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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Tuesday 8 March 2016

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

JUSTICE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Foreign National Offenders

1. **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the Home Secretary on steps to remove foreign national offenders from UK prisons to their home countries. [903940]

4. **Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the Home Secretary on steps to remove foreign national offenders from UK prisons to their home countries. [903944]

9. **Suella Fernandes** (Fareham) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the Home Secretary on steps to remove foreign national offenders from UK prisons to their home countries. [R] [903950]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Dominic Raab): The Justice Secretary and the Home Secretary have regular bilateral meetings in which they discuss progress on removing foreign national offenders from UK prisons and more generally. It remains a top priority for both Departments.

Bob Blackman: In London, we welcome people who come here to study, be tourists or add to our economy, but not those who commit crime and are then imprisoned. With 40% of crime in London committed by foreign nationals, what more can my hon. Friend do to ensure that those responsible are deported at the end of their sentences and not allowed back into this country?

Mr Raab: The number of foreign national offenders in the prison population went down by 1,240 between June 2010 and December 2015, but my hon. Friend is right and we strive to do better. Further action is being taken. As the Prime Minister announced on 8 February, we have introduced in the Policing and Crime Bill a new clause that requires defendants appearing in court to provide their name, date of birth and nationality. That is an important tool, backed up by a criminal offence for failure to respond that will help us to remove even more FNOs. That is vital for public protection and vital to saving precious taxpayers' money.

Andrew Bridgen: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is totally unacceptable for the British taxpayer to be paying for foreign criminals?

Mr Raab: My hon. Friend is right. We have a range of existing measures, as well as the new action I have just described. The early release scheme allows for the early removal of foreign national offenders. We remove about 1,800 prisoners per year under that scheme and there are also prisoner transfer agreements. Overall, 29,000 FNOs have been removed between 2010 and 2015.

Mr Speaker: I call Suella Fernandes. She is not here. I call Mr Philip Hollobone.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): What efforts are made to ensure that EU national foreign offenders who have been returned to their countries are banned from returning to the United Kingdom—or is that sort of sensible precaution not possible while we are a member of the European Union?

Mr Raab: My hon. Friend makes, if I may say so, a predictable but powerful point. There clearly are restrictions as a result of free movement, but we try to exercise the powers we have as strenuously and as vigorously as possible.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): My constituent was stabbed by a criminal who was given an indefinite hospital order. In my view, he should be deported. If I write to the Minister, will he look at the case to see that justice is done for my constituent?

Mr Raab: Those kinds of cases are very serious and very traumatic for the family. I am very sympathetic, and the hon. Lady should please feel free to write to me. All I would say to Opposition Members is that when we come to consider human rights reform, I hope that on the substance we can enlist as much support across the House as possible.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): The Minister will know that 25% of the foreign national offenders in our prisons come from three EU countries: Ireland, Poland and Romania. What is the reluctance of other EU countries to take back their own citizens who have been committing crimes in our country?

Mr Raab: We try, through our prisoner transfer agreements and residual national powers, to exercise powers as robustly as possible to remove as many people as possible. The right hon. Gentleman will know that, as a result of the EU free movement rules and of the Human Rights Act 1998 and human rights regime—which is, in fairness, separate, albeit related to some degree—there are restrictions. As I said to the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz), when it comes to looking at human rights reform I hope sensible people with experience, such as the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee, will look very carefully at the substance and not just take a purely political stance.

John Pugh (Southport) (LD): In July 2012, when the Government signed a compulsory transfer agreement with Albania, the then prison Minister said he hoped it

would be the first of many. How many have there been since then, and how is the arrangement with Albania going?

Mr Raab: We have more than 100 bilateral prisoner transfer agreements, as well as Council of Europe and Commonwealth schemes. If the hon. Gentleman wishes, I can write to him in due course on the particular numbers under the Albanian agreement.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): Does the Minister agree that the deportation of foreign national offenders is in some cases inhibited by the operation of the Human Rights Act? If so, will the Minister update the House on plans to repeal it and replace it with a British Bill of Rights?

Mr Raab: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. One specific issue we want to look at in some detail is the scope to which our Bill of Rights can facilitate the removal of serious offenders, particularly when they have relied on their rather elastic, opaque and ever-expanding rights under article 8. The removal of serious offenders is made even more difficult because of the Human Rights Act. Our proposals will be coming in due course.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): There are many convicted criminals in our prisons who, after committing crimes in the UK, fled the UK and were then returned here to face justice, thanks to the European arrest warrant. Will the Minister explain to the House how the interests of victims of crime can be protected if we leave the EU and, as a result, the scope of the EAW?

Mr Raab: I think the hon. Lady is slightly confused about the difference between extradition and deportation. As a result of European law, it has become harder and harder to deport foreign national offenders, while unfortunately the fast-track extradition of innocent British citizens has become easier and easier. That balance should be addressed, and in that I hope we can enlist her support.

Mental Health Treatment: Young Offenders

2. **David Rutley** (Macclesfield) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to improve mental health treatment for young people serving custodial sentences; and if he will make a statement. [903942]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Michael Gove): May I, through you, Mr Speaker, apologise to the House on behalf of the Minister for Policing, Fire, Criminal Justice and Victims, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mike Penning)? He is unavoidably detained in Bristol on departmental business.

We work closely with the NHS to make sure that young people serving custodial sentences have access to comprehensive mental health provision, and as part of his review of the youth justice system, Charlie Taylor is looking at ways to improve the provision of mental health care for children and young people.

David Rutley: I thank my right hon. Friend for the steps he is taking in this important area, but will he consider making mental health and substance misuse

treatment one of the accountability measures in the new prison league tables, including for the youth estate?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend makes a characteristically acute point. According to academic research, up to 70% of prisoners are likely to have had a mental health problem, often related to drink or drug abuse. It is therefore in all our interests that we do everything possible to ensure that appropriate therapy and rehabilitative activity are available to those prisoners.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): What steps is the Secretary of State taking to ensure that young people in custody are given adequate safe time outside to protect and safeguard their mental health and wellbeing?

Michael Gove: The hon. Lady makes a very good point. As part of the youth justice review, I have tasked Charlie Taylor with making sure that purposeful activity—education, sporting activity and time outside—is part of the regime that all young offenders in custody can enjoy.

Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con): What assessment has my right hon. Friend made of the impact on prisoner mental health and rehabilitation of ensuring that prisoners serve their sentences as close as possible to their family homes?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend makes an important point. It is important to ensure that families have access to prisoners. Sometimes, of course, that is facilitated by the prison or secure training centre being close to families, but there are ways to ensure that even geographically distant families have effective access to their loved ones.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): Six weeks ago, at the last Justice oral questions, I asked how many fines G4S had received since 2010 and how many times it had breached its contracts for youth training facilities. I was told by the Minister that he would write to me, but I am yet to receive a letter. I have asked written questions asking for this information, but still nothing. It beggars belief that such information, relating to a contract of this size, is not immediately available to Ministers. It also raises a question about what internal row is going on within the Department over the delay of the information.

Michael Gove: I can only apologise again, through you, Mr Speaker, to the hon. Lady. She has been persistent on this important issue, and I am truly sorry she has not received answers to her questions. She will be aware, of course, that G4S has said it wants to remove itself from the administration of secure training centres for young people, but it is important that there be full accountability about how public money is spent and how these organisations have operated. I will make sure that a reply comes to her as soon as possible.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): We know that many of the young people in secure training centres have serious mental health problems and therefore require specialist support. That is certainly the case at Medway STC. As the Justice Secretary said, we understand that G4S has decided to end its contract at Medway and at

another training centre, but I was surprised to learn that it can sell its contracts to other private companies. There is widespread agreement that G4S has an appalling track record in running STCs. In allowing it to sell its contracts, are not the Government rewarding it for failure?

Michael Gove: Absolutely not. It is our responsibility to ensure that children in secure training centres are kept in decent and supportive circumstances that enable them to reintegrate into society. As a result of Youth Justice Board monitoring, the work of the improvement board I set up and the wider work by Charlie Taylor, we are monitoring very carefully the health and welfare of children in all our secure training centres. My Department will have the ability to scrutinise any other organisation that takes over the running of these STCs to ensure that children are kept safe.

Legal Services (Brexit)

3. **Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the potential effect of the UK leaving the EU on legal services. [903943]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Shailesh Vara): The hon. Gentleman will be aware that on 19 February, the Prime Minister set out the Government position on remaining in the European Union.

Bill Esterson: The former head of the Association of Chief Police Officers, Sir Hugh Orde, says that leaving the European Union would increase the risk of terrorism and would mean that Britain would become a safe haven for criminals. I am sure that the Minister agrees with Sir Hugh, but will he explain why the Justice Secretary is so keen to ignore this advice from such a well-respected authority and to take such a risk with public safety?

Mr Vara: May I make it absolutely clear to the hon. Gentleman that the Government's position is that we would be better off in the European Union and that we would be safer and more secure in it? It is also the case that the deal struck by the Prime Minister in Brussels very much achieves those objectives.

Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con): England and Wales have by far the largest law firms in Europe and provide by far the largest legal services market in Europe, which is 1.5% of UK gross domestic product. Does the Minister not agree with most commercial law firms and the Law Society that up to £1.7 billion of annual legal services output could be lost following a Brexit?

Mr Vara: We have one of the best legal sectors in the world. We are thriving both within and outside the European Union. Whatever the decision on 23 June, I am confident that our legal sector will continue to thrive.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Given that an assessment of the impact on legal services will have been made by the civil servants in the Department,

does the Minister think it fair, right and proper that his colleague, the Justice Secretary, is denied the opportunity to see the paperwork?

Mr Vara: As I said earlier, the Government's position is very clear—that we will be better off in the European Union. As for any potential disagreements, let me gently say to Opposition Members that it is a bit rich for them to be engaging in this sort of conversation in view of the level of unity in their own party. I am prepared to bet a substantial amount with any Labour Member that tomorrow, in 24 hours' time, when we have Prime Minister's Questions, the cheer for my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will be a lot louder than the cheer that the leader of the Labour party will receive.

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): May I invite my hon. Friend to think about how he would choose to spend part of the £350 million that we will save every week when we leave the European Union? Will he also confirm that there will be a big saving in translation services currently expended on foreign national offenders?

