up Act we were told that the Government would not accept amendments because provision would be included in the National Planning Policy Framework; for example, on ensuring that housebuilders focus on healthy homes and on making specific provision for housing for older people, flooding, access to open space, protections for historic buildings and a wide range of environmental issues. What assessment has the department carried out to ensure that all those issues—all those promises that were made to us—are incorporated into this new set of policies?

I return to my initial point: without a determined effort to deliver 300,000 homes a year, which we will need to resolve the housing crisis, we will continue to see the shameful situation where children are homeless, where they share beds with their parents because of lack of adequate space, where permitted development allows appalling housing conditions to prevail, and where poor housing affects the health and life chances of a whole generation. Perhaps it is time for a new ITV drama, “Mr Bates versus DLUHC”. In failing to tackle this through a clear housing strategy and the policies to support that, including targets, this policy amounts just to failure and another missed opportunity.

Baroness Pinnock (LD): My Lords, I remind the House of my registered interests as a councillor in Kirklees—where we have an up-to-date local plan—and as a vice-president of the Local Government Association.

As the noble Baroness, Lady Taylor, just said, there are 1.2 million households on the social housing waiting lists and the Government’s own assessment is that 300,000 new homes need to be built every year. Having somewhere to live is a basic human right and a basic requirement that all Governments should fulfil. We have a housing crisis, and the response as set out in this Statement and the newly published National Planning Policy Framework fails to address that crisis. The policies are incoherent and fail on many levels. For example, the newly published NPPF refers to social housing only once and in a single sentence. There is a desperate need for social housing to rent. Can the Minister tell the House how long the 1.2 million households on the waiting list will have to wait for a safe, affordable home at a rent that is within their means?

I could tell the Minister of a family in my ward that contacted me this week. There is the wife, husband and a four year-old boy living with the grandmother, who has serious dementia, and a baby is on the way, in a two-bed Victorian terraced house with a front door that opens on to an A-road and the back door on to a ginnel, as we call it. It is an alley, I guess; we call them ginnels in Yorkshire. There is nowhere, literally no space, for that four year-old to play, or to put the baby. They rang me to ask what chance they had for a council house or a housing association home, and I had to tell them the awful truth: that virtually all the family homes have been sold under right to buy, very few replaced, and their chances are virtually nil within the next five years. How are the Government going to address that example and many, many more like it?

Debate on this vital national policy should have taken place when we debated the levelling-up Bill in this House. Many Members across the House, as the noble Baroness, Lady Taylor, said, asked for the information on the revised NPPF at that time, and it is now clear to me why the Government held back, because the National Planning Policy Framework as published fails to tackle this housing crisis by enabling local authorities to plan with confidence and with the goal of meeting their local housing need.

Housing need is defined not just by numbers of housing units required but also by type and tenure. The Government’s own figures show that 62% of the rise in households is of people over 65 living alone.

[BARONESS PINNOCK]

Perhaps the Minister can say how the Government intend to ensure that this particular need is to be met, given the policies that they have now published. Is it possible, for instance, for local authorities to allocate a site for building with specific requirements to meet such locally determined need?

Next, the Government are relaxing housing targets by describing these as an “advisory starting point”. Can the Minister flesh out “advisory” in this context? How advisory is advisory? What advice will the Government be giving to the Planning Inspectorate on the definition of that word and what they expect it to mean?

Given that housing targets are to be determined more locally, can the Minister explain the rationale behind the requirement for 20 of the largest towns and cities to have 35% more homes than are determined by their local housing assessment? Why is it 35%, not 20% or 40%? Where does the figure come from, and what will it actually mean for those towns and cities?

One of the major holes in the Government’s planning and housing policies is that there are no penalties for developers who, having obtained planning consent, fail to start building or start a site and then delay building out. This is one of the major reasons for the crisis in housebuilding numbers: more than 1 million properties have planning consent but have not been built. Yet local authorities are to be penalised for failing to provide sites while, in those same local authorities, developers are failing to develop sites that have permission. What will the Government do about this dreadful state of affairs? What pressures will they put on developers to ensure that, once planning consent is given, the developer gets on and builds out the site?

Many residents oppose new homes because of the impact on local infrastructure, such as traffic, school places and access to health services. Many are justified in their complaints. For example, in my area of Kirklees, GP patient numbers are at 1,900 per doctor, as compared to the national average of 1,600. When residents raise the issue of more houses meaning greater numbers of patients for their local GP, where I live it is genuinely the case. There are already 20% more patients per GP where I live than the national average. What will the Government do to address the genuine complaints from residents about local infrastructure? That is just one example.

Providing the housing that we need is dependent on local authorities having up-to-date local plans, yet the majority of them do not have one. What action will the Government take to ensure that local authorities have up-to-date local plans? A local plan is the initial building block that unlocks sites for housing of a type and tenure that is so desperately needed. This Statement absolutely fails to address this. I look forward to the Minister’s replies to all the questions that have been raised; if she cannot answer them, I hope that she can give us written responses.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (Baroness Penn) (Con): My Lords, I will endeavour to answer the questions from both noble Baronesses as fully as I can, but it is first worth reflecting on what this update to the

NPPF sought to do. Both noble Baronesses rightly situated it in the context of the broader changes in the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act to bring forward a reformed planning system that allows more homes to be built in the right places, more quickly, more beautifully and more sustainably.

The right way to do this is through a reformed planning system. In December last year, we laid out our plan to do that. We made it abundantly clear that the only way to do so is through up-to-date local plans, which local authorities can deliver for communities to protect the land and assets that matter most and lay the foundation for economic growth. Part of that plan for reform was the update to the National Planning Policy Framework. In December 2022, we consulted on a series of proposals that received more than 26,000 responses, which we have worked through in detail. The updates that we made, which were announced at the end of last year, strike a careful balance between delivering homes that our communities need and protecting the things that we care most about, such as our natural environment, heritage assets, high streets and town centres—matters referenced by both noble Baronesses. The NPPF update acknowledges that different areas and different parts of the country must be approached in different ways and that local authorities and communities are best placed to ensure that the right homes are in the right places, where they are both needed and wanted.

Both noble Baronesses asked about the change to the NPPF which clarified that the standard method of assessing housing need is the starting point for local authorities. The NPPF expects local planning authorities to evidence and provide for their housing needs. The Government are clear that the standard method should still be used to inform the process. Local authorities can put forward their own approach to assessing housing needs, but this should be used only in exceptional circumstances. Authorities can expect their method to be scrutinised closely at examination. The standard method remains the starting point for this process and only in exceptional circumstances would we expect local planning authorities to move away from that. However, it is right that we allow for those exceptional circumstances. In the updated framework, the demographics of a particular area are pointed to as the factor which might mean that an alternative method would be appropriate for that planning authority to use.

Part of delivering homes in a way that meets community needs is about having a more diversified housing market. Therefore, the framework also strengthens support for SME builders and the wider diversity of the housing market by emphasising the importance of community-led housing development, ensuring that local authorities seek opportunities to support small sites to come forward and removing barriers to smaller and medium builders in the planning system. In the long run, that will also ensure that we make progress in delivering the housing that we need and keep us on track to deliver 1 million new homes during this Parliament.

The noble Baroness, Lady Pinnock, asked about social housing. Her points were well made. These updates to the NPPF did not have that as a particular

focus but the Government are absolutely committed to increasing the supply of affordable and social housing. That is why our latest affordable housing programme is backed by more than £11 billion. We have increased the delivery of affordable housing under this Government. I would be very happy to sit down with the noble Baroness and discuss specific planning barriers to affordable housing further.

The noble Baroness, Lady Taylor, referred to the resources needed to unlock the planning system. She is absolutely right. That is why we have increased the resources going into local planning services. The new planning rules that came into force on 6 December increase fees for major applications by 35% and minor ones by 25%. The indexing arrangements now in place also ensure that they rise in line with inflation. Beyond that, the planning skills delivery fund was boosted by £5 million to £29 million. In the first round of funding, 180 local planning authorities are receiving collectively over £14 million. We recognise that the changes we have made to the planning system in the levelling-up Act and through the changes to the NPPF need to be matched by additional resources, which we have put in.

I turn to housing standards and a range of other issues that were debated at length during the passage of the levelling-up Bill. The Government have committed to bring forward further changes to the National Planning Policy Framework, bringing in a national development management framework. We are committed to consulting on those changes this year but, for the development of local plans, we believe that the combination of the measures in the Act and those announced and changed in the NPPF at the end of last year provide clarity and certainty for local areas to be able to make their plans and deliver on them.

Where that is not proving possible for local authorities, the Secretary of State has been clear that the Government are prepared to intervene. That is why the Secretary of State issued a direction about plan-making to seven of the worst authorities. The best outcome from those directions is that the local authorities themselves bring forward plans within 12 weeks and set out a clear timetable to do so. Should they fail, we will consider further intervention, but it would be based on the particular circumstances of those local authorities and reflect their points. I do not want to pre-empt that, as the best outcome for those areas is for the local authorities to take forward those plans themselves.

We are also taking action in London, because the homes needed in the capital are simply not being built. Opportunities for urban brownfield regeneration are being left untaken, as a result of the mayor's anti-housing policy and approach. His plan does not contain sufficient ambition for housing, and he is underdelivering against it. That is why we are undertaking an urgent review of it.

There are a number of areas from both noble Baronesses that I may not have addressed. The noble Baroness, Lady Pinnock, mentioned infrastructure and of course we have the housing infrastructure fund, which provides the funding needed to ensure that development can take place, is supported locally and comes with the schools, hospitals and GP places needed

to support it. I undertake to write to both noble Baronesses in detail on any further points on which I need to follow up.

2.42 pm

Lord Young of Cookham (Con): My Lords, there is much to welcome in the Statement—namely, the increase in planning resources—but it represents a major change in government housing policy, which was not there when the levelling-up Bill was introduced. As the noble Baroness, Lady Taylor, said, this was introduced to head off a rebellion in the other place. As a result, the targets are advisory, not mandatory, and we are already seeing a result—not just in plans being withdrawn but in South Oxfordshire doing something unheard of in planning by deleting from its plan for development sites that had already been included. We may end up with more up-to-date plans eventually, but they will have fewer homes in them than the country needs. How will a democratically elected Government, committed to building 300,000 new homes a year, deliver that if they are totally dependent on the good will of local authorities that do not share that commitment?

Baroness Penn (Con): My Lords, we announced a number of different changes at the end of last year. However, as I said to both the noble Baronesses, the standard method for assessing housing need remains the starting point for local authorities. It is only in exceptional circumstances that we would expect them to move away from that, and that must be well evidenced. In such circumstances, where it is not appropriate for that area, there is a way and method for those local authorities to put forward a well-considered and well-thought-out local plan, which would have a much better chance of being delivered than something that does not command local support and does not suit the needs of the local area.

We have made other changes that may result in the changes that my noble friend talked about—for example, by removing the buffers needed on land supply set out in local plans. They go over and above the amount of land needed to deliver against the assessed housing need for an area. Where local authorities have done the right thing, put a plan in place and identified the land they need to deliver against the local housing need in their area, it is not the right way forward to require those local authorities to hold a 5% or 10% buffer on top.

Lord Best (CB): My Lords, I pick up on a point made by the noble Baroness, Lady Pinnock. If we could see the production of decent, accessible, energy-efficient, companionable, new retirement housing for older people needing and wanting to rightsize, we could free up tens of thousands of family homes, which are so badly needed. The planning system can allocate sites, not least urban sites that regenerate town centres, and those absolutely essential local plans can stipulate requirements for a proportion of such housing in all major developments. I add that at the same time removing stamp duty for purchases by those over pension age would stimulate the market, increasing revenue to HM Treasury through the chain that follows, and that housing for older people saves massive sums for the NHS and adult care services.

[LORD BEST]

Will the Minister get behind all those trying to boost the output of well-designed homes for the estimated 3 million older people who are interested in downsizing and rightsizing?

Baroness Penn (Con): I absolutely support the remarks by the noble Lord on needing the right housing to meet the needs of people at all stages in their lives. There are changes within this update to the NPPF that will encourage the delivery of older people's housing, including retirement housing, housing with care and care homes. In addition, the Government have the Older People's Housing Taskforce, which is exploring broader changes that we might wish to see to encourage housing for older people to be built in the areas where it is most suitable and most needed. Also, there is the point that the noble Lord made: ensuring that we have the right solution for older people has a knock-on effect throughout our housing supply on the availability for those who may be trying to get on the housing ladder in the first place.

The Lord Bishop of Chelmsford: My Lords, the Archbishops' Commission on Housing, Church and Community recommended that the Government adopt a long-term plan to address the scale of the housing crisis in the UK. I am glad to see that they have adopted the language of long-termism, as the UK's housing has been held back by short-term planning and decision-making for far too long. However, I believe that such a plan must be holistic, taking into account all elements that make up a good housing strategy, with consideration of both new builds and existing buildings. What plans do the Government have to improve the quality of the homes that we already have, for example by undertaking a programme to upgrade EPC ratings, or by equalising the rate of VAT on repairs for existing houses with that for constructing new homes?

Baroness Penn (Con): My Lords, the right reverend Prelate is right that, when we consider the quality of people's homes, we absolutely need to think about existing stock, not just new homes. When it comes to new homes, we have just launched the consultation on the future homes standard, which will have in place regulations that mean that all new homes built from 2025 onwards will need to be net-zero ready and have much higher levels of energy efficiency. They would most likely have heat pumps installed as a way to deliver those net-zero targets. When it comes to existing homes, we have a huge range of government support in place to support increased energy efficiency. A lot of that has focused initially on those on low incomes: for example, looking at social housing, there is the social housing decarbonisation fund. We are broadening that out to support other people too. We have the boiler upgrade grant, which allows people to replace their old boilers with heat pumps, with a significant proportion of those costs met by government. We have debated VAT a number of times in this House, but I will say that we have introduced a reduced rate of VAT for energy-efficiency measures, and we extended the scope of the measures that that covers in the most recent Autumn Statement.

Lord Naseby (Con): My Lords, as the National Planning Policy Framework's primary purpose is more homes, is it not strange that His Majesty's Government have yet to make any statement about a new concept of the new town movement? You can see on the ground the wonderful work that was done as long ago as the 30s with the garden city just alongside the A1—I drove past it yesterday. Then there are the new towns. My former constituency was Northampton, and there is the new city of Milton Keynes, which was only a village before. That concept surely has to have a role, modernised to meet today's requirements in the future.

Secondly, my noble friend quite rightly says: "Yes, more new homes". But is not the problem at the moment that the developers do not have the confidence that she clearly has? The figures for 2023 are very low. Are they not going to be only marginally better in 2024? Against that background, will His Majesty's Government bring in new incentives for young couples to be able to provide some of that demand, so that developers can have some confidence to move forward?

Baroness Penn (Con): My noble friend makes two very good points. England has a proud history of new town development, and well-planned, beautifully designed, locally led garden communities are playing a vital role in helping to meet our housing need, through providing a stable pipeline of new homes. The Garden Communities programme supports local authorities to build places that people are happy to call their home. That programme was launched in 2014, and has awarded over £58 million of capacity funding to assist places to deliver their proposals for housing. A further £12 million has also been invested to deliver the infrastructure critical to unblock the delivery of homes. The 47 locally led garden communities have the capacity to deliver over 300,000 new homes by 2050. That is something that the Government absolutely continue to support.

The number of planning consents being down was referenced by the noble Baroness, Lady Taylor. When it comes to the wider conditions in the housing market, we recognise that this is a challenging time. The broader economic conditions we face due to very high levels of inflation, and the high interest rates that are in place to bring that down, make it harder for people to get on the housing ladder. That is why this Government have been focused, laser-like, on tackling inflation. We met our commitment last year to halve the level of inflation, and are back on the road to the Bank of England's 2% target. That is the most effective way in which we can make sure that people are able to afford their mortgages and access the housing market in the way they wish to. But there are also important things that we can do—for example, ensuring that our affordable housing programme continues throughout this period to provide more stability and certainty in terms of the pipeline of new homes while it is a difficult market out there for housebuilders.

Lord Carrington (CB): My Lords, may I ask the Minister, following on from the question from the right reverend Prelate, about the certificates—the EPCs? We have had a problem and a review on EPC measurement. Could she let us know where we are on that review?

Baroness Penn (Con): My Lords, my understanding is that the Government launched an EPC action plan to take forward a number of changes to EPCs. We are well on track for delivering against the majority of actions within that, but we continue to look at it. We recognise that there is potentially the need for wider reform to energy performance certificates; we are looking at that very closely and doing further work on it.

Lord Berkeley (Lab): My Lords, I have the honour of serving on the Built Environment Committee in your Lordships' House, along with one or two other colleagues here. We have been listening to evidence in the last few months from builders, planners and Ministers about why the 300,000 target has not been reached. I think the low point for me was evidence from an Environment Minister and the Housing Minister, who sat next to each other trying to explain why it was all very difficult. At the end of the evidence session, I thought, "When did they ever talk to each other? It is as if they are in completely different silos". We have heard answers from the noble Baroness, Lady Penn, this afternoon about the importance of the environment. She mentioned affordable housing once or twice. The noble Baroness, Lady Pinnock, mentioned that it is only in the NPPF once, I think; I may have that wrong.