Mr Vara: My hon. Friend makes his point as robustly as he always does. I simply say that the Government position is that we would be better off in the European Union; he might wish to reflect on the 3 million-odd jobs that we have secured that are linked to our being in the European Union.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): It must have been tricky choosing who should answer this question. According to *The Spectator*, the Secretary of State has three Ministers for in, three Ministers for out—a perfect miniature of the Conservative party. Given that the Minister for Policing, Fire, Criminal Justice and Victims is away, perhaps we should take the departmental vote today because there would be a majority for in.

We were promised a British human rights Bill last year, a consultation on the repeal of the Human Rights Act in the new year and then a sovereignty Bill last week. Are we going to get anything before the Secretary of State moves on or by the end of June, whichever comes sooner?

Mr Vara: The hon. Gentleman is a seasoned politician, so he will know that Governments operate and timetables are dealt with in the usual way through the usual channels.

Prisoners: Employment after Release

5. **Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): What progress his Department is making on plans to ensure that more prisoners obtain employment after release. [903946]

12. **Oliver Colvile** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): What progress his Department is making on plans to ensure that more prisoners obtain employment after release. [903953]

13. **David Mackintosh** (Northampton South) (Con): What progress his Department is making on plans to ensure that more prisoners obtain employment after release. [903954]

18. **Stephen Hammond** (Wimbledon) (Con): What progress his Department is making on plans to ensure that more prisoners obtain employment after release. [903959]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Andrew Selous): I hope you will allow me, Mr Speaker, to express on behalf of the whole House our utter disgust at the attempted murder of a prison officer in east Belfast on Friday. I am sure that prison officers throughout the United Kingdom will join us in wishing him a full recovery from his injuries.

I meet regularly with businesses and trade bodies to talk about the benefits of employing offenders on release. Following the Prime Minister's announcement of changes to recruitment practices for the civil service, to give offenders a fair chance of a job, I am keen to encourage all employers to "ban the box" when recruiting.

Michael Tomlinson: May I associate myself with the Minister's initial remarks?

Given the reoffending rates of those who leave prison and manage to secure employment—the evidence shows that fewer than half reoffend, compared with those who do not secure employment—will the Minister support initiatives such as the excellent Footprints project in Dorset, which provides help and mentoring through its team of volunteers? Will he ensure that such projects operate a clear and transparent process of referrals from the new community rehabilitation companies?

Andrew Selous: I warmly commend the important work that Footprints is doing in Dorset. I want to see greater use of the voluntary sector, and an increased focus on offender employment on the part of CRCs. I made those points to CRC leaders only last week.

Oliver Colvile: As a member of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, I, too, wish to associate myself with the Minister's initial comments.

How can we ensure that prisoners do not become institutionalised as a result of seeing prisons as "safe havens", rather than rebuilding their lives once they have been released?

Andrew Selous: My hon. Friend has raised an important point. We need to help prisoners to take responsibility for their lives, and that includes helping them to find legal work in order to support their families. I believe that the Prime Minister's announcement that we will measure employment outcomes for prisoners will drive further progress.

David Mackintosh: Will my hon. Friend join me in welcoming the work of Goodwill Solutions in Northampton, which is running a "back to work" programme that is helping ex-offenders, homeless people, those with substance dependencies, and vulnerable young people to secure training and employment in the logistics sector?

Andrew Selous: I certainly welcome the work of Goodwill Solutions in my hon. Friend's constituency, but the truth is that we do not have labour shortages only in the logistics area. We have them in construction, engineering, catering and many other areas, which is why I am very ambitious about increasing offender employment.

Stephen Hammond: As was noted by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson), the key to rehabilitation is employment, and the key to employment is training. What is the Department doing to encourage all employers to take an interest in training inside prisons, in order to help offenders to find employment?

Andrew Selous: That is an extremely important point. The model that I like best is that of the Clink restaurants and the Timpson, Halfords and Aramark academies, which offer demanding work and training in prison and a job and ongoing support on release. It works: I call it the gold standard. Clink graduates, who probably include some of my constituents, are now working at some of London's top hotels and restaurants.

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): May I, on behalf of Labour Members, associate myself with the Minister's remarks about the prison officer who was so severely wounded in Northern Ireland?

We have heard the Minister make a commitment to providing education and employment for prisoners, but surely he is aware that the shortage of prison officers is causing many prisoners to be locked in their cells for long periods, unable to gain access to education and training opportunities. Will he commission a report from within the Department on the impact of staff shortages on prisoners' education and employment, given that, as many have pointed out, the best way of ensuring that people do not reoffend is to get them into jobs?

Andrew Selous: The hon. Lady has made a valid point. The good news is that last year we appointed 2,250 prison officers—that is a net increase of 440—and we will continue to recruit the prison officers whom we need.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): Employment is the single biggest factor that prevents reoffending, and I remind the House of the excellent changes that were made under the coalition Government in 2012, but will the Minister update us on what cross-departmental work takes place? This is a process that must start within the prison system but must continue afterwards, and that is obviously the job of the Department for Work and Pensions.

Andrew Selous: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that there is indeed some very good cross-departmental working. The Social Justice Cabinet Committee takes the issue very seriously, and I have had outstanding help from the Employment Minister, who has been extremely supportive. We have been given plenty of practical help by the DWP, the construction industry and training organisations. Buses are sent into prisons so that prisoners can complete their construction skills certification scheme cards, and sewing machines have been bought so that they can use them after their release.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Following on from the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones), what is the Minister's assessment of the impact of overcrowding on educational opportunities for offenders?

Andrew Selous: What I can say to the hon. Lady is that we are building a prison estate that is fit for purpose. The Chancellor has just given us £1.3 billion to build nine new prisons, we are opening two new house blocks and we are about to open HMP Berwyn in February next year, so we are in the process of building a fit-for-purpose prison estate.

Women in Prisons

6. **Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): What steps he is taking to reduce the number of women in prisons. [903947]

10. **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): What steps he is taking to reduce the number of women in prisons. [903951]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinenge): I have been clear that I want to see far fewer women ending up in prison. We are committed to improving the treatment of female offenders and to putting in place the interventions needed at each stage to help them to turn their lives away from crime.

Dr Cameron: I associate myself and my colleagues on these Benches with the Minister's earlier comments.

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice in Scotland has made clear the Scottish Government's commitment to tackling the number of women in prison by consulting on proposals to strengthen the current presumption against short sentences, by continuing to invest in robust community sentences and by investing an additional £1.5 million annually in community justice for women. Will the Minister join me in commending the efforts of the Scottish Government to apply a community-based rehabilitative approach?

Caroline Dinenge: Absolutely. We are keen to learn from any experiences in Scotland and elsewhere in the world that are successful in diverting women away from prison. Here in England and Wales, we have awarded £200,000 of grant funding to pilot earlier and more sequenced interventions with the right sort of multi-agency approach, which should see fewer women ending up in prison for short periods.

Martyn Day: The Scottish Government's approach to justice has resulted in the number of offenders serving sentences of three months or less plummeting since 2008, and reconviction rates are at a 16-year low. Will the Minister look to the progressive example of the Scottish Government as a new approach to reducing the number of women in prisons?

Caroline Dinenge: We know that almost 45% of the women who were released from prison in 2010 reoffended within 12 months, and the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to suggest that the maintaining of family ties and the education and rehabilitation of women while they are in our care will have a good impact on their life outside prison. That is why our transforming rehabilitation changes are showing unprecedented levels of support for offenders who have been released after very short sentences.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): Research by the Prison Reform Trust shows that female prisoners are far more likely to receive custodial sentences even when they have no previous convictions or cautions. What interventions are being used at the sentencing stage to keep women out of prison?

Caroline Dinenge: Sentencing is a matter entirely for the courts, and they take into account the circumstances not only of the offence but of the offender. As the Prime Minister set out in a speech earlier in the year, we are also looking into how tagging, problem-solving courts and alternative resettlement units can support us to deal appropriately with female offenders, especially where children are involved.

20. [903961] **Owen Thompson** (Midlothian) (SNP): The Scottish Government have moved to relocate female prisoners from Cornton Vale prison to HMP Polmont as part of the first phase of their plans to transform the way in which Scotland deals with women in custody. Improved facilities will clearly give additional support to address the underlying issues that fuel crime. Will the Minister join me in welcoming this progressive step towards the rehabilitation of female offenders?

Caroline Dinenge: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. This is exactly why we have set about shutting Holloway, an estate in which brilliant work is undertaken by some exceptional people despite the constraints of the building that they are in. We hope that by offering a much better environment we will be able to improve outcomes.

23. [903964] **Roger Mullin** (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): In 2015, the Prison Reform Trust published research suggesting that 32% of women prisoners were borderline learning disabled, compared with 24% of males. Does the Minister agree that community sentencing such as that advocated in Scotland would be more appropriate than prison for such women?

Caroline Dinenge: So many of the women who end up in our prisons represent a failure of society to intervene and address the causes of their offending behaviour or other issues in their lives. The whole-system approach that we are piloting in England and Wales will enable us to intervene earlier to put in place the right interventions and support that will enable us to do just that.

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab): The case of Sarah Reed highlights the Government's failings on the mistreatment of prisoners with mental health issues. With women accounting for around a quarter of self-harm incidents, but only 5% of the prison population, will the Minister outline what action she is taking to lower the number of women who self-harm in prison?

Caroline Dinenge: We know that the women in our prisons are more likely to self-harm than their male counterparts. They are also more likely to suffer from mental health problems, to have drug and alcohol addictions and to have experienced such things as domestic violence and sexual abuse earlier on in their lives. That is why we are trying to divert as many people as possible from prison by putting in place interventions to address their

offending behaviour as early as possible and to support them in any way that we can, and why we also have interventions within the prison estate to support such women.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Does the Minister agree that going in and out of prison has a damaging effect not only on women themselves, but on their families and communities? Will she welcome the Scottish Government's efforts to transform and improve services for women and to break the cycle of reoffending with targeted support to address underlying issues, such as alcohol, drugs, mental health or domestic abuse trauma? Will she tell us what specific actions her Department is taking to address those underlying issues?

Caroline Dinenage: The hon. and learned Lady makes some excellent points. The whole-system approach that we are piloting is all about trying to divert women away from prison and putting in the right interventions much earlier on in their offending behaviour. We are also doing a lot of work looking at problem-solving courts and how we can address such things as drug and alcohol problems much earlier on in people's experiences of the criminal justice system.