When I looked at the Housing Minister's Statement on 19 December when he launched this, I was astonished to read one paragraph which used several phrases which to me indicate what is really important for this Government. One phrase was "gentle density"—I do not know what that means, but perhaps some experts can tell me—on the design of mansard roof development. Does that really go in a Statement? There was "well-designed places"—we know what that is—and then, "visual clarity" on the design requirements.—[*Official Report*, Commons, 19/12/23; col. 1266.]

Also, the word "beauty" comes into it, as the noble Baroness said. These are all very good things, especially if you want a lovely new house in the countryside, miles from anywhere, but are they the priorities for affordable housing? This is the problem. We have lost sight of what is important. I live in Cornwall and the lack of affordable housing there is just terrible. If we are to say that everything has to be a "gentle density" with "visual clarity" of place, I do not think we are going to get there—until we concentrate on what is important, which is affordable housing.

Baroness Penn (Con): I do not think that the delivery of more affordable housing and the delivery of more beautiful housing need to be in tension with each other. In fact, the right housing in the right place allows more support for development to go ahead, which is one of the big barriers we see to delivering more housing in local areas, and affordable housing should be beautiful housing too. Noble Lords have had a lot of debates in this House about the standards within our homes, particularly within our social housing. We should be no less ambitious for the standards that people enjoy in their housing, whether it is social housing, affordable housing or private housing. The noble Baroness, Lady Pinnock, talked about space for children to play, for example. Taking into account that kind of amenity is important for the right development to go ahead. We should recognise that we have made

significant progress in recent years in building more houses. We have had some of the highest housing delivery in the past four years that we have had in the past 20 years, and we seek to continue that, but without those measures necessarily needing to be in tension. The noble Lord spoke about Ministers talking to each other in different departments. I reassure him that, particularly on these areas that cut across different interests and on something like net zero or environmental impact, we bring together the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, my department and Defra to work together to provide solutions on these issues.

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (GP): My Lords, I shall follow the theme of social housing. I declare my position as a vice-president of the LGA and the NALC. Responding to the noble Baroness, Lady Pinnock, the Minister said that the Government are committed to social housing. We have just heard that again, and it is great, but the Minister may be aware of a document from the National Housing Federation, *Let's Fix the Housing Crisis: Delivering a Long-Term Plan for Housing*. This crosses over with her former departmental responsibilities. It asserts:

"The wider fiscal, societal and economic benefits of social housing are poorly captured in current cost benefit analysis", and, particularly, in the Government's Green Book. The NHF stresses that we need housing

"in the right location, with the right support for those who need it",

which sounds very much like the Green Party's Right Homes, Right Place, Right Price. Does the Minister agree that planning needs to think about this social element as well as the purely spatial element? We have been relying on the market for decades now. It has not worked out very well and has given the crisis we have now, plus the terrible privatisation of right to buy. I will pick up a point from the noble Lord, Lord Crisp: one of the things that the NHF report highlights is the increase in the long-term cost of housing benefit as a result of the increase in the number of retired people who are in private rental housing now. Do we not have to join up far more planning and financial considerations and pure human considerations to secure an affordable place for everybody to live?

Baroness Penn (Con): My Lords, a number of the changes that we are making to the NPPF address some of the noble Baroness's concerns. They are all about allowing a local area, using the evidence of local need, to produce a plan that works for that area. The noble Baroness touched on the Green Book and how we value social housing but also wider social benefits when we look at value for money in government projects. The Government have done work on reforming the Green Book over a number of years to ensure that we better take that into account. There is also better assessment of national well-being as a factor when we look at policies. We are looking, for example, at valuing our green space more clearly in our policy assessments, so that we can take a more well-rounded look. That is at the heart of my department's mission. When looking at levelling up across the whole of the United Kingdom, one point that often gets made is that the old ways of doing things incentivises you to invest only in London and the south-east. While that is incredibly important,

[BARONESS PENN]

we know that investing in communities across our country is how we will actually deliver for people, and that is what my department has been created to do.

Lord Shipley (LD): My Lords, the Minister has said that it is not the purpose of this long-term plan for housing to address the need for more homes for social rent. She has also said that the Government are absolutely committed to increasing the supply of affordable and social housing. In the face of the 14% increase in the past year of people in temporary accommodation in our country—a trend which is likely to continue rising—what is the Government’s short to medium-term plan for getting more long-term homes for those being forced to live in temporary accommodation?

Baroness Penn (Con): As I have previously said to noble Lords, we have over £11 billion for the affordable homes programme, but a number of other measures were announced, most recently in the Autumn Statement. For example, the local housing allowance uplift will help with the affordability of the private rented sector, reducing the chances that people might move into temporary accommodation. We also have the Homelessness Reduction Act, which is matched by funding to try to prevent people moving into temporary accommodation altogether. At the Autumn Statement, we also announced additional money for local authorities to increase the supply and quality of their temporary housing to bring down the costs of putting that provision in place so that we can invest in the longer-term solution, which is more affordable housing available to more people.

NHS Winter Update Statement

The following Statement was made in the House of Commons on Monday 8 January.

“With permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to make a Statement on the winter pressures facing the national health service and social care, as well as the impact of the ongoing junior doctors’ strikes. The NHS employs 1.3 million people and the social care system a further 1.5 million people. Together, they treat and care for tens of millions of people every day. We all know that winter is the most challenging time of the year for the NHS and social care, as our workforce have to tackle the pressures created by cold weather and seasonal viruses.

To put our health and social care system in a strong position heading into winter, this year we started preparing earlier than ever before. In January last year, we published our recovery plan for urgent and emergency care and provided £1 billion of dedicated funding to boost emergency capacity. The plan committed to delivering 5,000 new permanent staffed beds. I am pleased to update the House that more than 3,000 were already in place in December, and in the coming weeks NHS England will meet the 5,000 pledge and make sure that it has almost 100,000 core beds ready when Covid and flu peak.

Our recovery plan also pledged 10,000 virtual ward beds so that more patients can be monitored safely at home, away from hospital. I am pleased to update the House that we have delivered more than 11,000 virtual ward beds, and they have been a vital service for eligible patients over the festive period.

We have boosted our ambulance service with £200 million of additional funding, putting new vehicles on the road, improving response times and getting crews out and about for more hours. In recognition of the importance of patients being discharged promptly from hospital when it is safe to do so, we have made sure that every acute hospital in England has access to a care transfer hub, bringing together teams from the NHS and social care to speed up discharge, backed by an extra £600 million for social care. To help prevent the spread of winter viruses, we brought forward flu and Covid vaccinations, protecting the most vulnerable and making them less likely to require hospital treatment.

But no matter how thorough our preparations are, winter will always be the most challenging time of the year for our NHS. That is why it is extremely regrettable that the British Medical Association’s junior doctors committee has chosen to strike not once, but twice at this time of year. It has also chosen to strike for an unprecedented length of time, putting profound pressure on hospitals and GP surgeries throughout the country.

Before Christmas, the BMA’s strike caused the cancellation of almost 90,000 appointments, some of which will have to be rescheduled for a second or even third time. That is in addition to the 1.1 million appointments that have already been affected since strikes began in December 2022. This is not just another statistic; there is a person behind every one of these appointments, who may be in pain or distress and who now must wait longer for the care they deserve.

Last week, a member of the BMA leadership said that

‘strike action benefits absolutely nobody’.

They were absolutely right on that. The ongoing strikes are causing more appointments to be cancelled and more worry for patients and are putting a significant strain on staff.

During December’s and this week’s strikes, the NHS’s priority has been to protect patient safety. Resources have been channelled into urgent and emergency care, including vital neonatal and maternity services. Huge efforts were made to make the most of the working days between Christmas and new year, because throughout any strike action, it is crucial that every patient who needs urgent medical care comes forward as normal. We continue to face challenges, and strikes have stretched emergency care, but thanks to the meticulous hard work in local trusts in preparing for strikes, as well as to the huge personal sacrifices that clinicians and staff are making to pick up the slack, emergency care has largely held up and the system has coped under the circumstances.

Staff across the NHS deserve our sincerest thanks for the heroic efforts they have made throughout the unprecedented strikes. I thank the doctors, nurses, paramedics and all frontline staff who have come into work to support each other, deliver care and protect patients; the consultants, including Members of this

House, who are working extra hours, cancelling their holidays or even coming out of retirement to safeguard patient safety; the managers, administrators and NHS leaders who are working day and night to make sure that the right staff are in the right place to protect patient safety; and all those working in social care, from local authority staff to care workers and carers, who have rallied round to support hospitals.

I know that work does not stop when the strikes stop. NHS staff will begin turning their attention to recovering from the impact of the industrial action, restarting elective treatment and improving the flow of patients through emergency departments. The junior doctors committee's choice to strike at this time of year means that that work must now be done under additional pressures, as staff move to catch up from industrial action as well as tackling the impacts of cold weather, Covid, flu and norovirus.

I want to find fair and reasonable solutions to industrial action. One of my first acts as Health and Social Care Secretary was to bring in the British Medical Association for talks to end these long-running disputes, as well as meeting representatives for Agenda for Change unions who speak for frontline staff, including nurses. We have reached agreements with unions that represent consultants and specialty doctors on offers to be put to their members. Those offers will modernise contracts, realign pay scales and improve doctors' career progression, while delivering value for the taxpayer and protecting the hard-won progress we have made to halve inflation. Consultants and specialty doctors are pausing strike action while members vote on the offers, with the results of both ballots expected shortly. The Government and BMA agree that they are the best deals available to us, and I very much hope that members will vote in favour so that those positive changes can be made and we can move the NHS forward.

On junior doctor negotiations, the talks that began in November had been progressing with the BMA junior doctors committee. The talks were constructive, exploring a range of proposals that would improve the working lives of doctors across the NHS. I was therefore extremely disappointed when the BMA turned its back on the negotiations before they had concluded to call the damaging strikes that we face today. The Government will not negotiate with the BMA while strike action is under way and patient safety is at risk. Every strike is hugely disruptive for our NHS. The NHS and patient safety cannot be switched on and off on a whim. I do not believe it right to negotiate with unions while they are being unreasonable and some of their members are walking out of hospitals at the busiest and most challenging time of year for patients.

I remind the House that the junior doctors committee's headline demand of a 35% pay rise is simply unaffordable for taxpayers. Last summer, we accepted the recommendations of the independent pay review body in full. That meant that junior doctors received average pay rises of almost 9% in their September pay packets—some of the most generous increases across the entire public sector. Meeting the 35% demand would stoke inflation just as we as a country have halved it, burning a hole in the pockets of families up and down the country, and it would be totally out of step with the

pay rises awarded to other dedicated public servants and employees throughout the private sector. Staff across the public sector have agreed fair and reasonable deals on pay; only the junior doctors committee has repeatedly walked away from talks.

Let me address the issue of NHS leaders asking some junior doctors to return to work when patient safety is at risk, in what are known as patient safety mitigations or derogations. As of 9.30 this morning, 40 patient safety mitigations have been submitted during the current round of strikes, and two have been accepted by the BMA. NHS leaders, many of whom are themselves members of the BMA, have decades of combined experience. They know their patients and they know their rotas, and they would ask for mitigations only if they were absolutely necessary—in, for example, a children's emergency department. They are wholly independent of Government: it is for them to make those decisions. I trust them and I trust their judgment. That is the reality, and that is the truth about patient safety mitigations.

One of the reasons why I came into politics was the NHS and what it had done for me and my family. That is also one of the reasons why I am a Conservative. This is a Government who have delivered record NHS funding, the first ever NHS long-term workforce plan, and 50,000 more nurses for our NHS. We are providing the NHS with the doctors it needs for the future by doubling the number of medical school places, opening five new medical schools and pioneering one of the world's first medical apprenticeships. We have also supported doctors by making changes to pensions for those at the very top of their career path—at that point, that was the BMA's number 1 ask, and a policy that the Opposition seemed to oppose.

Those are not the actions of a Government who are turning their back on the NHS, as some have declared. They are the actions of a Government who are building a health and social care system that is sustainable for the long term. To do that, we must put the strikes behind us and move forward together, because the NHS belongs not just to the junior doctors committee: it belongs to us all. It belongs to the millions of people who rely on its being there when they need care, as well as the millions of taxpayers who pay for it. For their benefit, it is time for the members of the junior doctors committee to show that they are serious about doing a deal. They have legitimate concerns about their working lives, and a fair and reasonable deal can be reached, but calling damaging strikes is not the way in which to achieve that. Earlier this week I said that if they called off their damaging strike action, I would get round the table with them in 20 minutes. I am, of course, extremely disappointed that they refused my offer, and continue to refuse it—the strikes are ongoing as we speak—but if they come to the negotiating table with reasonable expectations, I will sit down with them.

This Government have a clear, long-term plan for the NHS. Our recovery plans in elective, emergency and primary care can improve access to treatment, transform services, and give patients more choice in and control over their care. Our long-term workforce plan will give the NHS the staff it needs to thrive for decades to come, our social care reforms will build a

better care workforce to support our growing number of older people, and by creating the first smoke-free generation we will reduce long-term pressure on our health service. We have eliminated the longest waits, but we have not yet made a significant enough reduction in waiting lists. To do that, we need the junior doctors committee to come to the table and do a deal that is in the interests of patients, in the interests of our NHS, and in the national interest. Then we can build an NHS that is not only stronger today, but stronger for our children and grandchildren.

I commend this Statement to the House.”

3.03 pm

Baroness Merron (Lab): My Lords, the Government’s urgent and emergency care recovery plan promised the largest and fastest ever improvement in emergency waiting times in the NHS’s history. Yet it has not delivered in preparing the NHS for the winter, which we should remind ourselves is a season that, as sure as eggs are eggs, appears every single year. It should be no surprise to any of us, including the Government.

To take just one shortcoming, the plan talked about lowering bed occupancy rates as “fundamental”, yet in November, at the start of winter, bed occupancy was at its highest level since the start of Covid. It stood at 94.8%, a level which will surely lead to serious issues. Did the Government consider taking any additional action to lower occupancy rates? What steps will they now take to ensure that this is not simply repeated every single year?

Today, there have been a number of reports in the media, and I want to refer to two of them. We have read reports that NHS England has confirmed that the NHS is failing to meet all of its key targets: patients are waiting even longer in A&E, even longer to start routine treatment, even longer for cancer diagnosis and treatment, and even longer to be admitted to hospital or for an ambulance to arrive. This is a damning indictment. Perhaps the Minister could tell us the Government’s response to the reports of NHS England today. Also in the news, the *Health Service Journal* reported that trusts are being told by service commissioners for Lancashire and South Cumbria that, due to the expected deficit, they should plan for a 10% cut in contract values on top of the annual efficiency savings that they are already planning for next year. What is the Minister’s response to this worrying situation? How will it affect services, not just in winter but all year round? How many other trusts across the country are in a similar position?

I would like to pick up a matter strongly defended by the Secretary of State in the other place when this Statement was first made to Parliament—the matter of 800 new ambulances. These ambulances were promised by the Government to help NHS trusts tackle the crisis of ever-worsening response times. But freedom of information requests found that, across 10 of the 11 ambulance trusts in England, there were plans to order only 51 new ambulances. I would like to give the opportunity to the Minister to share any information that is missing from the responses from ambulance trusts that would show that the information referred

to in the FOI request was mistaken in some way. Perhaps the Minister could also provide more detail on what NHS England referred to as a problem in procurement due to the impact of global supply chain pressures, and on whether and when it is expected pressure will subside, so that we will see all the promised new ambulances. What performance improvements are to be expected from the 51 new ambulances that we know have been ordered? How would this compare with the full 800 that were promised, had they been procured?

The Government’s Statement presents as a combination of somewhat selectively chosen numbers and situations that do not recognise the reality of a health service in which patients cannot get appointments with their doctors, dentistry is in crisis, and unprecedented numbers of people are having to wait unduly for surgery, cancer diagnosis and treatment, and their ambulances—and all of this while striking doctors are being blamed for the whole situation. The strike action by junior doctors has been the longest in NHS history, with trusts declaring critical incidents and A&E departments telling some patients to stay away to lessen the load. This is a situation that I am sure the Minister will tell us cannot continue, but it continues to disappoint that the Government do not see it as their responsibility to show leadership and resolve the dispute. Could the Minister advise the House of the steps the Government are now taking, or will take, to ensure that we do not see a continuation of this damaging situation?

Finally, I would be keen to hear from the Minister on an aspect of the winter health situation which was not mentioned in the Statement regarding Covid. In the run-up to Christmas, according to the Office for National Statistics, 2.5 million people were thought to have Covid. What assessment have the Government made of this increased prevalence and what impact has it had on the NHS so far this winter? What assessment have the Government made of how the impact may continue? I look forward to the Minister’s response.

Lord Allan of Hallam (LD): My Lords, we should start by recognising and thanking the nearly 3 million health and care workers whom we depend on all year but who have to work especially hard during the winter months. We should also show our appreciation for the many millions more informal carers who spent the festive period looking after family and friends. That was the nice bit, but I now turn to some questions for the Government on what I thought was a predictably upbeat, “It’s all going swimmingly except for the strike” Statement; yet within it there were some significant gaps, some of which the noble Baroness, Lady Merron, pointed out.

It is notable that the Statement says nothing about primary care but instead focuses very much on hospital beds, which I will come to next. Can the Minister comment on how GP appointment waiting times remain unacceptably long in many parts of the country? This is a poor outcome both of itself and in terms of the knock-on effect it has on emergency services. I hope that the Minister can confirm that the Government have been monitoring GP waiting times during the winter months, and that he can indicate what they are doing about these.

The Government say they have added 3,000 hospital beds as part of their 5,000 target. That target was part of their response to last year's crisis. Does the Minister have any new data on the utilisation of those beds and whether this matches up with the predictions the Government made when they set the target, and any analysis they made to come up with the 5,000 number in the first place? The Statement also highlights the 11,000 virtual beds that are now available, which instinctively seems like a positive development to me. But the important thing is how a broad range of people experience these and the health outcomes they deliver. What are the Government doing systematically to collect data about those virtual beds and whether they have been able to deliver a comparable level of care for people who are suffering during the winter pressures?

Another key area of delivering emergency care in winter is the availability of ambulances, which was rightly flagged by the noble Baroness, Lady Merron. The Minister may have seen a report in the *Health Service Journal* from 30 November last year, which said that in some areas there is a mismatch between the number of paramedics recruited and the number of ambulances available. It is great that the paramedics have been recruited, but if they are sitting around in the base stations because the vehicles are not there, that does not deliver the improved waiting times we are all looking for. I hope the Minister can comment on this report and whether the Government are able to deliver the vehicles in lockstep with the newly trained paramedics, which is what we all wish to see.

A further element of the response is the 111 service for less-urgent services, which, again, is not mentioned in the Statement. There are concerns about whether people are being directed to the right place—111, GPs, 999 or accident and emergency departments. Are the Government monitoring the performance of 111 in respect of flu, Covid and other winter respiratory diseases?

Finally, we have often discussed patient flow through hospital and out into the community with the Minister, who I know takes a particular interest in this. We know that some trusts are piloting systems to improve flow that could be described as like hotel booking systems that enable beds to be made available in a much more efficient and timely fashion. Will the Government compare the performance of trusts that have these systems in place with those that do not, as they go through this acute period of pressure in the winter months?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Lord Markham) (Con): I wish everyone a happy new year and share in the thanks given by noble Lord, Lord Allan—and, I am sure, the noble Baroness, Lady Merron—for the hard work all the staff put in over the Christmas period. We have done a lot of work to prepare for this winter, and that was based on expanding supply. I will go into more detail in answering the questions so far, but that included the 5,000 additional beds, of which 4,000 are currently in place. It included the 11,000 virtual wards and 800 new ambulances, and again, I will answer some of the specific questions about the utilisation of

those. It included the £600 million for adult social care discharge and the 141 CDCs, with 6 million more diagnostic tests, and the 50,000 increase in nurses—as well as mental health.

Of course, there have also been 50 million more primary care appointments since 2019, to answer the point made by the noble Lord, Lord Allan. That was accompanied by extensive planning, as I have seen. We have really tried to learn a lot of lessons from last year and get ahead of the curve with earlier plans, putting key management support teams in place to provide help in the areas where it is most needed. Everything is underpinned by a stronger technology infrastructure, digitalisation and the patient flow systems.

We are really trying to get ahead, so we brought forward the flu and Covid vaccines, so that, hopefully, we can make the situation better. I will not say that it is anything more than early days, or that one swallow makes a summer, but there are some promising early signs. On ambulance handovers, we have seen a 20% reduction in lost hours. The figure for category 2 response times is 45 minutes; it is still too long, but it is half that for this time last year. As for patient flow and the use of the system, we have seen a 10% reduction in so-called bed blocking, partly because of the flow mechanisms and partly as a result of early investment in the discharge fund.

All that is against the background of increased activity—and, of course, the strikes. To date, they have cost us 1.3 million lost appointments, 113,000 most recently. I say to the noble Baroness, Lady Merron, that we have tried to behave in a reasonable manner. We have reached agreements with all the other professions—the nurses, physicians, consultants and specialist doctors—and we have shown leadership, alongside the unions, in doing so. In contrast with that reasonable behaviour, the 35% pay demand is not reasonable, and nor is planning strike action at the busiest time of the year. Coming out only twice, when you have been asked 40 times by NHS trusts to act on patient safety, is also not reasonable behaviour. We want to resolve this issue. We have shown a capacity to resolve it in other areas, and we have shown leadership. I ask the BMA and junior doctors to come forward with reasonable expectations, and let us resolve this right now.

I have a polite suggestion to make. I thought that the noble Baroness, Lady Merron, might raise the issue of NHS targets. People know that I am a reasonable person, and the last thing I am going to do is say that all is rosy in the garden, but we are showing some solid improvement. I am definitely not happy with the fact that the England targets for a four-hour wait and 62-day cancer care were last met in July 2015. But I note that they have never been reached in Wales, which Labour has been running. In Wales, the 62-day cancer care target was last reached in 2010. Also, if you are in Wales, you are much more likely to be on a waiting list: 21% of the population are on a waiting list, compared with 13% here. In Wales, you are likely to wait five weeks longer, on average; and 50% of the time, you will wait for more than four hours in A&E, compared with 40% in England.

[LORD MARKHAM]

The England results need to be better, and we are working to make them better, but I politely suggest that the Opposition might want to look at where they are running the NHS and see what they can do to improve that, because on every standard you see a poorer performance from the Labour action in Wales. That is what all the evidence tells us.

I will try to answer some of the specific points. On ambulances, 300 new vehicles have been delivered to date. There is an issue with one supplier, but we are confident that the 800 new vehicles will be delivered. It is those, alongside the paramedics, that are allowing us to address ambulance wait times and bring them down. The 111 number is now on the app and is really directing traffic; it is up 8% versus last year, so, again, we are seeing real improvements. I think I mentioned that patient flow is improving as well.

On Covid, bringing forward the vaccinations has been helpful in terms of prevention. While we would all accept that 2.5 million is a large number, if we look at the number of beds being taken up by Covid and flu this year, we can see that it is half the number that it was last year. It is still a big number, but it is half what it was. We are in the early stages and a lot more work is needed, but one reason we are starting to see these improvements is that we have tried to get ahead of the curve with those vaccinations.

As regards virtual wards, so far we have about 70% utilisation of those. We need to collect the data; noble Lords have heard me say before that the results from virtual wards in places such as Watford and elsewhere show good results in terms of both satisfaction and, most importantly, not returning to hospital. Where people have gone into a virtual ward rather than just going home, there has been a reduction of as much as 50% in people having to return to hospital environments. So we are seeing results.

In terms of primary care, as I mentioned, we have seen 50 million more appointments take place. Pharmacy First, which will be introduced shortly, is a key way of expanding that supply still further. So I say politely that, yes, there is a lot more work that will need to be done, but we really have expanded supply. We have put plans in place, and the early signs are promising. I hope, like all of us, that we will see far more of this and I look forward to updating the House as the season progresses.

3.22 pm

Lord Winston (Lab): My Lords, we are very grateful to hear the increasing focus on the need for urgent ambulance care. Obviously, for personal reasons, I am very grateful for that, because this is the sort of time when those things happen. I wonder, however, whether I could probe the Minister a little more. With regard to Covid, my impression—from making inquiries to various centres in London—is that the uptake has not been as good as they had expected. Does the Minister feel that we are doing enough to ensure that in particular those who are most vulnerable are coming to get vaccinated, first for flu and secondly, of course, for the coronavirus?

Lord Markham (Con): The noble Lord is correct; London is always our most challenging place. I have found that across the board, funnily enough. He is right in terms of Covid and flu vaccinations, but it is also the case for the take-up of all sorts of different services. We see technology as a key enabler; in fact, the number of people who have booked their vaccinations and follow-up through the app has multiplied significantly. I do not have the precise figures in my head, but they really have gone up. A lot of that is through people seeing their reminder through the app as well. It is recognised that London in particular needs more targeted action—in fact, noble Lords will see an advertising campaign come out in the next couple of weeks or so. We are really trying to promote usage of the app, which is a tool for all these sorts of things as well.

Baroness Finlay of Llandaff (CB): My Lords, I should declare that I am a registered doctor with the GMC. I live in Wales, but I do not want to get into data-hurling over Wales, but I do have a comment to make. I would like to follow up on the question from the noble Lord, Lord Allan of Hallam, about virtual wards. The Minister may be unable to tell us now, but how many of those patients were actually terminally ill; how many of the virtual wards were providing 24/7 effective cover for these patients; and what is happening across the whole country in relation to 24/7 palliative care cover? All the evidence that is emerging is that it really is grossly inadequate. Families are left unable to access the care and support they need.

Ten years ago, NICE recommended that every area in England should have a helpline so that families can phone if there is a crisis, 24/7, when they are looking after someone with palliative care needs at home; yet the Marie Curie report *Mind the Gaps*—I should declare that I am a vice-president of Marie Curie—which has been developed with the Cicely Saunders Institute—again, I should declare my interest there as an international adviser—has shown that only one in three areas has such a helpline available. Two-thirds of the country has nowhere for people to phone.

Is the Minister prepared to meet me and others from palliative care to mirror what is happening in Ireland now? From this February, the Irish Government will be funding 100% of hospice clinical services, because they have recognised the inadequacy of relying on voluntary sector funding. We know that good care costs less than poor care. We know that where there is good palliative care in place, with 24/7 support, the number of emergency admissions goes down, the pressure on acute beds goes down and inappropriate transfers drop. Although I am not expecting an answer today, I hope the Minister will seriously consider looking at that situation.

I shall just make a comment from Wales and point out that in Wales, paramedics are now being trained specifically in palliative care. Some consultant paramedics are now attached to palliative care teams and are able to administer palliative care drugs out of hours as required.

My other question for the Minister is on what discussions he has had with the GMC over retention. Those doctors who were temporarily registered have received notice that, as from March, for those who

had retired, their temporary registration because of Covid will cease. I just wonder, with the figures we have seen come out today, whether it would be wise to negotiate with the GMC, first, for that to be deferred and, secondly, for all those doctors to be contacted and asked directly how they would like to contribute to improving some of the services. There is a lot of skill there which is currently being unused and underutilised. Again, I guess I should declare an interest because my husband is a dermatologist and has been in that position but has never been called up and would have been quite willing to go and help with clinics. Those are some of my questions for the Minister.

Lord Markham (Con): I thank the noble Baroness for those points. Absolutely, I will need to come back on some of the detail on the virtual wards and how they are being used. One thing I will say about them, though, from my knowledge, is that the ability of people to communicate on a regular basis is one of the key advantages. On the point she makes about palliative care and the ability to have 24/7 communication, the beauty of the virtual wards is that they have that inbuilt, for want of a better word—they have that advantage. As noble Lords know, I am always eager to learn from practices all around the world, so I will very happily meet people and learn from them.

On retention, absolutely, we all know that the supply of doctors and medics is the key thing that we need, so I personally feel that we need to look at every avenue to make sure that we can maximise that supply. Again, it is something that I will inquire into as a result of that, and maybe when we have our meeting we can discuss that further.

Lord Hunt of Kings Heath (Lab): My Lords, I too thank the Minister for the Statement and his response, but it takes the biscuit in terms of the Government really seeking to exploit the plight of the NHS by putting so much emphasis on the industrial action being taken. As the noble Lord has said, even before Covid the Government were way off meeting any of the core targets. In 2010, they inherited a health service that was running very well and met all the targets. They threw away that inheritance. When Covid hit, the health services were already running so hot that there was just no headroom at all to cope with the pressure that then came, with—my noble friend is right—hugely dangerous occupancy rates. There was simply no headroom.

Looking at the funding, from 1948 to 2019-20 the NHS received funding of 3.6% real annual growth, on average, per annum. The coalition Government slashed it to 1.1%. The May and Cameron Governments gave it 1.7%. Only with the Covid expansion were resources over that 3.6% average. It is no wonder that the health service is tackling such a momentous challenge. We need to hear from the Government some real plans to get investment back in the health service, to give it the kind of headroom it needs to start meeting the targets that are so important—would the Minister agree?

Lord Markham (Con): I happily agree that we are investing record sums. The latest figures show that we are investing around about 11% of GDP in the National Health Service. I believe the figure in 2010 was somewhere

in the 7% to 8% range—I am speaking from memory and so I will correct that if it is not quite right, but that is the sort of massive expansion we have seen. If I take one area as an example, the cancer workforce has trebled since 2010.

What we are seeing more than ever is a record level of investment in the health service but also a record level of demand. I was hoping to show in the Statement how we are looking to tackle that. I will freely admit the challenges, and that it is early days, but I believe we are showing signs of getting on top of it. As I have said many times, I really think that technology will be its future, and there will be lots more we can talk about when we show the profound changes it is going to make.

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (GP): My Lords, one in seven UK-trained doctors has left the country to practise overseas. That is some 18,000 doctors, a figure which is up 50% since 2008. Last year, the General Medical Council did a survey of doctors departing the UK to practise overseas, and one of the key factors identified was that doctors were leaving to work in a place where they felt supported by the state and the employer. Does the Minister believe that the Statement—the Government's general position—is sending a message to doctors that they are supported and cared for, and truly valued, by the UK Government, given that if we look at the financial valuation, junior doctors' salaries are down 24% in real terms since 2009?

This is obviously an issue of money, but it is also an issue of attitude. Have the Government got their attitude to the junior doctors terribly wrong?

Lord Markham (Con): I agree with the sentiment expressed by the noble Baroness. Clearly, we want to make sure that we minimise any loss to the profession. Retention is key. The long-term workforce plan was all about trying to put a long-term footing in place, one which looked at not just the recruitment of doctors but their retention, which, as I say, is key.

Money is an element of that, clearly. As I say, I have not heard or seen anyone suggesting that we should be paying the 35% increase. I do not think that is a reasonable approach; I have not heard any noble Lords come forward and say that. The correct attitude of the noble Baroness is key as well. We need to make sure that we get that right and I like to think that we are trying to do that. The Secretary of State has been very positive in terms of trying to do that as well. I absolutely agree that, at the end of the day, this is a key workforce and its members need to feel that they are key, rewarded and motivated by what they are doing. That is key to any profession.

Climate Change: Impact on Developing Nations

Motion to Take Note

3.35 pm

Moved by Baroness Northover

That this House takes note of the United Kingdom's contribution to international development, in particular with regard to the impact of climate change on developing nations.

Baroness Northover (LD): My Lords, I appreciate the number of noble Lords who have chosen to take part in this debate, and I look forward to the maiden speech of the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Winchester. I also appreciate that the noble Lord, Lord Benyon, is answering this debate, as the Minister spanning both FCDO and Defra. He has shown himself committed over many years to addressing climate change.

I start by declaring non-financial interests as a trustee of AgDevCo and MedAccess, both of which have been recipients of ODA, and as a council member of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

The UN's millennium development goals, set out in 2000, saw considerable progress. By 2015, more people had been pulled out of poverty; more children were in school; and more women were able to access family planning, with the benefit this brought to the women themselves, their families and their communities. The MDGs were superseded by the sustainable development goals in 2015, aiming to end absolute poverty by 2030. The United Kingdom played a leading role in their development, with the UN committee co-chaired by the UK, and an outstanding—then DfID—civil servant, Michael Anderson, as the key negotiator and penholder. The UK was at the heart of the development agenda globally, as well as within the EU, and the biggest global contributor financially.

I had the privilege in the coalition Government to serve first as a DfID spokesperson in your Lordships' House, and then as Africa Minister from 2014. During that time, we brought the UK's commitment to international development up to the UN-recommended target of 0.7% of GNI. The last act of the coalition was to enshrine that commitment into law, with cross-party support.

Since then, without consultation, in 2020, Boris Johnson smashed DfID and merged it with the FCO. Later that year, he cut the aid budget. DfID served a long-term goal: working with huge expertise to seek to address poverty and the long-term economic development of the poorest countries, so that they could transition out of aid. The FCO, by contrast, focused on the UK's more immediate foreign policy concerns. Both are laudable aims, with some compatibility in terms of global stability, on which the two departments, with the Ministry of Defence, had long worked together.

However, the two departments did not sit easily together. To put some budgets, for example, in the hands of ambassadors, great though they might be at their job, risked the long-term strategic aim of economic development, which was DfID's *raison d'être*. With the collapse of Afghanistan to the Taliban in 2021, and especially the invasion by Putin of Ukraine in 2022, the ODA budget was turned inward, supporting refugees in the UK.