Joanna Cherry: The Howard League for Penal Reform in Scotland has said:

"The emphasis must be on preventing women from becoming caught up in the criminal justice system in the first place, diverting them at the point of arrest and prosecution wherever possible, and reducing the use of remand and short term prison sentences."

It has also said that there must be

"sustainable funding for community-based services and there are lessons to be learned from the success of work with young offenders and the reduction"

in the number of young offenders at Polmont prison in Scotland. Does the Minister agree that the success in reducing the number of young people in custody in Scotland could be replicated across the UK for the number of women in custody?

Caroline Dinenage: I am certainly keen to take another look at that. Although sentencing is a matter for the courts, work is ongoing to improve the quality of the information that sentencers receive about community-sentencing options and we want to look more at that moving forward.

Prisons: Mental Health and Substance Misuse

7. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to improve mental health and substance misuse treatment in prisons; and if he will make a statement. [903948]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Michael Gove): Providing appropriate treatment at the right time is vital to improve outcomes for people with mental health problems. The NHS of course does a superb job in providing services for prisoners, but we want to give governors a much bigger role in helping to secure the treatment that prisoners need.

Michael Fabricant: I am grateful for that answer. Drones can be great fun. I have been promised one for my birthday in June and I am looking forward to

getting it. However, as my right hon. Friend says, this is a serious subject. Substance abuse is even more serious. Is he aware of press reports that drones are being used to smuggle drugs, mobile phones and other things into prisons? If he is aware of that, what can we do to stop it?

Michael Gove: The fact that it is my hon. Friend's birthday in June means that I am looking forward to celebrating two significant anniversaries in that month. His substantive point is actually very important, because even though instances are still mercifully rare, there is a real danger that drones can be used to smuggle contraband into prisons: mobile phones that can be used in criminal activity; and drugs that can be used in unfortunate ways. That is why we have introduced new legislation to make it illegal to land a drone in a prison or to use a drone to drop contraband.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): Last month, the Prime Minister announced that prison governors would have far more autonomy to start tackling these issues in prisons, based on the academy model for schools. As the Secretary of State will know from his previous job, the lesson of academy schools is that more autonomy must be matched by stronger local governance. Can he reassure us that governors who do have more independence will have a stronger local governance arrangement to match it?

Michael Gove: The hon. Gentleman makes a characteristically acute and intelligent point, and I absolutely agree that with greater autonomy must come sharper accountability. In the first six reform prisons that we are going to establish, which will model, in some respects, the freedoms that academy schools have, we are exploring exactly how we can ensure both that the local community is appropriately involved and that accountability measures ensure that areas such as mental health and substance abuse are tackled effectively.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Oh good, the hon. Member for Derby North (Amanda Solloway) is now stirring. We are grateful to her, as she has an identical question.

22. [903963] **Amanda Solloway** (Derby North) (Con): Following the release of Lord Harris's report last year on self-inflicted deaths in custody of 18 to 24-year-olds, will the Department be looking to implement any of its recommendations?

Michael Gove: We very much welcome the report of the Harris review and we agreed with 62 of its 108 recommendations. A further 12 are being considered alongside wider prison reforms in 2016. It is appropriate that we all recognise there has been an unwelcome increase in the incidence of self-harm and deaths in custody, and we need to do everything we can to tackle it. We also need to ensure that the mental health problems and substance abuse problems often associated with self-harm and deaths in custody are tackled even before people enter custody.

Education in Prisons

8. **Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to improve education in prisons; and if he will make a statement. [903949]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Michael Gove): As the House will know, I have asked Dame Sally Coates to bring forward the publication of a report on how we can improve education in prison. Crucial to the direction of travel that Dame Sally is recommending is more control for governors to decide the type of curriculum that prisoners should enjoy while in custody.

Pauline Latham: Does my right hon. Friend agree that too much emphasis is placed on the quantity of education in prisons rather than on its quality?

Michael Gove: I could not agree more. Inmates are often cycled through a series of low-level qualifications, none of which, after it is initially passed, secures any additional employability gains for the individuals concerned. I was very impressed on Friday, when I visited the military corrective training centre in Colchester, to see how our services have a prison that succeeds in helping individual prisoners to acquire more qualifications en route either to being reintegrated into the services or entering civilian life. That model could be applied with success in the civilian estate.

Magistrates Court Hearings: Torbay

11. **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): What assessment he has made of the potential merits of using other venues in Torbay for magistrates court hearings after the closure of Torquay magistrates court. [903952]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Shailesh Vara): My officials are engaging with the local authority and will evaluate the suitability of any proposed venue. The majority of the work, however, will transfer to Newton Abbot, seven miles away. In addition, video link facilities are available in Newton Abbot for any victims or witnesses who are unable to attend court where cases are listed in Plymouth.

Kevin Foster: As my hon. Friend the Minister will be aware, there is disappointment in Torbay that justice may no longer be local after the closure of our magistrates court. Will he look again at options for holding some criminal cases at the town hall and county court buildings in Torquay?

Mr Vara: My hon. Friend will be aware that we have had a lengthy and thorough consultation, where there were more than 2,000 responses. We have had to make some difficult decisions. I am afraid that Torquay magistrates court is in a poor condition, with inadequate facilities, and the majority of work will be transferred to Newton Abbot, seven miles away. We are, however, evaluating options to continue to provide access to services locally. My officials in the region have written to the council inviting alternative solutions for the provision of services.

Prisoner and Staff Safety

14. **Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): What steps he is taking to ensure the safety of prisoners and staff on the prison estate. [903955]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Andrew Selous): We are committed to running safe and decent prisons, and are taking action to improve this. We are trialling the use of body-worn video cameras, and the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016 introduces new offences to control supply and possession. We recognise that our prisons need reform, and there is still much more to do to ensure that prisons are places of decency, hope and rehabilitation.

Alex Cunningham: I have a large prison in my Stockton North constituency, and prison officers there tell me of an increasing threat of violence, with the latest figures showing that the number of serious assaults on prison staff is up 48% in a year. They blame staff cuts and increased substance misuse. What does the Minister blame? What does he want me to tell prison officers in my area? Do his plans include granting academy status to Holme House?

Andrew Selous: The hon. Gentleman can tell his prison officers that all violence within prison is a crime. We strive to eradicate it, and it is wholly unacceptable. We take it very, very seriously. As I told the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) a moment ago, we appointed 2,250 extra prison officers last year—a net increase of 440—and we will carry on recruiting. Really importantly, we will be testing for new psychoactive substances throughout every prison next month, and that will make a significant difference to the important issues that he raises.

Access to Justice

15. **Yvonne Fovargue** (Makerfield) (Lab): What steps he plans to take to ensure access to justice does not depend on the ability to pay. [903956]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Shailesh Vara): The Government's programme of reform aims to deliver faster and fairer justice for all citizens, by speeding up decision-making, giving parties the ability to submit and consider information online, and considering issues far more proportionately. We have committed to invest in the technology that will underpin that.

Yvonne Fovargue: The introduction of employment tribunal fees has caused the number of new cases to plummet. Sex discrimination cases are down by 80% and equal pay cases by 84%. Will the recently announced review publish an impact assessment on the introduction of those fees, and say whether it has disproportionately affected the number of women bringing forward cases to tribunal?

Mr Vara: The hon. Lady raises some important points. On the employment tribunal, she should consider the alternative facilities that are available. For example, the early conciliation service has reported that, in the first

12 months, 83,000 people used its services, and that the vast majority were happy with the services that they received.

Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): A total of 3,600 barristers, including a third of all Queen's counsel, contribute voluntarily to the Bar Pro Bono Unit. I am honoured that, as a barrister, I was one of those statistics. Does the Minister welcome the significant contribution that the Bar Pro Bono Unit is providing to free access to justice?

Mr Vara: I certainly commend not only my hon. and learned Friend's contributions, but the contribution of the Bar and the legal profession generally. Pro bono work benefits many people, and I am pleased to see that our engagement with the legal sector is fruitful, and that it is considering other ways of helping the community.

17. [903958] **Margaret Greenwood** (Wirral West) (Lab): Today is International Women's Day, which gives us the opportunity to reflect on the fact that financial abuse is not just a crime in itself, but also a way for domestic abusers to control victims and to prevent them from leaving abusive relationships. Following the recent Appeal Court decision on legal aid in cases of domestic violence, how is the Ministry of Justice intending to make access to justice a reality for victims of financial abuse?

Mr Vara: The hon. Lady refers to a recent case. She will be aware that the court did confirm that the Lord Chancellor has the power to set domestic violence evidence requirements. As for the other issues, we are considering the outcome of the case and will clarify our decision on the way forward in due course.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): In his latest annual report, the Lord Chief Justice makes an astonishing admission. He said:

"Our system of justice has become unaffordable to most."

Does the Minister accept that that is a wholly unacceptable state of affairs?

Mr Vara: May I say to the right hon. Gentleman that we work very closely with the senior judiciary? On access to justice, he knows only too well that, despite the reductions that we made to the legal aid budget, it remains, at £1.6 billion, one of the most generous legal aid budgets in the world.

Violence against Women

16. **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): What discussions his Department has had with the Home Office on steps to reduce the level of violence against women. [903957]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinanage): The Government are committed to ending all forms of gender-based violence, which has absolutely no place in our society. Justice Ministers attend the regular inter-ministerial group, which is chaired by the Home Secretary and drives forward work on this matter. Today, the Government are publishing their ending violence against women and girls strategy, which sets out the whole package of support for victims

Patrick Grady: Many women who experience violence are forced to flee to refuge accommodation, often with their children. Is the Minister aware of the devastating effect that the Government's housing benefits limit will have on these women? Given that it is International Women's Day, will she discuss these concerns urgently with her colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions and in the Home Office?

Caroline Dinanage: Under this Government, there are more refuge places than ever before. Since 2010 we have criminalised forced marriage and revenge porn, we have strengthened the law on domestic violence and female genital mutilation, there are now more successful prosecutions for domestic violence than ever before, and we have introduced FGM protection orders. We will build on that by doing more to deter and rehabilitate perpetrators, while continuing to improve the process for victims.

Estate Requirements and Disposals

19. **Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): What progress his Department is making on implementation of its strategy on estate requirements and disposals. [903960]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Shailesh Vara): We keep our estate office under review to make sure that it delivers and supports business transformation, operates efficiently and effectively, and delivers best value for the taxpayer. By closing less efficient, poor-quality court buildings, for example, we will raise £40 million to reinvest in the justice system, and have saved hard-working taxpayers £27 million per year.

Richard Graham: The Ministry of Justice kindly agreed a year ago to dispose of an unused car park in Gloucester to provide more parking and an additional entrance to our railway station—a very good regeneration cause. The Justice Minister assured me that this would be resolved before the end of the financial year. However, we are almost there and there is still no resolution. Does my hon. Friend therefore agree that the time has come to lock the Courts and Tribunals Service real estate representatives in a room with representatives of Gloucester City Council and Great Western Railway, and to leave them there until they have reached agreement?

Mr Vara: That may be a little drastic as a negotiating procedure, but my officials are engaged in conversations with Gloucester City Council. Those are at an advanced stage. My hon. Friend will not expect me to make commercial comments at the Dispatch Box, but I hope that a final decision will be arrived at very shortly. He and I are due to meet shortly, when we will discuss the matter further.

Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con): Can the Minister provide any further update on his plans for the Victorian prison estate and, in particular, any information regarding HMP Norwich in my constituency?

Mr Vara: I am keen that my hon. Friend should have the most up-to-date response, so I will write to her about that.

Public Understanding of the Law

21. **Tom Tugendhat** (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to increase public understanding of the law. [R] [903962]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Dominic Raab): The Ministry of Justice is working to increase public awareness of the law and of important initiatives in the criminal justice and civil law system. We do that by disseminating information to the media, by using our website and digital channels, and through bespoke campaigns of particular importance, such as on access to victim services.

Tom Tugendhat: I welcome the efforts made by the Minister and my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor. May I encourage my hon. Friend to do more to broaden public legal education? Having just set up a new all-party parliamentary group on the subject, I urge him to work with us to provide such education not just in schools and through adult services, but perhaps in prisons. Although it may not reduce the inmate population, it may reduce the future conviction rate.

Mr Raab: My hon. Friend is right. I commend him for his efforts and his initiative. One illustration of the things we are doing is the victims information service, which provides information on the criminal justice system, on what a victim can expect and on restorative justice. He is right—we need to strive to bring the law and its operation closer to the citizens it serves.

Topical Questions

T1. [903930] **Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Michael Gove): As a number of Members have pointed out, today is International Women's Day. It is therefore appropriate that we should think of those brave and idealistic women who serve in our prisons and who do so much to keep us safe and to improve the lives of the individuals who find themselves in custody. It is appropriate, too, that today we are publishing the conclusions of the Prison Service Pay Review Body, and I am delighted to be able to inform the House that we will be accepting the PSPRB's recommendations. That will include a non-consolidated pay rise for those who work in our prisons.

Jeff Smith: The director of Amnesty UK has said:

"The UK is setting a dangerous precedent to the world on human rights.

There's no doubt that the downgrading of human rights by this government is a gift to dictators the world over and fatally undermines our ability to call on other countries to uphold rights and laws."

In the light of that advice, is it not time to drop plans to scrap the Human Rights Act 1998?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Dominic Raab): Absolutely not. Frankly, it is irresponsible of any of our critics to weigh in with that kind of scaremongering before having seen the substantive proposals.

T3. [903932] **Dr Daniel Poulter** (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): Pilot studies into critical time interventions for released severely mentally ill patient prisoners have shown promising results in improving care for people released from prison with severe and enduring mental illness. They have also helped to cut reoffending rates. Will the Minister meet me and the team who helped to put this important work together to look at the potential for rolling out a national scheme?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Andrew Selous): I would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend, who is a distinguished former Health Minister, to discuss this important matter. As he might know, although mental health provision on release is provided by our health partners, probation staff work with health colleagues as part of their Through the Gate resettlement service, making sure that offenders access appropriate services and liaising with prisons and community mental health services.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): My hon. Friend the Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood) referred to the short and very clear recent judgment by the Court of Appeal, which said that the evidence criteria for accessing legal aid by domestic violence victims were unlawful in two important respects—something the Government have been told ever since the law was passed four years ago. The Secretary of State has had enough time to consider the matter. On International Women's Day, will he tell us what he will do in the light of the Court's ruling?

Michael Gove: The hon. Gentleman raises a very serious point. We want to ensure that we get it right. He is absolutely correct to say that criticism was made of the provisions that we put in place and that the Court's judgment is clear, so we want to ensure that in future we have an approach that ensures that victims of financial abuse receive the support they require.

Andy Slaughter: It is not only the financial abuse; it is the two-year rule as well. If the Secretary of State is going to go further than the Court of Appeal's ruling, that is all well and good. He should bear in mind that 40% of victims of domestic violence fail to meet the evidence criteria. They must then get into debt by paying for a solicitor, represent themselves and risk cross-examination by their abuser, or—this is the case for the majority—have no access to justice and continue to suffer. That is unacceptable, is it not?

Michael Gove: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that victims of domestic violence need all the support that we can give them, which is why I am reflecting carefully on the judgment and will come forward in due course with proposals that I hope will meet with the support and approval of as many Members of the House as possible.

T4. [903933] **Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): Many prisoners in our system suffer from mental health and substance misuse problems. Further to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter), what further support can be given in prison to support people with mental health and substance misuse problems?

Andrew Selous: I welcome my hon. Friend's continued focus on this important issue. As the Prime Minister said in his speech on 8 February, we believe in humane treatment and care. In our work in prisons we are going to give prison governors more say in this area, and we are going to move towards full co-commissioning for governors with NHS England, meaning that prison leaders can have more of a say in defining what kinds of services prisoners need and the budgets available for them.

T2. [903931] **Mr Graham Allen** (Nottingham North) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State welcome back, after her long illness, my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debonaie)? Will he also consider giving the House a report on the Peterborough prison experiment, where a social impact bond involved voluntary and private sector investors to reduce the amount of recidivism in prisons? May we please have a report on how that is going?

Michael Gove: First, may I take up the hon. Gentleman's kind offer, because we are all delighted to see the hon. Member for Bristol West back in her place—fully recovered, I hope—and look forward to her playing a prominent part in our debates in future; she is a real asset to the House. Secondly, the social impact bond that ran in Peterborough prison helped to inform some of the changes that we made through Transforming Rehabilitation. I have had the opportunity to visit Peterborough prison, which is run by a private company. It provides a significantly improved level of care, compared with the mean level offered by many other custodial establishments. I think that the spirit of the SIB lives on, both in Transforming Rehabilitation and in the way in which Peterborough prison operates, but I am open to other ideas about how social investment can help to improve the justice system.

T8. [903937] **Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): My constituent Mr Tony Conti was convicted last November of fixing LIBOR when he worked for Rabobank. Given that the US established the international prisoner transfer programme in 1977 to make it easier for foreigners who are convicted to return to their country of origin, will my hon. Friend consider such a transfer for my constituent?

Andrew Selous: I have listened carefully to what my hon. Friend has said, and we will give careful consideration to any transfer application from his constituent that is referred to us by the US authorities.

T5. [903934] **Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): It surely cannot only be Opposition Members who are dismayed that, to quote the Lord Chief Justice again:

“Our system of justice has become unaffordable to most.”

Has the Secretary of State discussed this dreadful situation with the Lord Chief Justice, and is there a plan to do something about it?

Michael Gove: I have discussed this issue with the Lord Chief Justice, the Master of the Rolls and other members of the senior judiciary. It is a complex matter. One of the key things that is problematic is the level of costs in the justice system, and we need to bring about reform, particularly to the civil justice system. That is why the report by Michael Briggs, which lays out particular

reforms, including more justice being transacted online, is a powerful way forward, but much remains to be done.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): The Government have given strong support to the idea of creating a new legal form of guardian, to help with the property and affairs of the 3,000 people who go missing every year in the UK. Will the Minister confirm when that might be brought into effect?

Mr Raab: I know that my hon. Friend has a family in his constituency who have been through the ordeal he mentions. We are absolutely committed to helping families of missing people to deal with the administrative problems they face over and above the heartache that is involved. We are working on creating the new legal status of guardian of the property and affairs of a missing person, and we will introduce measures to the House as soon as parliamentary time permits.

T6. [903935] **Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): On International Women's Day, it is truly shocking that one in four women will experience gender-based violence. On 4 February, the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Karen Bradley), stated that primary legislation was required to ratify the Istanbul convention to try to tackle that disgrace. When will that legislation be brought forward?

Mr Raab: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. The last Government signed the convention in 2012. We have already implemented almost all its provisions, so the purpose would be to promote it abroad. There is a specific issue, as she may know, about extraterritorial jurisdiction under article 44. We are looking carefully at how that might be addressed.

Suella Fernandes (Fareham) (Con): I apologise for my absence earlier, Mr Speaker. In the recent case of Kiarie and Byndloss, the Court of Appeal roundly upheld the deport first, appeal later policy, which prevents foreign national offenders from extending their leave to remain in the UK while their immigration appeals are pending—the two men in the case were convicted of serious drug offences and had leave to remain here. What assessment has my hon. Friend made of the judgment of Lord Justice Richards, which highlights the need for more clarity in the guidance given to caseworkers so that the policy can be better applied?

Mr Raab: My hon. Friend brings considerable experience from her time as a barrister. We welcome this decision. This is an important area of policy. It is also a Home Office lead, but I can reassure her that the relevant guidance for caseworkers was updated following the decision back in October.

T7. [903936] **Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): Today is International Women's Day, as other Members have noted. A recent survey by Women's Aid of women survivors of domestic abuse who have attended the family courts regarding child contact found that a quarter reported being directly cross-examined by their abuser. Does the Minister agree that that is completely unacceptable? What action is being taken to address it?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinenage): Protecting women and children from violence is, of course, a key priority for the Government. We will be working with others in the family justice system to discuss and address the report's conclusions, including in relation to the measures already in place to protect women and children, and their effective implementation.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): The Secretary of State knows my real concern about the accessibility of certain high-powered laser pens, which have been used to target civilian and military aircraft, cars and trains. I have called for them to be made a prohibited item. Will the Department look at my request before a major tragedy occurs in our country?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend has campaigned consistently and effectively on this issue. We are reviewing what steps we and other Departments can take in order to mitigate this danger.

T9. [903938] **Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab):** Last Thursday, the House voted for the Government to set up an all-party commission to look into gangs and serious youth violence. Will the Minister's Department contribute to that commission?