From 2020, of course, we suffered the pandemic, but so did every other country, with the poorest the least able to protect their citizens. However, what we face now is far more profound, and that is climate change. The overwhelming scientific consensus has long been that human activity is having a dangerous and profound effect on the climate. The world agreed

collective action at Paris in 2015 to tackle this, seeking to keep global warming below 1.5 degrees centigrade over pre-industrial levels.

Nowhere in the world will escape its effect, but some places will be hit first and far worse than others. The small island states of the Pacific are even now seeing their settlements drowned, and I heard yesterday of the first indigenous groups in central America being displaced by climate change. Climate change is operating at four times the global rate in Greenland, with potentially devastating effects there but also in terms of sea level rises globally. We know that the poorest will be hit—are being hit—the most and the worst. We also know that women and girls, the old and the very young, are the most vulnerable, as the *Lancet* study and others have demonstrated.

Many people in developing countries, especially in Africa, are of course entirely reliant on small-scale, rain-fed agriculture. In east Africa, directly due to climate change, we are seeing the worst drought in over 40 years; Plan International and others report that 20 million people are now at risk of acute food insecurity and, potentially, famine. Whereas in the United Kingdom we have research institutes studying how best to adapt, and the infrastructure potentially to help—for example, converting apple orchards to vineyards—that kind of support and resilience is lacking in the poorest countries, so we will see more conflict and migration and an increased risk of pandemics. As now, these are likely to be exploited by populist and authoritarian movements globally, with associated risks. Yet we know we are not on course to tackle climate change. This week, scientists said that 2023 has been the hottest year on record. So what are we doing to assist developing countries and to tackle climate change?

Here I turn to the recently released international development White Paper. I commend Andrew Mitchell for his leadership in trying to undo some of the damage that Johnson did in dismantling DfID and cutting aid, actions which Johnson took even while apparently being concerned about climate change, simply not seeing the connections in what he aspired to do and what he did. The new paper seeks to take a long-term approach, and I would expect nothing less from Andrew. He has sought wide international and national endorsement, and, again, I would expect nothing less. He has launched the new UKDev—UK International Development—trying to resurrect some of what DfID was. The paper makes the case for development for global stability. I recall that the noble Lord, Lord Hannay—I am glad he is taking part in the debate this afternoon—was a member of the UN High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change that made this case 20 years ago. It is as true now as it was then.

On climate change, Jim Skea, chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, is quoted as saying:

“The science and the evidence is clear, unless ambitious action is taken to combat climate change, we will not be able to secure development goals. We need a step change. Now is the time for action”.

The noble Lord, Lord Stern, chair of the Grantham Research Institute at the LSE, and so well known to us here in this House, says:

“Climate Change and biodiversity loss are existential challenges. Failure to act with urgency and on scale will have devastating effects on prospects for development, undermine poverty reduction, exacerbate conflict, and push the world further off track on the SDGs”.

The new Foreign Secretary, the noble Lord, Lord Cameron, states:

“Climate change’s impact on lives and livelihoods is accelerating, affecting developing countries the most”.

Andrew Mitchell says:

“We know that poverty, conflict, and climate change often go hand in hand”.

The paper itself argues that

“The impacts of climate change and nature loss are being felt by everyone, everywhere. Extreme weather, sea level rise and ecosystem collapse are accelerating, with the impacts felt most acutely in developing countries”.

Who now would disagree?

I am struck in the paper by evidence quoted which is of past actions, when DfID existed and the aid budget stood at 0.7%. Projections forward include many suggested ways of seeking to influence the international community rather than actions the UK can take.

Elsewhere, Sir Mark Lowcock, former Permanent Secretary at DfID and UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs argues that:

“The government abandoned the 0.7 percent commitment in 2020. It then raided the remainder of the aid budget in 2021 and 2022 to deal with domestic problems, above all the cost of looking after refugees, especially from Ukraine. The effect was to reduce the aid budget ... to about 0.3 percent of national income ... A chunk of the remaining budget—about 15 percent ... can, as a result of restrictions imposed by the Treasury, only be used to buy assets. Almost all of that has been going into continuous additional capitalisation of British International Investment (BII). BII has its virtues but it is currently ill equipped to play a major role in addressing the core poverty problem”.

What is more,

“all these changes have been landed on the aid budget with essentially no warning, making a mockery of any hope of rational planning or financial management”.

Quite so.

For poorer countries, addressing climate change requires external finance. However, as Oxfam and others point out, well-off and polluting countries have repeatedly failed to meet the agreed pledge to raise \$100 billion annually in climate finance and have only recently established a mechanism for funding loss and damage. Poorer countries need such finance to avoid increasing debt burdens—finance that is new and additional. Can the Minister clarify whether the UK, as it seems, is not seeking to meet its commitment with new and direct funding but rather is including payments to development banks and BII? At COP 28, the UK Government pledged £40 million for the loss and damage fund. Is this new money, or has it been taken from an existing part of the aid budget?

The economic shocks of the pandemic and rising food and fuel prices have plunged 54 global South countries into debt crises. Debt Justice notes that they are spending five times more on debt repayments than they are on adapting to the climate crisis. Tackling climate change clearly needs to be a main focus of our international development strategy. The White Paper states:

“The UK Government will take a whole-of-government approach to deliver our strategic vision for international development ... to end extreme poverty, tackle climate change and biodiversity loss”.

So what is this “whole of government” doing? The Government plan to issue new oil and gas licences. Alok Sharma, president of COP 26 in Glasgow, says that he cannot support these, arguing that the UK seems to be

“rowing back from climate action”.

Chris Skidmore, commissioned by the Government to review whether we were on course to deliver net zero by 2050, has taken the extraordinary action of resigning as a Conservative MP in protest:

“Where the UK Government once led in promoting climate action at COP26, it now finds itself opposing the International Energy Agency, the UN climate conferences and the Committee on Climate Change.”

This action follows those of the autumn, when the targets for banning the sale of new petrol and diesel vehicles were slowed, undermining certainty in the automotive sector, and weakened commitments on heat pumps, where we are massively behind the rest of Europe. Is this what the “whole of government” is doing to deliver on the White Paper?

Mann Virdee of the Council on Geostrategy quotes Benjamin Franklin:

“Well done is better than well said”.

That is indeed the case. The United Kingdom had a long and proud record as a global leader in international development—something that was in our interest, as well as being the right thing to do. It is difficult to re-establish this without the means to achieve it. Meanwhile, the world faces the existential challenge of climate change, which will affect the poorest and the weakest first and the most. There is little evidence that this Government are joined-up in their approach.

I look forward to the contributions of others. I am sure that the Minister will set out all sorts of things that the Government are doing, but I think that, in his heart of hearts, he will wish that he had a stronger hand to play.

3.51 pm

Baroness Bottomley of Nettlestone (Con): My Lords, I pay tribute to the noble Baroness for her thoughtful address, in which she made a number of extremely important comments. Like her, I much look forward to the maiden speech of the right reverend Prelate shortly. I want to talk about climate change and then go on to focus more specifically on malaria.

The COP 26 conference was a great success. The Glasgow climate pact, with 90% of the world’s economies committed to net-zero targets, was a remarkable step forward. The House is well aware that developing countries disproportionately are affected by the impacts of climate change, severe weather events, rising sea levels, and disruption to agriculture and water sources. Indeed, at that time, the developed nations reinforced the pledge to provide £79 billion to developing countries annually. This was followed by the recent COP 28—two COPs later—where nearly every country in the world agreed to move away from fossil fuels after 28 years of international climate negotiations. It was a world first getting fossil fuels into a UN climate agreement; again, those in need were recognised.

[BARONESS BOTTOMLEY OF NETTLESTONE]

Of course, I am a great expert in international climate events because I was a bag-carrier at the first international climate conference, in 1989, when Mrs Thatcher was fighting the ozone layer. She was doing so because the British Antarctic scientists had said that there was a gap in the ozone layer—had it been the Spanish, French or German Antarctic survey, I am not so sure how energetic she would have been. But it was the model, and it was rigorously science-based. It was very much the hallmark of British development policy. It was about industrial collaboration and innovation. It was about public relations and an NGO campaign, as well as international action. I would say that that formula has not changed greatly.

I said that I wanted to speak in particular about malaria, one of the world's oldest and deadliest diseases. It still kills a child every minute, yet it is relatively cheap and easy to address. In the 19th century, Louis Pasteur, the great pioneering French chemist and microbiologist, said:

“It is within the power of man to eradicate infection from the earth”.

But that power has so far eradicated only two infectious diseases: smallpox and rinderpest. Polio is coming closer. The Global Malaria Eradication Programme began in 1955 but was later abandoned. During the 1980s and 1990s, with increased insecticide and drug resistance, and a general deterioration of primary health services, the burden of malaria increased substantially in Africa.

The launch of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria has been a great initiative. Supported by seed funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, it has now had five directors. I must declare an interest because Sir Richard Feachem, the fund's first executive director, was appointed by my organisation, along with around 40 other appointments. It has not used us again—I do not know what that means. This has been a wonderful development. We saw mortality fall by 50% between 2000 and 2015. Of course, Covid has set us back, but 25 countries achieved three consecutive years of zero locally acquired malaria between 2020 and 2021.

There is more that we all have to do, but, as the noble Baroness pointed out, with the UN sustainable development goals, the end of the malaria epidemic by 2030 is definitely achievable. I think that we all welcome the Government's £1 billion contribution to the seventh replenishment of the global fund, supporting vital tools to combat malaria: the distribution of 86 million mosquito nets, 450,000 seasonable malaria chemo prevention treatments, and treatment and care for 18 million people.

British research, innovation and technology have all played a part. I accept that financial resource is always a great help and I appreciate the problems of limited budgets, but I do not think that anybody should underestimate the leadership of Britain in pioneering initiatives and in tackling global health and development issues. It is the leadership, the science base, the collaborative approach and the consistency that can ensure that we play a real part in reducing climate change and assisting developing nations further.

3.56 pm

Lord Whitty (Lab): My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Baroness, and to recognise that questions of health, development, poverty and climate change are all interrelated. I thank also the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, for initiating this debate. I must declare that I am a shortly-to-retire member of your Lordships' Environment and Climate Change Committee, and therefore will concentrate largely on that aspect.

Yesterday's edition of the *Times*—which is not normally regarded as an ultra-green broadsheet—reported clearly and with alarm that last year was the hottest on record and probably the hottest for over 100,000 years. It also indicated that it was one of the most disappointing years for the COP process; although the Minister and the UK delegation were helpful in ensuring that it was not quite the disappointment that the petrostates and some of the fossil fuel companies were looking for, it still did not go sufficiently far forward to say that we were on target for the 1.5 degree limit to global warming that was set in Paris, which was concluded to still be possible at the Glasgow COP 26 but now looks to be within 0.02 degrees of being reached already.

I have three essential points. First, this more rapid than expected rise in temperature and the level of carbon emissions, with rising sea levels and extreme floods, extreme heat, wildfires and so forth, means that the very existence of some nation states which are party to the COP process is at stake. Obviously, the low-lying islands of the Pacific and some in the Caribbean are first in line, but there are large areas of other countries, such as low-lying areas of Bangladesh, where agricultural and industrial land could easily be flooded within a relatively few years.

It all makes the case for establishing an effective loss and damage fund, as was agreed in principle but does not seem to have been followed up sufficiently by other nations. The threat has already been sustained to the land, biodiversity and very existence of many of these islands. As far as Britain's commitment is concerned, we have been more forthcoming than most rich countries in making our contributions to all the bilateral and multilateral arrangements. But we have not even ourselves fulfilled all our commitments, and many other countries are further behind.

What constitutes our ODA budget, let alone our abandonment of the 0.7% target referred to by the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, is also a complex story. I am indebted to the Library for its briefing on this. The largest single element of ODA expenditure covers refugees in this country. The largest sums of bilateral aid to other countries, by far, were to Afghanistan and Ukraine. I recognise that there are good geopolitical and humanitarian reasons for those contributions, but I am not sure that they should be classed as development. Ukraine is still a developed country, although it is scarred by a vicious war, and Afghanistan is probably the country least threatened by rising sea levels. Pacific nations, which are most at risk, received a very small proportion of aid from Britain. Multilateral aid, as I say, is yet to be fully forthcoming.

My third and last point is that the whole process of COP and the IPCC recommendations mean that we need differential targets for richer countries, less-developed

countries and large countries such as India and China—although there are disputes about whether they are to be regarded as developing countries, they are some of the biggest polluters and emitters. They need much sharper targets than we will give to the poorest developing countries. We need formally to recognise that in the COP process, otherwise unity across the nations will not continue.

We need to do that and to recognise not only that we were big polluters historically but that most carbon in the atmosphere has been put there not since 1945 but since 1990, when the world leaders in Rio recognised the truth of the science for the first time. That we have recognised that and let the globe warm to the extent that it has is a rebuke to us all.

4.02 pm

Lord Bruce of Bennachie (LD): My Lords, I thank my noble friend for initiating this debate and draw attention to my entry in the register as a consultant at DAI and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, as a non-financial chair of Water Unite and as president of the Caribbean Council.

There is no doubt that the precipitate merger of DfID and the FCO and the accompanying slashing of budgets has had deeply damaging effects. The UK's reputation as a world leader in development assistance was literally trashed, leaving many vulnerable people bereft and at risk. As my noble friend said, dedicated and experienced development practitioners left the sector and relationships with partner countries were damaged. In this context, I welcome the appointment of Andrew Mitchell and the noble Lord, Lord Cameron, but that alone will not undo the damage. Under the OBR forecast, the Government's tests for the restoration of 0.7% will be met by 2027, but the Chancellor said it cannot be done in the next five years. His priority is domestic tax cuts rather than the poor people of the world.

The Motion calls for a particular regard to the UK's development impact on climate change in developing nations. In 2011, Paddy Ashdown, the late and much-missed Member of this House, published a review of the UK's response to humanitarian emergencies, commissioned by Andrew Mitchell. One of its key findings was that those best able to acquire resilience were those who had already experienced disasters. The focus had to be on anticipation, prevention, mitigation and rapid recovery. People in developing countries should, of course, benefit from renewable technologies but, for many, the more urgent priority is to mitigate the impact of climate change that developed economies have inflicted on them.

In headlines, the UK makes impressive statements on the commitment to funding climate resilience in developing countries. The 2023 results for UK international climate finance are impressive but they are not stand-alone statistics. How is the four-year spending commitment of £11.6 billion broken down? How much is UK ODA, how much is from other donors, how much is from the private sector and how much is designation of existing ODA spending? Can the Government provide more detailed examples? The only ones in the results are small case studies from Zambia, Madagascar and Mexico.

One of the travesties of the Government's decision to disrupt aid was the destruction of the cross-party consensus behind the commitment to development spending at 0.7%. That was ended when Johnson and Sunak took over, and we should not let them forget that. Cutting it in the wake of Covid, Brexit and the cost of living crisis was a statement by UK plc to the world's poor people that we are going to tackle our—partly self-made—problems by cutting development assistance, while their problems get substantially worse.

I will give specific examples. In 2019, UK support for sexual and reproductive health and rights was £748 million; by 2021, it was £534 million. In 2020, our support for the World Food Programme was £549 million; in 2023, it was £286 million. These two areas are crucial to poverty reduction and good development. Giving women access to contraception, to safer, supported births and to safe abortion reduces poverty and improves their contribution within the community, as my noble friend said in her opening speech. With floods, drought and famine, pressure on food supplies, consequent hunger and malnutrition intensify. The World Food Programme has a very good track record of anticipating events and tackling crises.

UK ODA in 2022 was £12.79 billion; it would have been £16 billion if we had not cut it. It was further reduced by the diversion of £3.69 billion to refugee support at home. Development assistance, as previously defined, was cut by £7 billion in a single year. The Government have stated that bilateral aid will be cut again next year to maintain multilateral commitments. It is important to fulfil our obligations, even if this Government have a pretty cavalier attitude to them when it suits them, but this unfortunate choice would not have been necessary if the Government had kept faith with their legal obligation.

In summary, there is a great deal of work to do before the international community will judge the UK to have returned to leadership in international development. An integrated programme of development requires balanced priorities between humanitarian response, climate change, international action and bilateral commitment. When the pressure is on, the Cinderella services suffer. We need to address this. Without doing so, the commitment to leave nobody behind will be impossible to deliver.

4.07 pm

Lord Hannay of Chiswick (CB): My Lords, my contribution to this debate will start with tributes to three people. First, I pay tribute to the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, not just for securing a much-needed discussion of Britain's contribution to development aid but for her untiring and effective work as a Minister in the coalition Government and in opposition. Secondly, I welcome the noble Baroness, Lady Sugg, for her principled resignation in protest against the misguided decision to reduce our aid. Thirdly, I pay tribute to the Minister for Development, Andrew Mitchell, for having set out in last November's White Paper the first reasonably coherent and consistent framework for our aid since the ill-advised upheaval caused by the amalgamation of DfID and the FCO.