Michael Gove: The problem of gangs and serious youth violence was the subject of discussion between me and Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe only last week. We will do everything we can and report back to the House on what we as a Government, collectively, are doing to deal with these problems.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): The Secretary of State knows how much I, and many of my constituents, welcome the Prime Minister's big speech last month on prison reform. While there is little benefit in trading numbers, does he agree that the logical consequence of rehabilitation that really works is not only fewer victims of crime, but ultimately fewer people locked up in our country, with huge savings?

Michael Gove: I applaud my hon. Friend for the work that he did when he served on the Justice Committee in pioneering the case for a transformed approach towards justice. He is absolutely right. If we get prison reform right and get rehabilitation right, crime will fall, individuals will be safer, and of course the number of inmates in our prisons will fall.

Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab): On a basic point of clarification, can G4S sell the Government contract it has in place on the secure training centres to the highest bidder without any Government veto or Government involvement? It really is concerning that that could be the case.

Michael Gove: First, I take this opportunity to thank the hon. Gentleman for his diligence in asking questions on behalf of his constituents, and also for his historic work for mineworkers in distress. I know that over the past couple of days there have been reports in the press. I want to say in the House that he is an exceptionally dedicated worker for people who have fallen on hard

times and the vulnerable. As someone from another party, I want to say how much I admire him for that work.

The hon. Gentleman's question was in that tradition. It is absolutely not the case that G4S can simply sell the contract to the highest bidder. We have the right to ensure that any transfer is done appropriately. I will make sure that he is briefed on the progress that we are making in order to ensure that these young people are looked after well.

Mr Speaker: I trust that the hon. Gentleman will have the tribute framed and put in an appropriate place in his constituency office for everyone to observe. He should savour it—it was very, very fulsome.

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): In 2013, my constituent Adele Bellis was the victim of an acid attack. There has been a significant increase in such attacks in the past three to four years. I would be grateful if the Secretary of State could confirm that the Government will bring forward a strategy to address this, particularly the need for tougher sentences. Adele has shown great courage, but she has to live with that attack for the rest of her life.

Mr Raab: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. That is an absolutely appalling case, and all cases of that kind are absolutely abhorrent. I would certainly be willing to hear from him about the specifics of the case, and we will of course look to see whether there is a case for additional sentencing powers over and above those that we already have.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Before the legal aid restrictions were introduced, 78,000 disabled people a year were able to challenge social security decisions, 80% successfully. How can withdrawal of legal aid to disabled people, who are twice as likely to live in poverty, be fair or just?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Shailesh Vara): It is important that the hon. Lady appreciates that we have not withdrawn or abolished legal aid. Legal aid still exists for the most vulnerable and the most needy. We do have certain criteria. However, in terms of the decisions that are coming to the courts, the officials who take the decisions in the first instance are looking at the decisions of the courts, so that they do not have to come to the court by way of appeal in the first place.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): In 2009, Walter Scott and Ross, a solicitors firm in my constituency, was closed down by the Solicitors Regulation Authority due to financial irregularities. Since then, the SRA has systematically failed in its duty of care to former clients of the firm, leading to at least one bankruptcy. Will the Minister agree to investigate that case as a matter of urgency so that we can at last secure some closure for my constituents?

Mr Raab: My hon. Friend will know that the regulation of the legal profession is independent of Government. It would be wrong and improper for a Minister to try to intervene in any individual case, but there is an ombudsman service that allows for review of complaints against the SRA, and I encourage her to consider that possibility.

Points of Order

12.34 pm

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Last Thursday this House had an excellent debate on Welsh affairs, but unfortunately the Secretary of State for Wales was absent. The Under-Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Alun Cairns), said:

“I can advise the House that the Secretary of State has parliamentary business elsewhere”.—[*Official Report*, 3 March 2016; Vol. 606, c. 1162.]

However, we learned from Twitter that the Secretary of State was at a lunch with Bexley Conservative Ladies, and I have the photograph to prove it. That is not parliamentary business, so I respectfully suggest that the Under-Secretary comes to the Dispatch Box to apologise for inadvertently misleading the House.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker, I am happy to clarify the position and, of course, apologise if I have inadvertently misled the House. I can confirm that the Secretary of State was on a mixture of Government and political activity that afternoon. I can also confirm that it was always expected that I, as Under-Secretary of State, would respond to the Backbench Business Committee debate on St David’s day.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I think that is helpful and we will consider that matter closed.

Jo Cox (Batley and Spen) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. During last December’s debate on Syria, the Prime Minister made a commitment to provide quarterly progress reports to the House, and during last Thursday’s business questions, the Leader of the House said

“that there will be a further statement shortly on matters in Syria.”—[*Official Report*, 3 March 2016; Vol. 606, c. 1105.]

Could you offer me any guidance, Mr Speaker, on how I can encourage the Government to provide a clear indication of when that update will take place, and

on how I can persuade Ministers that it would be beneficial for the Prime Minister himself to report back to Members?

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Lady for giving me notice of her point of order. I understand that the Government have given an undertaking that they will provide quarterly progress reports on Syria to the House. It is for the Government to determine the appropriate form of those reports and, indeed, which Minister should make them. That cannot fall to the Chair. However, if the hon. Lady is dissatisfied with the form or content of the updates, there are a range of opportunities open to her for pressing the Government for more information. I would add that, similarly, if the statement is not forthcoming with the speed that the hon. Lady thinks proper, she will also be aware of the mechanisms that she can deploy to try to procure the presence of a Minister, possibly even the Prime Minister. We shall await events with interest.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. May I personally apologise to you for inadvertently, or through frustration, using an eight-letter word beginning with “b” and ending in “cks” when a colleague was raising yet another scare story about what a disaster it would be if we were to leave the European Union? It was unseemly.

Mr Speaker: Actually, I had heard the utterance of the hon. Gentleman, which was spontaneous and from a sedentary position, but precisely because of its unseemliness I did not wish to draw attention to it. However, the hon. Gentleman has now done so and there is nothing further that requires to be said. [*Laughter.*] I note in passing that the hon. Gentleman has occasioned—or possibly I have done by my reply—notable hilarity from the Secretary of State for Justice. It is good to know that the right hon. Gentleman is in such an upbeat frame of mind.

If there are no further points of order, we come now to the ten-minute rule motion in the name of Mr Will Quince, a notably busy fellow in this House. Let us hear from the hon. Gentleman.

Driving Licence (Mandatory First Aid Training)

Motion for leave to bring in a Bill (Standing Order No. 23)

12.39 pm

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require applicants for full driving licences to have received first aid training before undertaking the practical driving test; and for connected purposes.

Britain has some of the safest roads in Europe, but there is still more we can do to reduce the death rate. In the last 12 months, 1,780 people were killed on British roads, and 23,700 were killed or seriously injured. Land transport accidents are one of the top five biggest killers of both males and females between the ages of five and 34. In such situations, where someone is seriously injured or fighting for their lives, every second counts. A review of road traffic in Europe cited by the World Health Organisation claimed that 50% of deaths from road collisions occurred within a few minutes of the crash, so there is often not time for an ambulance to arrive. Knowledge of first aid can be absolutely critical. The immediate initiation of CPR, for example, can double or even quadruple survival from cardiac arrest.

The sad reality is that in Britain, knowledge of first aid is patchy. Through no fault of their own, many people do not feel confident enough to intervene and provide first aid in crash and accident situations. A survey for St John Ambulance found that 59% of people would not feel confident enough to save a life. At the scene of an accident, 24% would do nothing until an ambulance arrived or a passer-by who knew first aid appeared. Those are troubling statistics, but I hope that they set the scene for the Bill that I am introducing to require first aid training as a requirement of the driving licence application.

Many other European nations already require driving licence applicants to undertake such training. In order to qualify for a driving theory test in Switzerland, applicants must prove that they have undertaken 10 hours of first aid instruction from a company approved by the Swiss Government. Since 2016 in Germany, there has been a single first aid course for applicants for all categories of driving licence. That course takes seven hours and consists of nine 45-minute lessons. In the Czech Republic, learners must take obligatory lessons in a driving school, including four 45-minute first aid lessons. Other countries that require first aid as a condition of receiving a driving licence include Austria, Slovenia, Hungary and the Baltic states.

Introducing such a requirement would make a huge difference to our population's knowledge of first aid. Around 63% of the population aged between 21 and 29 have a driving licence. If that figure remained steady, in about 13 years the proposal would have helped to ensure that nearly two thirds of those aged under 30 in Britain were potential life savers. Far more drivers would feel confident enough to step forward in the event of a crash or any other emergency situation. First aid knowledge and skills would also make new drivers more aware of the potential dangers on the road, and of the perils of speeding and reckless driving.

The Bill is a great opportunity to boost the ability of a substantial proportion of the British population in an important skill. Every year, as more young drivers receive their licence, the number of British people who have first aid training will rise. I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that the change has the potential to save hundreds of lives. Indeed, it reinforces the Government's strategy to improve road safety and reduce the number of people killed on our roads by 2020.

A Conservative Government first introduced the stand-alone theory test in 1996. It is a tough test, and so it should be. The pass mark is 86%. It helps to ensure that applicants for a full driving licence have a good knowledge of the Highway Code and can spot potential dangers through the hazard perception test. At the time, some claimed that the stand-alone theory test was unnecessary, but since it was introduced, road fatalities in this country have more than halved. The theory test may have played a role in that reduction. Since 2007, the theory test has contained a number of first aid questions, and that was a good development, but I believe that it is time to introduce a requirement for stand-alone practical first aid training as another condition to obtaining a licence. This reform is supported by both the British Red Cross and St John Ambulance. Those two groups recognise the transformative effect that first aid can have in accident situations.

Last year, I supported the private Member's Bill to make first aid lessons compulsory in schools. Some opponents of that Bill claimed that it would put too much pressure on school timetables and undermine the discretion of teachers, and I understand such concerns. That is why I think my Bill is a good compromise. British people should have the opportunity to learn such skills throughout their lives. It would help to boost the first aid skills of many more British people. Surely we want to foster an environment in which people are more willing to step forward and help in an emergency. The Government's Social Action, Responsibility and Heroism Act 2015 aims to do that by removing the fear of liability for those who help out, but how can we expect people to act if they do not have the skills and confidence to do so?