[LORD HANNAY OF CHISWICK]

Useful though that White Paper was, it lacked one essential element: adequate resourcing to face the worldwide challenges of climate change, pandemic disease, malnutrition, educational shortcomings and war and violent upheavals. The Government say that they will return those resources to 0.7% as soon as our circumstances permit, but what about the circumstances of the developing countries, recipients of aid, which have been just as adversely affected by the Covid pandemic, the cost of living rises and wars in Ukraine and the Middle East? The Government's assurance has already been repeated several times and a cynic would say that it is all set for serial repetition in the years ahead. It has no credibility. Better, surely, if it is unrealistic—I accept that it is—to revert immediately to the full 0.7%, at least to set out on the path towards it, even if only modestly at first. The opportunity for that is the Budget on 6 March. I urge that it be taken.

How best to link global action against climate change to the situation of developing countries, many of which, let us recall, have contributed little or nothing to the climate crisis we all face? Obviously, we and other donor countries need to make a better job of fulfilling the commitment on aid we have collectively entered into at successive COP meetings, most recently in the UAE. What plans do the Government have to do that? We need to ensure that this increase does not come at the expense of other priorities of the developing country recipients, thus robbing Peter to pay Paul and expecting the global South to accept our priorities over theirs.

The prospect of a substantial number of developing countries, many of them in Africa, requiring urgent debt restructuring, including in some cases outright debt forgiveness, is already in sight. No doubt, as before, many donor countries will argue, short-sightedly in my view, against debt forgiveness. Would it not be better if we were to campaign to link such debt forgiveness to specific recipient country commitments on climate change expenditure? Would that not be a good deal for both? What is the Minister's response to that sort of approach?

Since 2024 is going to be an election year, I have one final thought. Any change of government that might result will inevitably bring to the fore once again the issue of the government structures for handling our overseas aid. I have myself consistently spoken out against the last set of decisions, which led to the creation of the FCDO. It is not a question of one solution being clearly the right solution and the other being the wrong one; it is the damage caused by the Whitehall turf-fighting and the chaos of departmental reorganisations which make these successive zig-zags so damaging and undesirable. An incoming Government could perhaps give a higher priority to development aid issues other than that one, and in particular to those being highlighted in this debate.

4.11 pm

The Lord Bishop of Leicester: My Lords, I too am grateful to the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, for the opportunity to debate this hugely significant subject.

I too am looking forward to the maiden speech by my right reverend friend the Bishop of Winchester, who has real expertise in this area.

When it comes to thinking about the impact of climate change on developing nations, the injustices at play are twofold. First is the fact that those nations that are being and will yet be most affected by climate change are those that have contributed least to the crisis. Secondly, much of the funds that fuelled our Industrial Revolution, wherein were sown the seeds of climate change, were generated by extracting and exploiting the resources of many of those regions, most devastatingly, of course, through the transatlantic chattel slave trade.

Our moral debt is as great as the climate emergency we face, so I was pleased to see that the Government's international development White Paper, published in November, included "tackling climate change" in its title. I was also most encouraged to read the Government advocating for a move away from donor-recipient models of aid towards partnerships built on mutual respect, putting greater value on the voice, perspectives and needs of developing nations, as well as supporting local leadership. The paper hearteningly states:

"We will engage with humility and acknowledge our past".

With that in mind, might the Minister inform the House of the outcomes of the Secretary of State's meeting with the Barbadian Prime Minister in December, and whether they discussed the issue of reparations? Responding with humility and honestly acknowledging our past includes such complex issues, which directly affect a country's ability or inability to respond to climate change.

I have said that we as a country carry a weighty moral debt, yet for developing nations the financial debt is a more tangible problem, as the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, and the noble Lord, Lord Hannay, have both already mentioned. According to the World Bank, in 2022 the external debts of countries with low and middle incomes reached \$9 trillion, double the figure in 2010. The cost of servicing these debt payments is crippling, and drains funds away from what is needed to become climate resilient. Analysis by Development Finance International has shown that lower-income countries spend over 12 times more on debt payments than on adapting to the climate crisis. Indeed, some are turning to fossil fuel extraction to generate the revenue needed to reduce the burden.

We have an opportunity to build on our previous track record of debt relief. Under previous Governments, 49 low-income countries had all or part of their debts to the UK forgiven. Now many creditors are private commercial entities rather than organisations such as the IMF or the World Bank. As a result, 90% of global debt contracts are overseen by English law. We are in a unique position to legislate for private creditors to offer debt relief so climate-vulnerable countries can invest in adapting to the changes that are to come. At COP 28, the UK, along with France and the World Bank, committed to pause debt repayments when climate disasters hit. This is a valuable step forward but, when so little is owed to the UK, should we not at least ask the same of commercial creditors that operate under English law?

Debt and climate are inextricably linked so, now that the Secretary of State has put climate change at the centre of the new international development White Paper, will the Government revisit the International Development Committee's report on debt relief and reconsider its recommendation for new legislation? We cannot undo the errors of our past, but we can let ourselves be changed by them and commit ourselves to doing justice to our global neighbours. I urge us to play our part in doing so.

4.17 pm

Viscount Eccles (Con): My Lords, I welcome this debate. I am an outlier because I am a pensioner of what was CDC and is now BII. Indeed, I was its chief executive about half way through its history. It is still there, and it is still doing development.

I hope for two things really. The first is that it will be accepted that, in CDC, we always thought of what we were doing from the point of view of the country where we were doing it. We never did it with the western agenda in our minds. Secondly, I hope that the pessimism, the difficulty and the incredible challenge of the debate in the name of the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, does not make us all so uncertain and depressed that in the end we stop trying to do anything. That is a bit extreme but it is a serious danger: if you do not keep trying, you stop doing things altogether.

There are 17 Commonwealth members in sub-Saharan Africa and 13 of them are in the bottom quartile of per capita incomes of the world's countries. When we work in those countries, do we think about climate change first? I think the answer is: what do they think about first? I suspect that they think that climate change is just another aspect of the problems that they have, which are dominated by food security, so it is just a bit more of the same and not necessarily because there is so much uncertainty about the effects of climate change. People have to think more carefully about some of the certainties they are trying to express. We simply do not know why, perhaps, the yields of maize from the small farmers of Rwanda will start to drop. There is so much that we do not know about it.

I would like to refer quickly to BII, which is doing some very interesting things in relation to the prosperity of small farmers. It has made more than one investment in a Kenyan-based business which builds solar plants to drive pumps to irrigate. I think the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, made a reference to rain-fed agriculture. Of course, we all know that if you can move from rain-fed in a place where there is enough groundwater available and irrigate, your yields will increase dramatically—not just by a little but, in east Africa, dramatically.

In addition, BII is investing in a 50 megawatt, sun-driven power station and distribution system in Sierra Leone—which is not an easy place. That is a very positive move. It has also formed a subsidiary which has just agreed with the Government of Burundi to do something similar. Burundi is the bottom country on the world list—so some things are being done. In addition, right from the beginning of CDC, power has always been on its agenda. Forestry has always been

on it, too, and BII is doing some very interesting work on agroforestry. Smallholder farming has always been on the agenda.

I want to move very briefly to Kew, because there we are missing a trick. Kew does a great deal of very valuable work, collecting and distributing information. It is looking into all sorts of possibilities—the power of wild relatives to improve plants, and so on—but it does not do much after collecting and distributing that information. Does my noble friend see Kew joining in the development programme, as opposed to being simply a scientific institution that says, “If you want the information, please apply for it”?

4.22 pm

Baroness Blackstone (Lab): My Lords, we see all too often the terrible impact of climate change on developing countries, from devastating floods in Pakistan to appalling droughts in a number of African countries. Mary Robinson, the former President of Ireland, has eloquently set out the impact of climate change on various groups, above all on the poorest of the poor in low-income developing countries. Surely a rich country such as the UK should be doing more to allocate new resources—I emphasise, new funding—rather than recycling money from other development aid allocations, greatly diminishing their impact.

It is also a regret that the Government have reneged on their original pledge to stop new oil and gas installations. It is damaging to our international reputation to increase reliance on fossil fuels, rather than investing in renewables and nuclear power. This of course led to the resignation of a much-respected Climate Change Minister. My first question to the Minister today is: why do the Government continue to provide generous subsidies and tax breaks to oil and gas companies, which are already making profits running into billions? A loophole in the Government's windfall tax is said to result in £11.9 billion of tax relief for fossil fuel companies in the North Sea. Will the Government close this loophole and allocate the resulting savings to development aid to counter the effects of climate change in poor countries?

I turn now to the Government's record on climate change finance for developing countries. So many times, we have been told that the Government will return when circumstances permit to 0.7% of GNI for development aid from the current 0.5%. I ask again what the criteria are for the circumstances in which that will be possible. Would the Minister also accept that the international aid budget is being decimated by the decision to cover the cost of asylum seekers and Ukrainian refugees from this source? The combination of these two decisions by the Government has meant massive cuts in many sectors where aid is desperately needed, including a failure to meet government pledges on mitigating climate change in poor countries. Given that the extreme effects of climate change are a fairly new challenge, is there not a case for establishing a special budget for it, beyond existing ODA spending?

Other speakers referred to the international development White Paper, published in November. The recommendations, including on climate change, were mainly welcomed when we debated the White

[BARONESS BLACKSTONE]

Paper in this House. Regrettably, the Government's approach does not now seem likely to meet their White Paper aspirations. In 2019, the Government pledged to spend £11.6 billion of the ODA budget on climate finance. Instead of a straightforward allocation of funding to meet this pledge, this Government have found various ways to massage the figures. They have expanded what they categorise as climate finance, increased the risk of double counting and backloaded greater proportions of spending to future years, so that the next Government—whoever they may be—will be landed with extra spending.

There are two good examples of this manipulation. First, the Government are including a share of their contributions to multilateral development banks, such as the World Bank, as climate finance. Secondly, as the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, said, they are going to count more funding going to British International Investment as climate finance. NGOs such as Oxfam and Save the Children have justifiably criticised the Government for reclassifying climate finance in ways that are vague in transparency and accountability. Save the Children calculates that these measures, along with increasing the share of humanitarian aid classified as climate finance, amount to a cut of £1.6 billion to the UK's climate finance. The Minister is shaking his head, but perhaps he can comment on these claims by the NGOs.

Lastly, I want to turn to the loss and damage mechanism by which higher-emitting nations may help address losses in poor regimes, which are the least responsible for climate change. In contrast to adaptation and mitigation, which help poor countries change their own practices, loss and damage finance relates to areas over which they have little or no control, such as sea level rises or extreme weather events. The UK pledged finance for the loss and damage fund at COP 28, which was welcome. I believe it pledged £60 million to this fund but, yet again, it is financing it by taking funding from existing mitigation and adaptation funding. What is the point of robbing Peter to pay Paul?

I end by saying that poor countries are calculated to have been responsible for only around 5% of global emissions over time. They deserve a better response. There is an overwhelming humanitarian case for generosity. It is also in our long-term interest to avoid the future global disruption entailed by millions of climate change refugees.

4.28 pm

The Lord Bishop of Winchester (Maiden Speech):

My Lords, I am conscious of the immense privilege that is mine to have a seat as of right in your Lordships' House. I am very grateful for the welcome and help I have received from noble Lords and staff, both today and as I have been inducted into its ways.

The See of Winchester, which I serve, was founded in 660. In 838, at the Great Council of Kingston, King Egberht of Wessex entered into a compact with the Sees of Winchester and Canterbury, in return for their promise of support for his son Aethelwulf's claim to the Throne. Aethelwulf was the father of Alfred the Great. That ancient compact was a key moment in the developing relationship between Church and state that

has done so much to shape to the life of this country, as together we have sought the common good—and it is to that theme of the common good that I will return later.

I turn specifically to the matter of this debate. In looking at this issue of international development, I believe we must pay proper attention to two cardinal principles: internationalism and localism. It is vital that, as a country, we take an internationalist approach to international development. Global problems, including climate change, require global solutions, and nothing less will do. But, in all that, the local must not be lost. Effective development must always have purchase at the grass roots in specific contexts and communities, or it will be simply unsustainable.

In my clerical career, I have been immensely privileged to have been given both a broad international perspective and unique insights into the local and particular. I have led a church in a rather unremarked but wonderful corner of south London, and I have led another at the heart of Paris, exercising ministry at the crossroads of the world. I have led a global mission agency deeply committed to pursuing a global agenda through the context of the very local. I have been Bishop of Truro in Cornwall, a place with great international reach historically and with its own much-prized local culture.

I now serve in Winchester, a diocese that can lay good claim to having shaped the wider world—think of Bishop Lancelot Andrewes overseeing the compilation of the authorised version of the Bible and its global impact. But it is also a diocese made up of truly distinctive local places: Winchester, England's ancient capital; the great port city of Southampton; the burgeoning boroughs of Bournemouth, Basingstoke and Christchurch; our historic market towns; and innumerable picture-perfect Hampshire villages. Each is a place of value in its own right but also part of a greater whole.

This theme of globalism and localism has particular relevance when we look at one theme critical to international development: freedom of religion or belief—FoRB. It is critical because the denial of FoRB is inimical to effective community development. As Bishop of Truro, at the invitation of the then Foreign Secretary, the Member for South West Surrey, the right honourable Jeremy Hunt MP, I authored a report on FoRB, the recommendations of which became and remain government policy. I am hugely grateful to my friend in the other place, the Member for Congleton, Fiona Bruce MP, who holds the role of Prime Minister's special envoy for FoRB, for her dogged commitment to the implementation of those recommendations, which have even led to the passing of a UN Security Council resolution on this issue for the first time.

In this global struggle for FoRB, in which the UK plays a leading role, we value both the international—this is a universal right and a global problem—and the local, in that it is minority communities that are most under threat from its denial. The denial of FoRB is a scourge on local minority communities and, therefore, on their development. Its denial can be laid squarely at the feet of both weak government and intolerant, authoritarian and nationalistic regimes that brook no dissent. This is therefore a growing global problem that requires a global response, and I am honoured to

play my part, along with many others, including the noble Baroness, Lady Cox, and the noble Lord, Lord Alton of Liverpool, in such a response.

It is vital that we act globally to protect the distinctive and the local, and there is a moral connection between the global struggle for FoRB and the challenge of climate change. In the end, only plural states with a heart for the common global good, rather than their own self-aggrandisement, will truly care about these issues. So action on FoRB and action on climate change spring from a common concern for the common good. In tackling both, we seek the health and welfare of the whole planet, and a common good that, in the end, can be expressed only through flourishing local communities. Promoting FoRB promotes plural, prosperous and stable states, contributing significantly to international development and global security.

In tackling climate change and FoRB together, we must stand against those regimes that are more concerned with preserving their own power than seeking the local rights of minorities and the global good of the whole planet. I urge His Majesty's Government to maintain a broad international perspective and to value and treasure the local and particular, both things which make this world so rich and so blessed a place.

4.35 pm

Lord Alton of Liverpool (CB): My Lords, it is a great privilege to be able to respond to the maiden speech of the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Winchester and, on behalf of the whole House, to welcome him to his place. He is greatly admired here and, as a former Africa Minister told me only this morning, in another place too.

The right reverend Prelate has reminded us of the historical significance of his diocese. Christianity here is said to have had its origins in that part of the world, thanks to the efforts of St Birinus, the Apostle to the West Saxons. Like the right reverend Prelate, Birinus was a missionary, arriving just 37 years after Augustine came to Kent. He was also a predecessor of another saint in Winchester, St Swithin. With such illustrious forebears, we will expect great things of the right reverend Prelate.

The story of the right reverend Prelate's diocese underscores the long-standing relationship between Church and state, the spiritual and temporal. In referring to Lancelot Andrewes, and his central role in the translation of the King James version of the Bible, the right reverend Prelate reminds us of its hugely influential role in shaping our culture, as well as that of the whole, wider English-speaking world.

The Bible was the right reverend Prelate's lodestar while serving as executive leader of the Church Mission Society and in his parochial work in London and Paris, following his ordination in 1989, five years after he married Ruth, his wife. In 2018, following his appointment to Truro, and beyond his greatly admired diocesan work in Cornwall, he was asked to put his international experience to good effect. The Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, as we heard, asked him to prepare a report on global persecution. It followed a *Times* leader, which referred to persecution of Christians and said:

"We cannot be spectators at this carnage".

Yet silent observers we have too often been.

Open Doors says that more than 360 million Christians suffer at least high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith, that in 1993 Christians faced high to extreme levels of persecution in 40 countries, and that that number had nearly doubled to 76 countries by 2023. When the right reverend Prelate launched his report in 2019, he said:

"If one minority is on the receiving end of 80% of religiously motivated discrimination, it is simply not just that they should receive so little attention ... however, this must also be about being sensitive to discrimination and persecution of all minorities".

In that landmark report, the right reverend Prelate painstakingly set out 22 recommendations, which sought to restore the importance of Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—the right to believe, not to believe or to change your belief. In giving FoRB—freedom of religion or belief—far greater definition, the Truro review was hugely influential, and I have no doubt that, in joining your Lordships' House, the right reverend Prelate will bring an authoritative and greatly welcome voice to our proceedings and that from all our Benches we will wish him well in his time here.

Before concluding in the brief moments I have left to speak, I remind the Minister that the full implementation of the Truro recommendations is a manifesto commitment of His Majesty's Government. I hope that he will look at the link between the implementation of recommendation 7 of the Truro report and genocide and, in the light of what we have seen in Sudan, Tigray, the Middle East and Ukraine, that he will agree to meet me to discuss my Private Member's Bill on genocide determination and examine the impact of atrocity crimes, especially on developing nations. I would like him to look particularly at the situation in Nigeria and the absurd suggestion—made, I might add, by a Head of State—that climate change was the cause of 40 people being murdered in a church in Ondo on Pentecost Sunday. That claim was strongly contested here, at a meeting I chaired for the Bishop of Ondo, Jude Arogundade.

Climate change and cuts to aid certainly impact development, but so does jihadist ideology, and we should not be frightened in saying so. On Red Wednesday, just a few weeks ago in November, I met Mr and Mrs Attah, two of the Ondo victims. Margaret's legs were so badly damaged by the jihadist bomb that they had to be amputated. The couple wanted to know—and so do I—why no one has been brought to justice in this culture of impunity. Who is being brought to justice for the further 200 killings in Plateau State in Nigeria just two weeks ago, over Christmas? Why is Leah Sharibu—whose case I have raised regularly in your Lordships' House and whose mother, Rebecca, I escorted to the Palace of Westminster so that she could meet Members of both Houses—still in captivity, having been abducted, raped and forcibly converted at the age of 14?

Persecution and conflict are major drivers in the displacement of 110 million people worldwide. These drivers destroy lives, such as those that I have just mentioned, and set back development. Conversely—and here I will finish—robust academic work demonstrates

[LORD ALTON OF LIVERPOOL]

that, where persecution is contested and Article 18 freedoms are upheld, those countries are the most stable, the most harmonious and the most prosperous. I hope that the Minister, who I know takes a deep interest in some of these subjects, agrees and will commission more work to push policies based on the Truro recommendations higher up the political, diplomatic and development agenda.

The noble Baroness, Lady Northover, who has done so much on these issues over so many years, deserves and has our thanks for instigating today's timely and important debate.

Lord Harlech (Con): My Lords, this has been an incredibly thoughtful and incisive debate, but I gently remind the House that it is time-limited. We want to hear everyone's contributions and have time for the Minister to answer the questions raised. I therefore make a plea: if all noble Lords could stick to time, that would be marvellous.

4.41 pm

Lord Hannan of Kingsclere (Con): My Lords, the noble Lord, Lord Hannay, reminded us that 2024 is an election year, and not only for us. More human beings will have the opportunity to cast a ballot in this year than ever before in history. That must be good news, not only intrinsically in itself but from the perspective of climate change.

One of the odd things, although it is rarely noted, is that the democracies are the countries taking the lead in global collaboration. You might think, from first principles, that this would be one of those areas where you could have a benign dictator doing things that would be unpalatable to the electorate, but that is not how it has worked out. Our country has become the first to halve its carbon emissions from the peak—the only developed country so far to do so. We do not see any equivalent action from Russia, China and so on. The spread of democracy, as well as being a good thing for the people of those countries, is good from our perspectives.

However, when we drill down and look at some of those elections, we see that the picture looks rather different. We had the first big election last weekend, in a country with a big population: Bangladesh—I think it has something like 170 million inhabitants. The UK, the US and the European Union have all said, with reason, that it was not a free and fair election. That is unsurprising: the opposition party there, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, which used to alternate with the Awami League in office, has been broken and exiled and its leaders chained. We have the next big election coming up on 8 February in Pakistan, where it is a similar story: Imran Khan has been imprisoned and the PTI party has been broken, with its leaders arrested or exiled. We are moving towards a situation where more and more countries are voting but it is in a performative and perfunctory way. The chief benefit of democracy—namely, the ability peacefully to change your leaders—is being lost.

This ties into our aid policy. Bangladesh and Pakistan were immense recipients of our aid, particularly under the coalition starting with David Cameron's premiership.

There have obviously been cuts since Covid but, just before Covid, Pakistan was getting £330 million-plus a year and Bangladesh more than £200 million. Yet that massive increase in aid coincided with a decline in democracy—they were imperfect democracies, but they are plainly in a worse place now than when that aid money began. I am not saying, by the way, that that aid was useless—it may have had all sorts of good effects in promoting girls' education or whatever—but it did not correlate with any democratisation.

If we are not using aid as a way of spreading democracy, and therefore getting all these other public goods that we get from it, what can we do? Democracy has been in retreat, globally, probably since the financial crisis. We can measure it in all sorts of ways. The Economist Intelligence Unit has a thing called the Democracy Index. It was expecting a bounce-back in 2022 as the Covid restrictions were lifted, but did not find one: there has been a continued loss of freedom. The International IDEA found the same thing: it saw six consecutive years of decline in democracy. Freedom House says there have been 17 continuous years in which more countries have ceased to be free than have become free. This correlates to the increase in autarchy and self-reliance, as its defenders would call it, since the banking crisis. Just like between the two wars, protectionism and authoritarianism go hand in hand. Indeed, autocrats are as much products as sponsors of economic protectionism.

What can we do if not use our aid budget? I put it to noble Lords that one thing we can do is recall our historic mission as a nation and try to spread globalisation as an instrument of poverty alleviation. It was the single most effective way of doing that. After the Second World War, we saw billions of people lifted out of poverty as their countries ceased to be autarchic and joined global market systems.

This is a much harder argument to make now than it was pre-Covid. We have mercantilist and protectionist policies in Washington, Brussels and Beijing—indeed, sometimes it is being done in the name supposedly of fighting climate change, as with the absurdly misnamed Inflation Reduction Act in the US. If our country has one historic dream and task, it is to raise our eyes above that and to be the place that drags the rest of the world to greater prosperity. It was the elimination of obstacles to trade that lifted this nation to a pinnacle of unprecedented wealth and happiness in the 19th century. It is our task once again, now that we have the opportunity, to do the same, and to lift the rest of humanity with us.

4.47 pm

Lord Oates (LD): My Lords, I join others in thanking my noble friend Lady Northover for initiating this debate, and I congratulate the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Winchester on his eloquent maiden speech. I declare my interests as chief executive of United Against Malnutrition and Hunger, co-chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Africa, and council member of the Royal African Society.

As we have heard, over the past three decades the world has made significant progress in tackling some of the core challenges of development, and the UK's contribution to that success has been significant. The

Department for International Development, now sadly dismantled, was a beacon around the world. The expertise of our academic, scientific and research institutions, and the hands-on knowledge and experience of UK-based INGOs, helped the UK deliver real and lasting impact as part of a sustained global effort to bring about change and progress. That effort brought results. Over recent decades, the proportion of people who were undernourished almost halved. The share of the global population living in extreme poverty fell even more dramatically, from 47% in developing regions to 14%. The incidence rate of TB fell by 17% and of malaria by 40%. The proportion of the world's population without sustainable access to safe drinking water more than halved. At a global level, gender disparity in education was eliminated.

These are huge successes, and I agree with the noble Viscount, Lord Eccles, that at this time, when the future can seem so bleak and progress can appear almost impossible, it is particularly important that we celebrate this success as a reminder of what we can achieve as a global community if we have the will to do so. Sadly, however, some of these successes have gone into reverse in recent years. As Action Against Hunger pointed out in its excellent briefing, the number of people facing extreme food insecurity is rising, with millions of children dying unnecessarily every year from malnutrition-related causes.

Across the sustainable development goals, progress is well off-track and in several cases has gone into reverse. As the UN Secretary-General has warned:

“Unless we act now, the 2030 Agenda will become an epitaph for a world that might have been”.

The climate crisis is only exacerbating these challenges and, cruelly, the people on the front line are those who have contributed least to climate change and are most vulnerable to its effects.

The facts are stark. The World Bank estimates that climate change could push an additional 100 million people below the poverty line by 2030. The Pentagon describes climate change as a threat multiplier and a key driver of fragility. Stanford University research estimates that climate change has increased economic inequality between developed and developing economies by 25% since 1960. Yet no country in the rich world is acting with anything like the urgency the situation demands. Sadly, the UK's record in the vanguard of action has now been put at risk as a result of decisions by the current Government in the past year.

The Africa APPG's inquiry into just energy transition, which is being conducted in conjunction with the Royal African Society and Oxfam, has highlighted the risk of a dangerous disconnect between the global north and global south on what justice means in this context and how it can be delivered. The inquiry has also shown that if we are prepared to work in genuine partnership with the continent, a huge opportunity exists dramatically to increase energy access across Africa, spurring sustainable economic development, while reducing carbon emissions and the health impacts of burning carbon fuels.

For a long time, we talked as if climate change was something that might happen if we did not sort things out soon, but it is not that. It is happening now and has been for a long time. We all know the story about

the frog which, if put in a pot of cold water and gently heated to boiling point, will not jump out. Some people say that experiments show that a frog is not so stupid, and these prove the story is not true, but they are wrong. The story is true: it is just that it is not about frogs; it is about humans. The water is literally heating up in the oceans around us, yet we continue to throw fuel on the fire. Now is the time when we have to choose whether to wake up to our responsibilities to the world and to ourselves, and to act with the urgency the moment demands, or to continue to slumber and eventually boil.

4.52 pm

Baroness Chakrabarti (Lab): My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Oates, and I join in the tributes to the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, for bringing this vital debate. I also congratulate the right reverend Prelate on a wonderful maiden speech.

What we are now doing to the world by degrading the land surface, polluting the waters and adding greenhouse gases to the air at an unprecedented rate, is new in the experience of the earth. It is mankind and his activities which are changing the environment of our planet in damaging and dangerous ways. We are seeing a vast increase in the amount of carbon dioxide reaching the atmosphere. The annual increase is 3 billion tonnes, and half the carbon emitted since the Industrial Revolution remains in the atmosphere. At the same time, we are seeing the destruction on a vast scale of tropical rainforests, which are uniquely able to remove carbon dioxide from the air.

We should always remember that free markets are a means to an end. They would defeat their object if, by their output, they did more damage to the quality of life through pollution than the wellbeing they achieve by the production of goods and services. Each country has to contribute, and industrialised countries must contribute more to help those that are not.

A framework is not enough. It will need to be filled out with specific undertakings and protocols, in diplomatic language, on the different aspects of climate change. These protocols must be binding and there must be effective regimes to supervise and monitor their application; otherwise, nations that accept and abide by environmental agreements, thus adding to their industrial costs, will lose out to those that do not.

These are not my words, though I cite them in a forthcoming book. They are not even borrowed from the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, or the noble Baroness, Lady Bennett of Manor Castle, who is to follow me, or David Attenborough, or Greta Thunberg. Whose words are these? For noble Lords who do not immediately recognise them, the clue was in the earlier speech of the noble Baroness, Lady Bottomley. I am citing Lady Thatcher's 1989 address to the UN General Assembly. *Daily Mail*, please take note.

The problem with Paris is that it contains no individual binding obligations, let alone sanctions relating to the meeting of targets. The regime, as we have heard, lacks a sense of international or historical fairness, given that some of the greatest industrial polluters since 1850 are both most the enriched and least affected by the damage.

[BARONESS CHAKRABARTI]

Alongside other proposals that have been put to the Minister—and I guess to all five of the warring families of the party opposite—I urge a move back towards internationalism and improving the rules-based order, not just in relation to human rights, as has been advocated by the right reverend Prelate and possibly even the noble Lord opposite, but climate security. We need more internationalism and less unilateralism.

People say that Lady Thatcher responded in that way because she was a trained chemist, and I have no doubt that that was part of the special contribution. However, she was also a lawyer. Lawyers are denigrated by some current Conservatives, but I believe that those two sides of her education inspired that very important speech: science and law. We need both to deal with this crisis.

4.56 pm

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (GP): My Lords, it is a great pleasure to follow the noble Baroness, Lady Chakrabarti, who made a very powerful point about externalised costs. Currently, the few in many sectors—the few giant multi-national companies—are making a financial killing, while the rest of the human and non-human world pay.

I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, for securing this debate and introducing it so clearly. Like many, I am tempted to talk about the inadequate, non-manifesto compliant level of UK official development assistance. The fact is that we would all be more secure in a more stable world if we were spending more on ODA. The Green Party says double the Government's current level, and that should be applied to real development assistance, not housing refugees in the UK—as much as we should be doing that as well.

After the year we have just had, the warmest in probably 100,000 years, I was tempted, like the noble Lord, Lord Whitty, to focus on the extreme urgency of climate mitigation. That is roughly half the time our species has been on this planet, and this is the warmest year. It is certainly, by a substantial margin, the hottest since records began. I was also tempted, as Debt Justice has been doing, to focus on the way the global debt crisis is preventing climate action, particularly in the 54 hardest-hit global south nations. Global south countries are currently spending 12.5 times more on debt repayment than they are on climate adaptation.

The Minister might be surprised to hear that in the short time available to me, I am going to focus instead on some money that the Government could stop spending on official development assistance, money that might instead be redirected towards supporting women and girls' grassroots organisations as a foundation of a feminist foreign policy, for example. This area is of particular interest to the Minister: agriculture. I am relying in part on a briefing from Compassion in World Farming and on some excellent research for which I credit the House of Lords Library, which conducted it for me at speed. Compassion in World Farming, as the name suggests, is focused on the well-being and welfare of non-human animals. It points to an independent review for the FCDO that suggests that the department should

“work through its programmes, with the Governments in programmes' countries of operation, to establish agreed levels of animal welfare”.

My direct question to the Minister is: will the Government be doing that?

However, we are focused today on the climate emergency, and with that in mind I want to look in particular at the activities of the International Finance Corporation, which is a member of the World Bank Group. Andrew Mitchell MP, in his role as Minister of State for Development, is a member of the IFC board of governors. The IFC has in recent years funded private sector projects including: a multi-storey pig farm in China; industrial pig production in Vietnam; industrial broiler chicken production in Uganda; and industrial pig and chicken production in Ecuador. Will the UK use its influence to stop that damaging funding of factory farming? As I often reflect in your Lordships' House, it is a huge threat in terms of antimicrobial resistance and is wasting food that could be fed to people, instead feeding it to animals which convert cereals and plant proteins very inefficiently into meat and milk. Globally, 40% of crop calories are used to feed animals when they could be feeding people.

Of course, these factory-farming installations also contribute to massive deforestation and other environmental damage, creating manure as a major pollutant, even though, if we had small-scale agricultural agro-ecological regenerative approaches, it could be a fertiliser on arable crops. Many studies have shown that will not be possible to meet the Paris targets without a reduction in global livestock production. Therefore, will the Government do something—take action to seek to persuade the IFC to stop this damaging funding—and, furthermore, commit to ensuring that no direct UK aid goes to factory farming?

On agriculture more broadly, I am sure the noble Lord is aware of the Independent Commission for Aid Impact paper, *UK Aid to Agriculture in a Time of Climate Change*, from June 2023. The Government then, in responding to that, committed to

“ensure all new UK bilateral aid spending does no harm to nature”

by ensuring that it is all “nature positive”. That was a commitment in the international development strategy of May 2022. Can the Minister tell me whether that is true of everything that was funded in 2023?

Finally, we have to tie all this together: the welfare of our natural world, of our climate and of people. Food security is one of the crushingly important issues of the coming age. The Government themselves, at least sometimes, acknowledge that small-scale agro-ecological production is crucial both to improving nutritional standards and to ensuring that we live within the Paris Agreement. Are the Government ensuring that they stop funding both industrial agriculture of all forms, and that they are funding the agro-ecological small-scale production the world needs?

5.03 pm

Lord Lucas (Con): My Lords, we need developing countries to join us in the progress towards net zero, but we also want them to develop. I am delighted to see that this conundrum was dealt with at COP 28 and

that it was widely recognised and supported that developing countries need what was referred to as transition fuel. In other words, we need to accept that they will burn more hydrocarbons for some considerable time in order to develop, and therefore they will go through a process of development, at the same time moving towards net zero as they become rich enough to afford that.

That is a process that we, through our international development operations, really ought to be supporting. We have the expertise in this country—we have some great consulting engineering companies, such as Buro Happold and others—and there is an awful lot to be gained from collaboration. Although each country will be different, there will be a lot of similarities. Helping countries through this process in a co-ordinated way is something that we ought to be really good at, and by being involved in that we will earn ourselves respect and credit in the help we are giving to countries that wish to develop. However, if we are to go through that process, we have to be truthful. We have to talk about real costs and real performance; we cannot afford the comfortable myths that we indulge in ourselves. These are countries at the margin where every bit matters.

To pick up on what the noble Baronesses, Lady Chakrabarti and Lady Bennett of Manor Castle, have said, we need to look at systems, not individual bits. You must look at the whole picture, and we have not been doing that. I asked the Library for help on three particular aspects of that. It is widely said that cows cause climate change, but there is no scientific demonstration of that. They are just part of the carbon cycle. Methane and carbon dioxide are emitted all over that cycle. If you removed the cows, something else would be doing the emitting. You have to look at the whole system: cows against what?