I propose that attendance at a four-hour practical first aid course, run by an approved first aid provider, should be a minimum requirement for receiving a full driving licence. Evidence of the training would have to be produced before allowing an applicant to take a practical test, as with the current theory test. The change would be made by amending the Motor Vehicles (Driving Licences) Regulations 1999.

I hope that I have done this proposal justice in such the short period available. I truly believe that introducing the change will have a transformative impact on the British public's knowledge of simple, but life-saving techniques. So many of the British public lead busy lives. The introduction of this reform would ensure that the majority of young people were required to take the time to learn these skills. Indeed, I believe that many would welcome the opportunity provided by this reform. Moreover, I am encouraged by the fact that Members from six separate parties have agreed to sponsor the Bill, which shows a degree of cross-party support for the proposals. Put simply, this change will give many more British people the chance to learn life-saving skills and, potentially, to save a life. I urge colleagues to support the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Will Quince, Dr Tania Mathias, Peter Aldous, Wes Streeting, Jim Fitzpatrick, Sir Roger Gale, Mr Nigel Evans, Mrs Cheryl Gillan, Lady Hermon, Caroline Lucas, Martyn Day and Mr Mark Williams present the Bill.

Will Quince accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 11 March, and to be printed (Bill 149).

ENTERPRISE BILL [LORDS] (PROGRAMME) (NO. 2)

12.48 pm

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Order of 2 February 2016 (Enterprise Bill [Lords] (Programme)) be varied as follows:

- Paragraphs 4 and 5 of the Order shall be omitted.
- Proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading shall be concluded in two days.
- Proceedings on Consideration shall be taken on each of those days as shown in the following Table and in the order so shown.
- Each part of the proceedings on Consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the time specified in relation to it in the second column of the Table.

Table	
<i>Proceedings</i>	<i>Time for conclusion of proceedings</i>
First day	
New Clauses and new Schedules relating to the Green Investment Bank plc; amendments to Clauses 37 and 38.	One and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order.
New Clauses and new Schedules relating to public sector exit payments; amendments to Part 9.	Three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order.
Second day	
New Clauses and new Schedules relating to Sunday trading and working; amendments to Part 7.	Three hours after the commencement of proceedings on Consideration on the second day.
New Clauses and new Schedules relating to the Pubs Code Adjudicator and the Pubs Code; amendments to Clauses 39 and 40; remaining proceedings on Consideration.	6.00 pm on the second day.

5. Proceedings in legislative grand committee and proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at 7.00 pm on the second day.—(*Anna Soubry.*)

Question agreed to.

Enterprise Bill [Lords]

[1ST ALLOCATED DAY]

Consideration of Bill, as amended in the Public Bill Committee

Mr Speaker: As I informed the House on Monday 26 October, before a Report stage begins on a Bill, I will seek to identify in advance those changes made in Committee that I would expect to certify, together with any Government amendments tabled on Report that, if passed, would be likely to lead me to issue a certificate. My provisional certificate, based on those changes and expected amendments, is available in the Vote Office and on the “Bills before Parliament” website. At the end of the Report stage on a Bill, I am required to consider the Bill as amended on Report for certification. At that point—tomorrow, in this case—I will issue my final certificate. As I informed the House on 26 October, I have accepted the advice of the Procedure Committee not, as a rule, to give reasons for decisions on certification during this experimental phase of the new regime. Anybody wishing to make representations to me prior to any decision should send them to the Clerk of Legislation.

New Clause 4

OBJECTIVES OF UK GREEN INVESTMENT BANK

(1) Prior to a sale of shares of a UK Green Investment Bank Company (as defined in section 30(2)) the Secretary of State shall—

- ensure that the objects of the UK Green Investment Bank Company contained in its articles of association (“the Objectives”) shall be—
 - the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions;
 - the advancement of efficiency in the use of natural resources;
 - the protection or enhancement of the natural environment;
 - the protection or enhancement of biodiversity;
 - the promotion of environmental sustainability;
- ensure the articles of association of the UK Green Investment Bank Company require its directors to act and review their actions against the Objectives;
- create a special share; and
- establish a company limited by guarantee registered with the Charity Commission (“the Charitable Company”) that will own the special share.

(2) Any amendment to the Objectives shall require the consent of the Charitable Company, as holder of the special share.

(3) The special share shall—

- have no income or capital rights;
- have no voting rights except on a vote to amend the Objectives and on a vote to alter the rights of the special share.

(4) The rights of the special share shall be deemed altered by the issue of any other special share of the same class.

(5) The Charitable Company that will own the special share shall—

- have three members, none of which shall be public bodies;
- have as initial members legal persons appointed by the Committee on Climate Change established under the Climate Change Act 2008;
- provide that if any member ceases to be a member the remaining members shall nominate the replacement member;

- (d) provide that the members will be required to act unanimously in exercising the rights attached to the special share.

(6) For the avoidance of doubt, the Committee on Climate Change shall play no role in the conduct of the Charitable Company or its members following the initial appointment of those members prior to the sale of UK Green Investment Bank company shares by the Secretary of State.”—(Kevin Brennan.)

Brought up, and read the First time.

12.50 pm

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New clause 8—*Disposal of Crown’s shares in UK Green Investment Bank Company: purchaser’s obligations*—

“Before any sale of the Crown’s shares in the UK Green Investment Bank Company takes place each prospective purchaser must enter an enforceable undertaking to fully fund the Bank’s current five year business plan.”

This new clause would ensure that the Green Investment Bank is maintained as a single, functioning institution and can continue to invest in the UK’s low carbon economy at the same level as was planned prior to privatisation.

Amendment 17, in clause 37, page 54, line 44, at end insert—

“6B Report on remuneration of chair, non-executive directors and executive team

(1) For each year following a disposal of shares held by the Crown in a UK Green Investment Bank company the Secretary of State must lay before Parliament a report on the remuneration of the company’s chair, non-executive directors and executive team by the company.

(2) The report shall include a statement of the framework or broad policy for the remuneration of the above individuals.

(3) The report shall include the value of the following, where applicable, in respect of each individual—

- (a) salary or fee,
- (b) pension,
- (c) other cash or non-cash benefits, including bonus or performance-related payments, and
- (d) shareholdings in a UK Green Investment Bank company.”

This amendment would require, following a disposal of shares in a UK Green Investment Bank company, that the Secretary of State to report annually on the remuneration of the Chair, non-executive directors and Executive Team of the company.

Kevin Brennan: New clause 4 might be referred to as the “hokey-cokey clause” because it has been in, out, and shaken all about during the passage of the Bill. I am not exaggerating when I say that, because this new clause should still be in the Bill. You may not be aware of this, Mr Speaker, so I will read briefly from the record about what happened with this clause in Committee.

In Committee the Chair put the question that clause 32 stand part of the Bill, and hon. Members responded “Aye”. The Chair asked for votes to the contrary, and said, “I think the Ayes have it.” The Minister then moved that the clause should not stand part of the Bill, and I raised a point of order to the Chair to point out that the Committee had just voted that the clause should stand part of the Bill, and that the Minister could not then move that it should not. The Chair then said:

“For clarity, I will put the question again.”—[*Official Report, Enterprise Public Bill Committee, 23 February 2016; c. 201.*]

The clause was accepted in Committee, but the vote was taken a second time because the Chair, in a spirit of extraordinary generosity and to save the Minister’s blushes, allowed a second vote. First the clause was in, then it was out, and today we are suggesting that new clause 4 should again be included in the Bill. It is not really a new clause; it was clause 32 when we considered the Bill in Committee.

The Government are wary of new clause 4, or old clause 32, because they fear that the Green Investment Bank’s borrowing would, because of the position taken by the Office for National Statistics, remain on the Government’s books and be classed as public sector debt after privatisation. If there were any suggestion of statutory control of the Green Investment Bank’s purpose, the ONS would insist that it stayed on the books.

There is currently statutory control of the Green Investment Bank’s purpose, to ensure that it is green and not just like any other investment bank. The Green Investment Bank is supposed to be a different kind of entity; it is not supposed to be like the bank that the Secretary of State worked for when he earned £3 million a year, and which was fined £600,000 by the European Union for fiddling interest rates. It is not supposed to be that kind of institution; it is supposed to be completely different and focused on sustainable investment in green projects, not based on the unsustainable culture of greed that brought the world economy to its knees in 2008, with millions of hard-working families still suffering the consequences of that. If the Green Investment Bank is meant to be a new kind of institution, how do we ensure that it remains so if the Government strip it of its statutory purpose, which is to invest in green projects?

In Committee we asked whether the Government should allow that potential ruling by the ONS to drive completely in this important area of sustainable public policy, but the ONS point is a technical matter. If the Green Investment Bank remains on the books after privatisation, that does not reflect any problematic public debt. It may cosmetically spoil the look of the Chancellor’s forecasts on public debt, but it would not change the fundamental underlying substance of public finances. In other words, statutory protection for the Green Investment Bank’s purposes is to be removed by the Government because of an accounting convention that is inconvenient to their political narrative. It is spin over substance on stilts.

As we discussed in Committee, the Green Investment Bank is not getting the same treatment as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. The Treasury is all too ready to allow UK borrowing to be part of financing that bank, and it was not worried at all that public debt will be part of its financing. However, it is extremely reluctant to allow the same treatment for the Green Investment Bank.

You will not be surprised to hear, Mr Speaker, that I praised the former coalition Government for introducing the Green Investment Bank. Policy in that area can be difficult to implement, because by its very nature it is new and innovative—in Committee I quoted the wise words, as ever, of Kermit the Frog who said, or sang or croaked, “It’s not easy being green”. That is true. It is not easy, and this is an innovative and effective piece of public policy, and I praise the former coalition Government for introducing it.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Is one benefit of the Green Investment Bank that in large part it addressed some of the market failure that had gone before? We risk losing some of the benefits that it brought in terms of securing green investment. All that will happen—an unforeseen consequence, perhaps—is that taxpayers will have to pay more through a larger subsidy.