There is a lot of argument that aeroplanes are a lot more CO₂ intensive than, say, railways, but they are much cheaper. There is no analysis that the House of Lords Library can find that looks at the system and reconciles the fact that trains are more expensive with their total CO₂ emission, which is being paid for by those fares, and compares that with a similar analysis for planes.

On microplastics, which people get very exercised about, there is no science that says they are harmful. What is obvious is that they are sequestering carbon dioxide. They are burying carbon for a long time. They may be untidy, but that is what they are doing. There is nothing to show that they are harmful to any biological system. They are present, but there is no science to show they are harmful. We can say “Oh, we don’t like it, and we won’t tolerate this stuff”, but you cannot impose those additional costs if you are doing something in developing countries.

We should also be looking at positive things we can do to help. It is clear that there is a new ocean developing in east Africa. We know from the Icelandic experience that this is potentially a huge source of geothermal energy. We really ought to be helping the countries along the Rift Valley to benefit from that in a co-ordinated way to help them reap that source of CO₂-free energy. In other areas too, we ought to be looking at how we can bring the technology which

countries will need to go carbon neutral to them in a co-ordinated, supportive way and to use all our accumulated expertise and make it available to them through our international development efforts.

5.07 pm

The Earl of Sandwich (CB): My Lords, it is an extremely hard act to follow the noble Lord, so I shall not. My thanks today go to the noble Baroness, who over many years has been a stalwart of international development in this House and, more recently, on the effects of climate change in developing countries. My particular interest is in Sudan and South Sudan, because of the continuing conflict and genocide there. I am especially concerned about migration, like my noble friend Lord Alton, and the limits of international aid in that region.

Climate change is one of the drivers of migration and therefore concerns us directly as we attempt to reduce the numbers coming across the channel. The Government have got wound up over these numbers, and in my view are not doing enough to slow the original causes through our aid programme, to address the trafficking problem in north Africa as a whole, or to publicise what we and other European countries are already doing. The result is that the country’s concerns seem to be entirely insular, concerned with our backlog and lack of hospitality, and we are even donating some of our limited aid to the Home Office. We have, on the other hand, pioneered the international response to climate change, as we have heard, and our efforts towards climate finance need more recognition and evaluation. I will come back to that.

The situation in north Africa and the Sahel has become more chaotic. Libya in particular is now one of the main sources of trafficking via a string of unsafe detention centres, despite EU funding. France is withdrawing from the Sahel countries where Russia or the Wagner Group have provoked changes of government. The UK’s involvement in the Sahel is minimal, yet the instability and threats from jihadi groups there are bound to rebound on us, as on other European countries. We need to pay more attention to those areas.

It is often impossible to separate climate change from conflict, since the two go together. A well-known example is the long border dispute at Abyei, half way between Sudan and South Sudan, where pastoral interests have clashed with settled farming for years, even within the Dinka people. Exceptional floods and droughts have recently exacerbated this conflict, and now civil war in the north has caused thousands to flee south into that area. International intervention has failed and will probably fail again, but—I note the experience of our new Member on the Benches of the right reverend Prelates—civil society, especially local churches, is struggling to resolve it. The Minister may confirm that the FCDO has been behind some of these efforts. Christian Aid, for example, helps church leaders in Sudan to represent grass-roots voices in advocating for peace and to lay the groundwork for reconciliation. I live in the Salisbury diocese, which is also supporting this effort through its Sudan partnership. Other NGOs work on conflict prevention.

[THE EARL OF SANDWICH]

That leads me back to climate change. The ICF, our international climate finance programme, is currently spending £5.8 billion over a five-year period. I am glad that ICAI, the watchdog, has been following the ICF's progress quite closely and positively. It is going to report to Parliament soon in a rapid review; in particular, it will explain how the ICF contributes to enabling global climate action. It may help to sort out the confusion in my mind about the use of our aid programme. For example, one of the FCDO's oldest projects is the productive safety net programme in Ethiopia. Much of it is being recategorised, yet that will do nothing to improve Ethiopia's global response. Is that really the intention? Can the Minister explain this when she answers the similar criticism from the noble Baroness, Lady Blackstone?

I have no time to talk about Sudan. I say to the splendid remarks from the noble Viscount, Lord Eccles, that we must keep trying. I say to the noble Lord, Lord Hannan, that we are doing soft power.

5.13 pm

Baroness Sheehan (LD): My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Earl; I always find myself in agreement with him. I pay tribute to the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Winchester for his commendable maiden speech. I add my thanks to my noble friend Lady Northover for securing this important and timely debate. Time is short so I am grateful to her for laying out the issues so comprehensively. I associate myself with her remarks, in particular her rebuke—and those of other noble Lords—of the Government for playing fast and loose with the reduced ODA budget by shamefully reclassifying spends and redefining climate finance. In effect, they are robbing Peter to pay Paul.

I will start with some facts. They are mostly taken from NASA's website; I hope that they will provide context for my call to our Government to stop sending mixed messages. First, the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is now 420 parts per million, an increase of 50% since the start of the Industrial Revolution. Secondly, the rate of global warming since the mid-20th century is unprecedented over millennia and accelerating. Thirdly, global emissions from fossil fuels reached record levels again in 2023. Fourthly, last year saw an unexpected and unexplained spike in global sea temperatures, especially around the North Atlantic and the seas around the UK, and last year was the warmest year on record globally. I will stop there, but there is plenty more hard evidence pointing to accelerating climate change, maybe more aptly referred to now as climate breakdown.

We are in the last chance saloon. The time for action to save our planet is now. This is the decade in which we must act. It is also time to equip developing countries to join the fight against increasing emissions, but they need resources to do so. Some, such as the small island developing states, are fighting for their very survival. COP 28 gave them early hope, when agreement was reached on the loss and damage fund. However, the end goal of reaching agreement to phase out fossil fuels was watered down by the weaker agreement to transition away from fossil fuels. Their disappointment was bitter. They were in effect being asked to sign their

death warrant. Will the Minister work to make the loss and damage fund meaningful, so that countries are not left saddled with crippling debt and existing funds are not used to fill it?

I will say a few words about the impact of climate breakdown on global health. As a trustee of the Malaria Consortium, I will use malaria as an example. The fact is that wetter, warmer conditions mean that malaria is on the increase. For example, catastrophic flooding in Pakistan in 2022 led to a fivefold increase in malaria cases, and WHO's *World Malaria Report 2023* tells us that cases worldwide have risen to 249 million. With the two vaccines now at our disposal, this terrible disease, which has been with us for millennia, could be consigned to history, but in 2022 we reduced our contribution to the Global Fund's seventh replenishment by a third, from £1.48 billion to just £1 billion. As the noble Baroness, Lady Bottomley, pointed out, the Global Fund leads the charge against the scourges of TB, HIV/AIDS and malaria. What does our reduction to that fund signal to the world? Does the Minister agree that our Government must do much more to support the eradication of this dreadful disease, which is now within our grasp? It would be nothing short of enlightened self-interest. The West is fast becoming a hospitable climate for the malaria mosquito and the mosquito that spreads dengue fever.

In conclusion, the mixed signals that I talked about at the start of my contribution must stop. We cannot mouth support for the loss and damage fund and then reduce our historical support for the Global Fund. Nor can we welcome the COP 28 text calling for countries to transition away from fossil fuels and give the go-ahead for a new coal mine in Cumbria, as well as put into legislation the farcical offshore petroleum Bill for an annual round of new oil and gas licences. I put to the Minister that we must behave more honourably if we are to continue to claim credibility as a leader in climate action.

5.19 pm

The Lord Bishop of Norwich: My Lords, I too express my appreciation to the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, for securing this debate and congratulate my right reverend friend the Bishop of Winchester on his informative and passionate maiden speech.

The UK rightly has a distinguished record in overseas development aid and I look forward to the urgent return to the Government's manifesto commitment of 0.7% of GDP being spent on it. There also needs to be transparency in new funding announcements about whether the funding is new money or comes from salami-slicing existing programmes. The priorities for climate change aid must be focused on three areas: mitigation, resilience and emergency response. I will look briefly at each in turn.

The first is working both locally and globally to reduce the amount of carbon in the atmosphere. There is a myriad of small projects, often led by faith communities, to protect land, restore habitats, nurture soil and plant trees. Faith actors are accessible as they are in every community. They are affordable, due to their existing structures and volunteers, and they are acceptable due to being trusted partners on the ground in local cultures. But they also connect globally, giving

a bigger picture and attracting solidarity from faith communities around the world. Welling up inspiration from their faith, they are great advocates for the care of creation.

One such initiative—I declare an interest here as I am much involved in it—is the global Anglican Communion Forest, which seeks to conserve, protect and restore ecosystems across the world. Last year, the Anglican Church in Tanzania planted more than 300,000 trees across 69 villages. The Anglican Church in Kenya planted 2 million trees and is planning to plant 15 million more by 2026. The Anglican Church in Mozambique is involved in restoring mangrove swamps, which both protect coastlines and enhance biodiversity. These small projects inspire people to go further to protect and enhance their environment. Will the Government work more closely with faith communities, which are so often on the front line of the delivery of ecosystem services that absorb carbon as well as on the front line of the adverse impacts of climate change?

Secondly, we need to build resilience to the impact of more extreme weather events caused by climate change. As your Lordships have already heard, last year was the hottest on record and it is no coincidence that floods, cyclones, droughts, et cetera, killed or displaced millions of people. If we do not build resilience, we will see increasing health inequalities, poverty, conflicts and migration, due to the impact of climate change on people's lives, resources and safety. The UNHCR estimates that 70% of all refugees from conflict come from countries that are highly vulnerable to climate. Aid in this area is money well spent for the future. I express my gratitude to the Government for, on various occasions, providing match-funding opportunities to lever in further faith-based support for the world's poorest communities.

Finally, we need to respond really well by providing the right emergency aid to affected nations. The noble Earl, Lord Sandwich, mentioned Christian Aid; a new analysis by it said that the 20 costliest extreme climate disasters in 2023 revealed a

“global postcode lottery stacked against the poor”,

where the relative economic impact of disasters varies considerably across countries. In the world's economically poorest nations, few households have any financial buffer to help them bounce back after a disaster. As well as more deaths in the immediate aftermath, this means that recovery is often slower and more unequal, with many people pushed further into poverty as their assets have been destroyed or damaged.

Part of our moral duty as a nation is to reach out to our global neighbours. Part of this can be seen in the commitment we might make to the loss and damage fund, so will the Minister make its operationalisation an urgent priority? This is the task for our generation in this decade.

5.24 pm

Viscount Chandos (Lab): My Lords, as the last Back-Bench speaker, I will try to be brief and avoid repetition as far as possible, let alone hesitation or deviation. I thank and pay tribute to the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, not just for her compelling introduction but, as the noble Lord, Lord Hannay, said, for her long record in this field in and out of government. I will

focus my remarks exclusively on the role that sustainable media plays in international development generally, particularly in relation to climate change. I declare my interest, as included in the register, as chair of the not-for-profit Thomson Foundation, which, along with its sister organisation in Berlin, promotes sustainable media development and trains journalists in countries with either low incomes or low press freedom, or both.

Six weeks ago, I attended the annual awards ceremony of the Foreign Press Association, addressed this year by Her Majesty the Queen. One of the award winners was the documentary film “Under Poisoned Skies”, directed by Jess Kelly for BBC News Arabic, which revealed the devastating effect on the health of local people caused by gas flaring in the giant oil fields of southern Iraq, over and above the deeply damaging level of emissions. So far, this film has had neither the ratings nor the political impact of “Mr Bates vs The Post Office”, but it demonstrates vividly the role of the media in raising awareness and prospectively spurring action against climate change and related threats to the health of people in developing nations.

“Under Poisoned Skies” was financed by the BBC World Service, whose funding since 2014 has been predominantly from the licence fee rather than the then FCO, following the ill-judged settlement between the BBC and the Government, which paralleled the later raids on the international development budget described by the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, and other speakers.

Policies to combat climate change cannot be imposed on developing nations: they must emerge with the wholehearted consent of those countries' people, based on accurate and truthful information. That is why the Thomson Foundation strongly believes that local journalists in developing nations have a vital role to play in changing the narrative around the world's environmental breakdown and climate change. The foundation, funded inter alia by the FCDO, the British Council and, through Berlin, the EU, provides online e-learning courses and webinars and holds competitions for environmental journalists and workshops in countries including Lesotho and Ethiopia.

Media developments straddled the FCO and DfID when they were separate departments, so if there were any positive arguments for their merger, as opposed to a continuation of the cross-departmental co-operation described by the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, this might have been one. It is therefore disappointing that November's White Paper, welcome as it is in other ways, made no attempt to capitalise on the merged department by including any reference to the vital role that strong and free media plays in achieving international development objectives. Will the Minister urge his colleagues in the FCDO to incorporate the promotion of sustainable media as a priority in the international development policy that I hope will emerge from the White Paper?

5.29 pm

Lord Purvis of Tweed (LD): My Lords, the House welcomed the maiden speech, as I do, and recognised, rightly, the exceptional introduction of this debate by my noble friend Lady Northover. I pay tribute to her

[LORD PURVIS OF TWEED]
distinguished role as a DfID Minister and for raising the associated issues with such consistency in this House. Her role as a DfID Minister and her contributions are one example of why I think the case is very strong for there to be an independent development department again—not one that simply will recreate DfID but, in my mind, an independent development department for global transition, which is focused on the issues we have been debating today, and one where the UK would be seen as a dependable, predictable and reliable leader, but also a partner when countries are grappling with those challenges of transition towards zero poverty and also on climate.

This is traditionally the week when we wish Members a happy new year. For many people around the world, it is hell on earth they see—in Sudan, with the ongoing conflict there, and in Palestine, where women and children are bearing the brunt of conflict. If you add the climate emergency, which impacts disproportionately on women and children, particularly the newborn and the most elderly and frail, this is not a happy new year for those people.

During the Christmas break, just before Christmas, I was in Nairobi with Sudanese civilians in the Takadum programme, who are seeking an end to the conflict in Sudan, which has caused the greatest humanitarian crisis on the planet at the moment. I returned this morning from Malawi, a country which is one of the most vulnerable to the climate crisis. I visited the parliament yesterday, and MPs; the UK has recognised that it is a priority country. The FCDO website says that

“Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world and ranks 171 out of 189 in the Human Development Index, with 70% of the population below the (\$1.90) poverty line”

and is

“vulnerable to climatic shocks and demographic challenges”.

The UK supported Malawi in 2018-19 with £82 million. This year, that is now £23 million. The UK response to one of the most desperately needy and vulnerable countries in the world is to give support that is less than a third of what it was before, and that is not estimated even to grow to more than £28 million in 2027.

With regard to climate, my noble friend Lady Northover welcomed the fact that the Minister responding has a dual portfolio, with environment and also FCDO, because she raised the need where the UK has offered practical support and transition advice for many of those advisers that have been so welcomed working with other countries. The Minister will know the Independent Commission for Aid Impact, in its review on aid and agriculture, found that we now have cut the experts for agricultural advice by 25%. That means that countries are less equipped, because there are fewer UK advisers working with them with regard to climate transition and agriculture.

On climate, no doubt the Minister will refer to the £100 million of UK funding announced at COP 28; I am sure that is in his contribution. He will cite the £18 million for an innovative new programme to adapt and strengthen health systems. I suspect what he will not say is that the cuts for neglected tropical diseases and cuts in health systems made prior to that included a 95% cut for neglected tropical diseases and health

systems, where the UK had led a global flagship programme on transition and climate. We know that one of the impacts of climate change is the increase in disease and those debilitating conditions which the UK has cut aid on, so there is little point in issuing press releases announcing £100 million extra, where just a few months before, £150 million had been cut from health systems.

Taking us for fools is one of the more wearisome policies of this Government. Deliberately misleading statements on development have become a bit of an art form. For example, restoring the legal requirement of 0.7% of GNI on ODA “when the fiscal circumstances allow”, a position now depressingly adopted by the Labour Party too it seems, is misleading because the fiscal tests were designed never to be met. Unique across all departmental expenditure, a distinct set of fiscal tests was put in place, but the Government hit a bit of a snag. When they announced the fiscal tests in July 2021, the Chancellor said, in a Written Ministerial Statement, that

“the Government commit to spending 0.7% of GNI on ODA when the independent Office for Budget Responsibility’s fiscal forecast confirms that, on a sustainable basis, we are not borrowing for day-to-day spending and underlying debt is falling”.—[*Official Report*, Commons, 12/7/21; col. 3WS.]

In March 2022, page 129 of the OBR’s *Economic and Fiscal Outlook* said:

“At this forecast, the current budget reaches surplus and underlying debt falls from 2023-24”.

The Government did not expect the fiscal tests to be met, but they were, so what did they do? They changed the tests. We are now in a situation where it is very hard to believe the Government when they say that they are committed to restoring 0.7% when they set tests to be judged by an independent body and, when those tests are met, they simply change the rules.

It is suspicious, because we also might see some of that with regard to the commitments to international climate finance. The Minister no doubt will say that we are committed to £11.6 billion on international climate finance. He is nodding, and I am looking forward to hearing it, as it means he is able to answer the question I am about to ask him. The commitment given by the Government on international climate finance seems to have a fair amount of double-counting in it. From what was announced, we understood it to be £11.6 billion of new money. What we now understand is that the Government are double-counting humanitarian assistance on climate finance of £542 million and double-counting commitments to multilateral development banks of £920 million, and £159 million which has been committed through BII, which has been referred to, is seemingly included within the £11.6 billion. The Minister is clearly going to be saying something about the commitment, and I am sure the Box will be able to give him information that all of that £11.6 billion is new money, not that which had been committed beforehand.

We are now in a situation where the UK is not a reliable partner, is not predictable and is not dependable. My party favours an immediate restoration of 0.7%, because it is in our interests and the world’s interests. We would establish an independent department for international development and we would put the

sustainable development goals, particularly the elimination of absolute poverty and climate transition, at the heart of international development spending. We would immediately restore full funding for programmes supporting women, girls and equality.

I close with what the noble Lord, Lord Hannan, referred to: the record number of people around the world voting this year. There is likely to be a fair number of people in this country doing so, and many of them will be looking at parties' commitments on international development. Boris Johnson promised he would not get rid of DfID and then shortly got rid of it. Liz Truss promised to reverse the savage cuts to women and girls aid programmes and a month later reneged on it. Our current Foreign Secretary criticised the unlawful cuts to ODA, which he now defends around the Cabinet table. Boris Johnson, Liz Truss, David Cameron: why on earth would many of those people who will be casting their democratic vote trust Conservative Foreign Secretaries and aid funding ever again?

5.39 pm

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): My Lords, I too thank the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, for initiating this debate. She has a tremendous record on this subject; of course, when I first met her, she was an International Development Minister. I also congratulate the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Winchester. We first exchanged comments at the conference on freedom of religion or belief, which I was at because that is such an important subject. It is about not only the freedom to practise religion; it is also the freedom not to have one. Countries that allow that can cherish and protect all human rights, as he said. That is why it is so important and I welcome his ongoing contribution.

At the launch of the Government's recent White Paper on international development, Andrew Mitchell acknowledged the United Kingdom's historic role in such development. Like the noble Lord, Lord Hannay, I welcome its future focus but we need a clear understanding about where we are heading. To have that, we also need a frank assessment of where we have been.

One of Labour's lasting achievements had been to forge a new political consensus around development. To his credit the noble Lord, Lord Cameron, sustained that commitment as Prime Minister, keeping Britain on the path to 0.7% that Labour had set it on. But under the direction of Rishi Sunak, this Government have retreated from Britain's commitments: cutting our development target from 0.7% to 0.5%, as we have heard, and stripping billions from vital aid programmes in the process. The speed of those cuts is what was most damaging. Without any proper planning, they caused huge damage, particularly to our credibility as a trusted partner. We also then saw delivery undermined through a bungled merger between DfID and the Foreign Office, deprioritising development, sapping morale and pushing out expertise that we had built up over so many years.

I want to give a bit of focus for hope to the noble Viscount, Lord Eccles, because Labour's foreign policy will focus on delivering security and prosperity for Britain. Our development policy will be no different

by rebuilding Britain's reputation, reasserting Britain's partnership and, as my noble friend Lord Chandos said, developing a clear soft-power strategy. That is crucial in building the alliances needed to take on the foreign policy challenges of the 21st century and tackle the underlying causes of instability, which threaten Britain and the multilateral system.

There is an abundance of economic potential in the global South, with young populations eager to make change, and a new generation of political leadership, particularly women. They are being held back by the challenges of climate change, debt and the risks of conflict. As the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, said, it is important that in this debate we focus on debt and its direct linkage to the climate crisis. It is vital that climate finance mechanisms do not force vulnerable countries deeper into debt.

As we also heard in this debate, multilateral partnerships such as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria have been critical in the progress towards the 2030 agenda and the SDGs, yet multilateral aid is projected to fall to just 25% of aid spending by 2025. We need to continue to raise awareness of the intersection between global health and climate change on the global stage, while working to improve climate resilience in healthcare systems and ensuring that climate-sensitive diseases such as malaria, as the noble Baroness, Lady Bottomley, highlighted, are factored into health programmes. We know that malaria is a climate-sensitive disease, threatening hard-won progress in many areas.

I declare an interest as co-chair of the Nutrition for Development APPG, and I have raised in previous debates the issue of food insecurity and malnutrition. Investment in nutrition has a key multiplying effect. It plays a critical role in health, education, economic advancement and gender equality. It is fundamental, as the noble Lord, Lord Oates, said, to achieving most of the sustainable development goals. Climate change is a key threat to previous global progress on malnutrition and hunger. Changing weather patterns are leading to more frequent and severe droughts, flooding, poor crop yields, lower national content in produce and destroyed harvests. It is not only affecting people's access to food, but the quality of food and therefore nutrition. Studies have made that absolutely clear.

Last November's global food security summit in London—I welcomed the fact that we were engaging with others to address this issue—demonstrated the UK Government's recognition of the importance of food security and nutrition. But we need more than just words; we need action. We need a clear understanding that we will maintain all the commitments we made at the last nutrition for growth summit in Tokyo, and that we will focus on the targets set out at that summit.

We need significant investment in climate-resilient food systems and a proper focus on food and security systems. That is why what was decided at COP 28 was so important. There, Britain took an important step by committing £100 million to support communities particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. I hope the noble Lord can focus on the questions about how that will be delivered and the timetable for delivery.

[LORD COLLINS OF HIGHBURY]

By focusing on where Britain has most to offer, Labour will refocus development co-operation back on to eliminating poverty by supporting partners with economic transformation, prioritising conflict prevention, working for fairer deals on debt and unlocking climate finance. Our new approach will be based on respect—a genuine partnership with the global south, supporting its plans, as the noble Viscount said, to build stronger partnerships while supporting jobs and innovation at home. What we want to see, and what will give hope to global partners, is a Britain reconnected as a trusted partner, providing longer-term sustained development funding and support. Working in partnership to strengthen the multilateral system, we can leverage more of the funds needed to meet the global goals, modernise developing economies and build resilient public services to create lasting change.

5.47 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Benyon) (Con): My Lords, the nature and environment activist Tony Juniper, now chairman of Natural England, wrote a very good book called *What Has Nature Ever Done For Us?* He showed the equivalent of the life of this planet in a train journey from London to Cambridge. Humanity's existence on that journey is the equivalent of just walking from the train to the ticket machine. Only the last few steps of that equivalent journey have created the existential threat of climate change and the loss of nature that we know is so damaging and that can deliver such appalling insecurity and poverty, and which we are seeking to tackle.

I thank noble Lords for their contributions to this debate. I do not have time to do all the contributions credit, but I pay great tribute to the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, for tabling it and for her years of dedication to international development.

Tackling climate change and ending poverty are two sides of the same coin, and we cannot achieve one without the other. The United Kingdom has a crucial role to play, working with our partners to address these critical global challenges. I thank the noble Baroness for setting the debate in context, and I pay great tribute to the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Winchester for an outstanding maiden speech, in which he stated both the internationalist and the local approach, picked up by so many noble Lords. His was a really thoughtful contribution, and we are lucky to have him among us.

We cannot achieve our climate or development goals without full-scale economic transformation to deliver the trillions of dollars of investment needed. This must be coupled with unprecedented action to tackle climate change and to protect and restore nature. Our White Paper, which has been much commented on in this debate, was published in November. It establishes seven areas of transformative action, and this is how we will deliver a step change in international development by the end of the decade, ending extreme poverty and tackling climate change.

Among the key elements is going further and faster to mobilise international finance and increase private sector investment in development, while strengthening

and reforming the international system to improve action on trade, tax and, crucially, debt, which was mentioned by many noble Lords—as well as tackling the scourge of dirty money, of course. This is also the key to unlocking the money needed to tackle global challenges, including climate change. We will build on resilience and enable adaptation for those affected by conflict, disasters and climate change. We will harness innovation, new technologies and scientific research to solve the problems that money alone cannot solve.

The noble Lord, Lord Alton, was right to remind us that linked to this is the whole humanitarian piece. The Pentagon first described climate change as the great risk multiplier, and, with that risk to security, systems of governance collapse. With that comes increased authoritarianism—my noble friend Lord Hannan referred to this. In the White Paper, there is a stark graph showing the number of people in the world who now live under authoritarian regimes, compared to a few years ago.

The global context for international development has changed, and the White Paper sets out our approach and how it is changing with it. We will work in partnership, based on mutual respect, with leaders, communities and individuals shaping the solutions they need. This includes our work to reduce emissions, adapt to climate change and protect and restore nature. I am grateful to my noble friend Lord Eccles for mentioning Kew. At a number of recent COPs, we have seen how Kew is at the heart of this, with its 500 scientists delivering an extraordinary piece of soft power for Britain and a real gift to the world, in the understanding of the importance of plants and natural systems. I am grateful to my noble friend, who led it so well in the past. It is absolutely key to the kind of partnerships that we are creating around the world.

We also partner with countries to improve access to climate adaptation finance. For example, we co-chair the climate and development ministerial meetings with the UAE, Vanuatu and Malawi. The forum has already taken significant steps, including raising support for debt-suspension clauses in times of disaster and launching a task force to improve access to climate finance. Overall, the UK will prioritise its grant resources for the lowest-income countries and communities, which are particularly vulnerable to the effects of conflict and climate change. We will go further and faster to mobilise more finance to help end extreme poverty and tackle the climate crisis.

I will mention the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Norwich's absolutely vital point about using local actors, as well as Church-based and faith-based organisations, along with civil society—this is so important. As was mentioned, in countries such as South Sudan, it is really important that we use them as part of the tools we need to win through.

Beginning with our work to reduce emissions, we remain committed to delivering net zero at home and driving progress internationally to keep 1.5 degrees centigrade within reach. Over the past 12 years, our international climate finance has provided almost 70 million people overseas with improved access to clean energy. We also reduced or avoided 86 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions. The deal at COP 28 is a key moment in efforts to get to net zero by 2050.

For the first time, there has been a global agreement to transition away from fossil fuels, and I am proud of the UK's pivotal role in the negotiations—but we still have a long way to go. We will continue to work with countries around the globe to accelerate action in this critical decade. I remind noble Lords who are concerned about recent announcements that we are reducing our dependency on our own oil exploration by 7% a year.

I turn to critical minerals. The green transition must not come at the expense of countries—often less developed ones—with critical mineral resources. The UK is working through the G7 and G20 with the IEA, through forums such as the Minerals Security Partnership, to support diverse, responsible and transparent critical mineral supply chains. I pay tribute to the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, and her colleagues in the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Critical Minerals for their efforts on this vital issue.

I turn to adaptation. Over the past 12 years, our international climate finance has helped more than 100 million people cope with the effects of climate change. Our negotiators helped to agree a framework at the COP 28 summit to bring a global goal on adaptation to life; although there is further work to be done, this is a critical step towards more meaningful action. For those who doubt Britain's place in multilateral diplomacy, on climate and nature, we were really at the heart of that COP and previous ones—and I pay huge tribute to all those who take part. We demean them if we talk it down; this was an extraordinary result. We were extremely gloomy about the possibility of getting the kind of agreement that we did, and certainly to start the whole thing with an agreement on loss and damage was very welcome.

My colleague, the Minister for International Development, Andrew Mitchell, announced at COP 28 £100 million of UK funding to help vulnerable people adapt to climate change. That includes £36 million for action in the Middle East and north Africa to support long-term climate stability; that will mobilise \$500 million for clean energy and green growth projects, and support 450,000 people to adapt to climate change.

COP 28 also reaffirmed the importance of forests—and I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Chakrabarti, for mentioning that—and nature, in tackling the climate crisis. I could list all the amounts of money that we have put towards that, but it is a crucial part of the work that we need to do globally to get the planet back on track.

We know that aid alone will not be enough when the annual financing gap for achieving the sustainable development goals is \$3.9 trillion. We must unlock finance from other sources, and mobilise more private capital to low- and middle-income countries—a key point made by the noble Baroness, Lady Sheehan. The UK is a major donor to international climate finance. At the G20, the PM announced that the UK will provide \$2 billion to the Green Climate Fund, which is the biggest single funding commitment that the UK has made to help tackle climate change. Half of that contribution will go to adaptation.

Overall, we remain committed to spending £11.6 billion of new money on international climate finance by April 2026, including £3 billion to restore and sustainably

manage nature. We are committed to tripling UK funding for adaptation to £1.5 billion next year to support those experiencing the worst impacts of climate change. The UK is delivering on its commitment. I have been party to lengthy discussions on this, and I assure noble Lords that we are serious about this.

We have heard the increasing calls from developing countries to reform the international financial system. The Prime Minister launched the global climate finance framework at COP 28 alongside leaders from Barbados, Kenya, India, France and others. This sets a new ambition on reforming finance to address our climate and development goals. A key pillar of reform is multiplying our impact by unlocking hundreds of billions of affordable finance from international financial institutions for key development priorities, and I shall visit one of those next week.

Our guarantees to multilateral development banks—a point that was raised—are also doing this. At the UN General Assembly, we announced a guarantee to unlock up to \$1.8 billion of climate finance, supporting vulnerable people across Asia and the Pacific to adapt to climate needs. To note the point made by the noble Lord, Lord Hannay, the UK is leading the way on making the global financial system more shock responsive. We were the first to offer climate-resilient debt clauses in loans from our export credit agency, pausing repayments when disasters strike. COP 28 saw the UK announce take-up of this offer in Senegal and Guyana, with 73 countries backing the UN call to action for creditors to offer CRDCs by 2025.

I am conscious that I want to address the point made by my noble friend Lady Bottomley about malaria, which was also raised by others. We are making a range of investments to fight malaria, which include our £1 billion contribution to the seventh replenishment of the Global Fund. This supports vital tools in combating malaria, including the distribution of 86 million mosquito nets, 450,000 seasonal malaria chemoprevention treatments, and treatment and care for 18 million people—but the future is where the benefits really lie. We are funding R&D support on next-generation bed nets and vaccines and are supporting research that has paved the way for the rollout of RTS,S and R21 malaria vaccines, mainly targeting children under five who are at much greater risk of malaria. Additionally, we have supported the rollout of these vaccines through our £1.6 billion funding to GAVI, including for further clinical trials. This is really important work and, with our biotech industry and ability to move fast on vaccines, we can benefit from some of the tragedies we have had in recent years, such as Covid, and see real benefit to the world in what we are delivering.

Some noble Lords raised the issue of loss and damage. The UK's contribution to the new fund is a new commitment that will be met from our ODA budget. It is part of our ongoing commitment to support developing countries to tackle the causes and impacts of climate change. I just want to take one of the dying minutes of this debate to mention SIDS—small island developing states. These are people who are facing the reality of climate change on a daily basis. We are absolutely at the heart of trying to support them. I do not have time to go into it, but it is an absolute priority for our country.

[LORD BENYON]

We must accelerate progress towards the sustainable developing goals; that matters now more than ever. We will continue to use all the tools that we have to deliver the transformation that the world needs to see, including building a bigger, better and fairer international system that addresses poverty and climate change. Together with our partners, we are building a healthier, greener and more prosperous future for generations to come.

6.03 pm

Baroness Northover (LD): I thank all noble Lords for their wide-ranging contributions and their very kind comments. I thank the Minister for his response and for granting me some of his time so that I could respond to the debate. I also look forward to what I hope will be his written response to the questions he has not managed to answer, not least from my noble friend Lord Purvis.

What strikes me about this debate is the cross-party agreement that climate change is real, dangerous and must be tackled. I am also struck by the common agreement that we must look and act globally as well as locally, as the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Winchester said in his excellent maiden speech. I am sure that we will return to these issues. On that, I hope, positive note of what we can and must do—for the noble Viscount, Lord Eccles—I thank everyone again for their contributions.

Motion agreed.

Trade (Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership) Bill [HL]

Order of Consideration Motion

6.04 pm

Moved by Lord Roborough

That the amendments for the Report stage be marshalled and considered in the following order: Clauses 1 to 3, The Schedule, Clauses 4 to 8, Title.

Lord Roborough (Con): My Lords, on behalf of my noble friend Lord Johnson of Lainston, I beg to move the Motion standing in his name on the Order Paper.

Motion agreed.

Judicial Pensions (Remediable Service etc.) (Amendment) Regulations 2023

Motion to Approve

6.04 pm

Moved by Lord Roborough

That the draft Regulations laid before the House on 13 November 2023 be approved. *Considered in Grand Committee on 10 January.*

Lord Roborough (Con): My Lords, on behalf of my noble and learned friend Lord Bellamy, I beg to move the Motion standing in his name on the Order Paper.

Motion agreed.

House adjourned at 6.05 pm.