Kevin Brennan: I believe that the proposals on privatisation that the Government quickly brought forward following the election were seriously undercooked, if I can put it that way. The Green Investment Bank has only just started to turn a profit. We are glad that it is doing that, but it is a very small amount. When the Government said that they intended to privatise the bank, they prayed in aid the statutory obligation to invest in green projects that they now wish to remove from statute, because of what the ONS said about public debt and the Green Investment Bank being on the books. That proposal has been in trouble all along, and the way that the Government are scrabbling around for a solution shows that the original proposal was undercooked.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): I praise my hon. Friend for tabling this new clause, and for the way that he scrutinised the Bill in Committee. Does he agree that things have moved on substantially since we met in Committee, with the Government's publication last Thursday of the prospectus and the announcement that the sale was to proceed and will be a two-stage auction? It certainly looks as though the bank will be fully privatised, so all the debate and discussion that we had in Committee about whether the Government would keep a minority share in the bank, as recommended by the Environmental Audit Committee, seems to have been pretty much for the birds. The Minister probably knew that in Committee.

Kevin Brennan: I congratulate my hon. Friend on her election to the Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee. I am sure she will be as assiduous in scrutinising this proposal and other areas of Government policy as she was in Committee and on the Back Benches, along with my other hon. Friends. She is right to say that the publication of the Government's intentions last week was interesting, and I hope that the Minister will answer her point about the Government's intentions, and clarify whether they intend to maintain a stake in the Green Investment Bank after privatisation. When we probed the Minister on that in Committee, answer came there none. From the way that the proposals have been published, it would appear that the Government intend to fully privatise the bank, even though—as we discussed in Committee—it must be the worst possible time, given the current state of the market, to consider privatising this important public asset, if part of the purpose is to get good value for the taxpayer.

Mary Creagh: I will develop this point in my speech, but in Committee two weeks ago I mentioned the bear market, the slide in value of all bank shares since Christmas, and the softening of growth in China. Only this morning, Mark Carney and the Bank of England revealed the large amounts of liquidity that they are preparing to inject into the UK banking economy in the

event of an exit from the European Union after the referendum, to avoid a complete meltdown and financial crisis such as the one that took place in 2007-08.

Kevin Brennan: My hon. Friend is right to point that out, and, by implication, to point out that the privatisation would of course occur after the referendum in the summer. The implications of a leave vote on the attempt to privatise the UK Green Investment Bank would be highly significant, as she points out.

1 pm

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): I wholly support my hon. Friend's remarks. What impact does he think it might have on the prospects for full privatisation of the Green Investment Bank were the official Opposition to indicate that they were minded to purchase back the bank into the public sector?

Kevin Brennan: My hon. Friend will understand that I am not going to speculate on that, given that it is not current party policy or under discussion. What I will say is that the Government have a duty, if they go ahead with a privatisation that we do not support, to be absolutely sure they get value for money for the taxpayer, as well as to give an absolute guarantee that they will protect the bank's green purpose.

I have praised the Government for the introduction of the Green Investment Bank, but why would they do anything to place its central green mission in grave doubt? I remind the House that the bank was first proposed under the previous Labour Government. It was first mentioned as a proposal for development by the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, Alistair Darling, in one of his Budgets. It was developed in the Cabinet Office and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills when I was a Minister in those Departments. It was introduced under the coalition Government, and it has made a good start. It has been able to participate in the financing of projects that would otherwise not have taken place and that make a real contribution to meeting our commitments under the Climate Change Act 2008.

I think we all agree, throughout the House, that the creation of the bank is a good news story. I do not see any dissent from that proposition from anyone in the Chamber. We have therefore come to a strange pass when even something we all agree is a good thing—good borrowing for sustainable purposes—is classified as bad for no other reason than that it appears on the Government's books.

During the difficult years following the banking crash, in which we were sometimes in recession, a significant part of the UK economy's growth came from the green economy. By some estimates, it accounts for 1 million jobs in the low-carbon sector and is worth more than £100 billion. It is disappointing that the Government are in danger, if they are not careful, of undermining one of the key drivers of that sector. If we could tap into our country's wind, wave and tidal power, we could create thousands more high-quality, sustainable jobs for our economy as well as doing the right thing for the environment.

When the Government announced their privatisation plans last June, the Secretary of State assured the House in a written statement:

“This should bring a number of important benefits, giving GIB greater freedom to operate across a wider range of green sectors in accordance with its green purposes, which are enshrined in legislation.”—[*Official Report*, 25 June 2015; Vol. 597, c. 27WS.]

He emphasised that the green purposes of the GIB were protected by the legislation in which its duty to pursue them are enshrined. After that, something obviously went wrong with the Government’s proposals. They received advice from the ONS that led them to say instead that they intended to repeal the very legislative protection that the Secretary of State had prayed in aid on 25 June 2015 when he announced the decision to privatise the bank. By October, they were effectively saying that it did not really matter whether they repealed the statutory protection, as long as they made sure the bank did not appear on their books. In his letter of 15 October, when he announced his intention to repeal the relevant measures in the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013, the Secretary of State offered no assurance that the bank’s green purposes would definitely be maintained.

We have been demanding assurances on how we can ensure that the bank maintains its green purpose when it is privatised and does not simply become yet another bank—albeit a very small bank, but one that could easily be gobbled up by somebody else in the marketplace. That is why Labour and other parties defeated the Government on this issue in the other place and introduced the special share that we are trying to reintroduce in new clause 4.

The Government say that the GIB can create the special share itself. In Committee, the Minister quoted a letter from the chairman of the bank, Lord Smith, to Lord Mandelson and Lord Teverson. She may well quote it again today; we will find out in a moment. In Committee, she said that she was confident that that approach would satisfy the ONS, but could not give us a guarantee. As I said then, we need an absolute assurance on that before we relinquish the legislative opportunity to future-proof the purposes of the GIB.

Since Committee stage, the bank has written to hon. Members, as is its right, outlining its plan to issue the special share envisaged in new clause 4 itself, rather than through the Bill, which is what we are proposing. Its reason for doing that is its belief that the ONS will then allow it to be classified as off the Government’s books. I asked the GIB whether it could guarantee that. Colin Faulkner, its director of government affairs, responded to me by email, writing:

“You’ll likely be aware that ONS doesn’t engage directly with arms length bodies like GIB. At the same time, however, we have been engaging closely with the Government over all matters relating to the sales process, and this is an issue where we’ve been as close as we can to Government throughout. We understand that Government has been engaging closely with ONS on this whole issue, including the special share structure which GIB is putting in place, and we understand that on the basis of those discussions the Government were sufficiently satisfied to allow the sales process to proceed.”

On that basis, if the Government say they are satisfied, they should be able to guarantee categorically, here on the Floor of the House, that their special share proposal will definitely be acceptable to the ONS. I hope the Minister will say that. If she wants to intervene and say that now, she can, but I hope she will at least be able to say it in her response. She is not indicating that she wishes to intervene.

Mary Creagh: I wonder whether my hon. Friend has had the chance to look at annex C, which was presented to Parliament last Thursday, on the proposed disposal of shares in the bank. It states:

“As a key part of any sale discussions, potential investors will be asked to confirm their commitment to these values”—

that is, green values—

“and to set out how they propose to protect them. Bidders’ stated intentions will be taken into account in the overall assessment of bids.”

I wonder whether we will hear what percentage will be allocated to that in the bidding process. All bids will be marked against a schema. I, for one, would be curious to know what weight and relevance will be given to the protection of green purposes when the Government decide to sell.

Kevin Brennan: I think we would all be interested to know that. Perhaps the Minister will be as informative as she possibly can and tell the House about that in her response. We have a legislative opportunity here, because after privatisation anything could happen. What guarantee do we have that the bank will not simply be swallowed up by somebody else, and that all the guarantees given by the original investors will not evaporate?

Mary Creagh: Does my hon. Friend share my disappointment that, although the Government have bent over backwards with the ONS to create a special purpose vehicle—a special charity—with independently appointed people to protect the green purposes, they have refused to make any such moves on another matter we debated in Committee, which is the transparency of executive pay, on which the bank is a rare exemplar in the banking sector? I hope to speak about that shortly.

Kevin Brennan: I agree. My hon. Friend has been dogged in her pursuit of that both in Committee and in tabling her amendments on Report, and I look forward to her contribution on that subject.

Will the Minister guarantee that privatisation will not dilute the bank’s green purposes, or must we just keep our fingers crossed? The Government still need to adequately answer questions that were not answered properly in Committee. Am I right that the legislative lock on the green purposes is being repealed purely to get the bank off the Government’s books? If that is the principal reason, is it a good enough reason to give up the statutory guarantee, given what I said about the technical nature of the accounting issue that the ONS raised?

Will the Minister indicate the Government’s view of the stake they expect to retain in the bank, if any, following privatisation? I understand that it is a market transaction, but we need an idea of the kind of return they expect from the sale. As was mentioned earlier, market conditions are so poor that the Chancellor had to abandon the sell-off of Lloyds shares, but we need to know whether they really expect a significant return from the privatisation, given all the pain associated with the process and the record of poor value for money for the taxpayer in previous privatisations. I do not expect her to be able to be precise, but she will want to avoid the criticism the Government encountered over the lack

[Kevin Brennan]

of value achieved previously, so will she give us an idea of what she expects the Government to get from privatisation?

Is the Minister concerned that these matters will provide further uncertainty for low-carbon investors, at a time of real concern about the Government's retreat from investment in wind power? We have learned over many years that making policy in haste is not wise—it is certainly not wise to privatise in haste—and we might well repent at leisure if this innovative and effective piece of public policy is lost as a result of a lack of care and a rush to privatise. That is no way to make sustainable policy, particularly in an area where we are trying to create a sustainable future for the country, which is why we have tabled new clause 4.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I am happy to be able to speak to my new clause 8, which I would like to press to a vote, but first I wish to associate myself with the shadow Minister's case in favour of new clause 4, to which I have also put my name.

Essentially, the context of new clause 8 is my dismay at the Government's determination to push through privatisation of the Green Investment Bank despite concerns expressed by the House of Lords, Members of this House, the Environmental Audit Committee and civil society. Through this and other actions, I fear that the Government have demonstrated that their desire to get the bank off their balance sheet is taking massive precedence over their interest in whether the bank is genuinely contributing to the green economy to the fullest extent possible.

1.15 pm

The EAC, on which I am proud to serve, noted in its report on the future of the bank back in December:

“Whilst we recognise there are potential benefits resulting from an injection of capital, we found that the Government has taken the decision to privatise GIB without due transparency, publication of relevant evidence, consultation, or proper consideration of alternatives. The absence of these steps is likely to lead to the suspicion that the move and its timing are not evidence-based policy.”

Nothing has changed my view since December. The Government are again acting without looking at the evidence. My new clause is therefore intended to ensure that the bank is maintained as a single functioning institution that can continue to invest in the UK's low-carbon economy at the level planned prior to this deeply regrettable privatisation.

As well as being regrettable, the privatisation will not be easy. The Government say they aim to sell 75% of the bank, which equates to roughly £1.5 billion up front, which is a considerable sum. Indeed, it is huge, even by the standards of the behemoth investment funds. According to Bloomberg New Energy Finance, one of the largest successful green energy sales in 2015 was worth just \$688 million. Given that few notable deals even touched the £1 billion mark in 2015, how can the Government be sure of making a sale of £1.5 billion in one round? There is a risk that it will turn out to be fanciful.

In addition, investor confidence in the UK's green economy is at an all-time low. One need only look at last week's Energy and Climate Change Committee investor

confidence report to see that. In that context, it is even more unlikely that the Government will sell a majority stake in the bank in one round or that the taxpayer will get value for money on any sale. Furthermore, any equity stake bought would require the buyer to follow through on their equity annually—in other words, to bankroll the bank's annual business plan—which would mean another £500 million to £600 million a year.

The huge sums involved make it highly likely that come October, the desired 75% will not have been sold. Given the Government's determination to hold on to only a 25% stake, if that, there is a good chance of the Government saying that they have done what they can but not been able to make the sale, and therefore proceeding to dismantle the bank and sell off its assets. In other words, we could essentially face a fire sale. That is even more likely given that the most attractive parts of the bank are ripe for asset sell-off, particularly the £1 billion offshore wind fund and the £500 million waste to energy fund.

Furthermore, there is a risk of the bank's owners—the new ones and the Government—not committing to fully funding the bank's business plan for new investments in the UK's green economy. It would then become little more than a fund manager, as opposed to a bank driving additional investment in the UK's green economy. It is really important that the Government do not just sell to any investor. New investors must be committed to maintaining the bank as a going concern, fully funding its business plan, driving the expansion of the UK's low-carbon economy, addressing market failure to crowd in additional private investment, implementing best-in-class governance, transparency and public accountability standards and facilitating and scaling up citizen investment in the UK's low-carbon economy.

Quite simply, my new clause is intended to inoculate the bank against the risks that I have described by committing the Government to maintaining its integrity as a single functioning institution with a fully funded business plan, not simply selling off its assets.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Would not inoculation, to use the hon. Lady's word, be guaranteed by the special share the Government intend to operate?

Caroline Lucas: Unfortunately, the special share has no legal underpinning, so we cannot have reassurance about that. In addition, the Government's overestimation of the ease with which they will sell the bank is a real problem, as I am demonstrating. They have massively overestimated the speed at which they can sell, which I fear will lead to a temptation to asset-strip. My new clause is a simple way of ensuring that that does not happen. I suggest we ensure that anyone buying the bank commits to the full five-year life of round one.

Mary Creagh: The hon. Lady is a credit to our Committee, and I am grateful for the many points she is making on this issue. Does she share my concern that the proposed special share might not be carried forward in any future sale of assets? Will she join me in asking the Minister to clarify that in her response? The bank may be sold once, but the danger is that the next time it is sold, it may well be a case of, “We want to get rid of all this stuff about the green part of what the bank does.”

Caroline Lucas: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her intervention and kind words, and I congratulate her on her chairmanship of the Environmental Audit Committee. I do indeed share her concern that we have no real legal guarantee that this special share mechanism will be safe over time. We need a guarantee that it will protect not just the bank's green purposes but the focus on complex and novel investments that a public green investment bank is uniquely fitted to be able to fulfil.

I fear that this privatisation is being done in haste. It has not been properly thought through, and the guarantees that we are being offered are not watertight. I therefore commend my simple new clause 8, which would provide at least some reassurance that the Green Investment Bank will be maintained as a single functioning institution that can continue to invest in the UK's low-carbon economy at the same level as was planned prior to privatisation. If the Government are so sure that that is possible, I hope they will accept the new clause.

Mary Creagh: I shall speak to amendment 17, which stands in my name and that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint). Before I come on to the substance, I would like to congratulate previous speakers in the debate. The fact that the Government have moved substantially on some of these issues is a testament to the scrutiny provided by the Environmental Audit Committee and the Labour party as the Bill has passed through the House. I put on record my anxiety about the fact that this asset sale was rushed out last Thursday, before the Bill had had a chance to pass through the House, which suggests that we are moving on the basis of a timetable not dictated by the Minister or the market conditions that would achieve the best possible value for a Government asset of this kind, but driven by the Chancellor, who is going to have to make some difficult announcements in his Budget on 16 March.

To meet the climate change targets that were agreed at Paris, we will need billions of pounds of green investment to upgrade the energy and transport infrastructure of the UK. So far, the Green Investment Bank has done a really sterling job in attracting capital to low-carbon infrastructure projects in the UK that might otherwise have struggled to find funding. The Bill allows the Government to sell off the bank. I stress that I am pretty certain that this bank is going to be sold in one piece at one time, with the risk that it will not achieve best value for the taxpayer. I am not opposed to privatisation, if it can be shown that it is the right policy tool to get the job done, but this decision seems to have been rushed through just to get the bank off the Government's balance sheet.

The Environmental Audit Committee, on which the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) and I both sit, produced a report before Christmas that concluded that the Government took

“the decision to privatise GIB without due transparency ...consultation, or proper consideration of alternatives.”

Ministers have simply not yet proven to Parliament that the bank will achieve its aims better in the private sector. The Government have relied heavily on assurances from potential shareholders and executives who stand to benefit personally from the sale.

Amendment 17 would ensure that, if the sale goes ahead, the Green Investment Bank would remain accountable to Parliament and taxpayers by reporting

annually on the pay of its top team. The Environmental Audit Committee recommended that the Government undertake proper consultation and evidence gathering before any sale and that protecting the GIB's green identity should be paramount. While I welcome the Secretary of State's pledge to protect the bank's green status with a special share, as the Committee recommended, I am concerned that without locking that in legislation, it may not be secure. I am concerned that the special share will not be worth the paper it is written on in any future sale of the bank and that it will be forgotten because, of course, the bank's onward sale value is depressed if we are limiting the nature of the activities in which it can invest.

When the bank was established, it was intended by the Government to be an exemplar of transparency in the financial services sector in reporting executive pay. That particularly important point was accepted on a cross-party basis, given the recent banking scandal and the low levels of public trust in bankers and their bonus culture, which rewarded recklessness and persists to this day. It is therefore disappointing that that welcome clarity will not continue under the Minister's proposals to privatise the bank. Ministers are happy for the bank and its executives to revert to the status of any other bank or fund with minimal reporting of remuneration that is limited to the highest paid member of staff and the chairman of the board. My amendment would commit the Government to providing full disclosure to Parliament of the remuneration of the Green Investment Bank's senior management and board after privatisation.

This point was hotly disputed and argued by the Minister in Committee, but it is fair to say that the Committee saw a certain irony in her stout defence of allowing Green Investment Bank executives to have the freedoms to increase their pay under the Bill and privatisation, although the Bill simultaneously caps the pay of people working in private sector companies such as Magnox with salaries of around £25,000. That stands in sharp contrast to the salaries of the executive team at the Green Investment Bank, which range—we know this because of the transparency—from £125,000 to £325,000, plus bonuses and benefits.

The bank began in 2012 to invest in green infrastructure projects. It has invested in 58 projects with a total value of more than £10 billion. Last June, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) said, the Government announced their decision to privatise the Green Investment Bank. The Bill provides the means to do so by reclassifying it as a private sector organisation so that its finance will not contribute to public sector net debt, and by removing reference to the GIB's green purposes and identity from the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013.

Bob Stewart: It seems to me that the Green Investment Bank has been a success since it was set up by the coalition Government. One reason why it should go into the private sector is to liberate more investment and increase the possibilities.

Mary Creagh: That has indeed been the argument from Ministers. We want the bank to be able to fund more projects, and the hon. Gentleman might say that the Government have called this privatisation a “natural

[Mary Creagh]

next step”. However, who else supports the move? The Green Investment Bank certainly supports it, and the Government have drawn on that support as a primary motivation for their plans to proceed, but we have not had the same transparency and consultation that accompanied the bank’s establishment.

The Environmental Audit Committee heard in evidence to our inquiry that the Government’s decision was taken

“without due transparency, publication of relevant evidence, consultation, and proper consideration of alternatives.”

The hon. Gentleman will be aware that there are many different ways to raise money. When the GIB was established in 2013, the idea of privatisation so soon after its creation was not discussed. Our Committee also heard that the Government have not presented enough evidence for privatisation, or considered a wide enough range of alternatives to a sell-off.

In their response to the EAC report, the Government claimed that they had undertaken unpublished market testing over the course of two years. In Committee, I asked the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise whether she would be willing to publish that market testing. She declined, and said that she would not publish the impact assessment either, because there were no regulatory or significant cost impacts of the GIB sale or changes to its pre-existing policy goals. Our Committee disputes that because of the risk to the green purposes of the bank.

What concerns us is that a bank that was set up to invest in green projects is being privatised without consultation or transparency, and that, although it might have more money, it may not retain its laser focus on green purposes following any future sale. We know that when assets are sold—transport assets, for instance—they tend to be sold on by the pension fund or the other establishment that ends up holding them, hence my question to the Minister.

1.30 pm

Bob Stewart: I hope that the hon. Lady will forgive me for intervening, given that I was not a member of the Committee. It seems to me that the special purpose of the Green Investment Bank will be maintained through the special share and the special share ownership. Any change to the bank’s original purposes will have to come back to Parliament one way or another.

Mary Creagh: The Minister has said that a report will be presented to Parliament before the bank is finally sold. In Committee, I asked her how the report would be considered by Parliament. I asked if it would be considered on the Committee corridor as part of statutory instrument proceedings and if it would be subject to the affirmative or negative procedure. Will we have a chance to vote on this issue again? The Minister is nodding, so I am sure that she will clarify the position when she responds to the debate.

The Committee had a series of concerns, and I still worry that the bank might be sold on at some future stage as the Bank of America Merrill Lynch Investment Bank. Investment banks are going through a very tricky time, and things are not at all well in their sector.

Any purchaser of the GIB will be looking for maximum freedoms so that potential future sale capital receipts can be maximised.

The only robust consultation that the Government can point to, given that they will not publish the market testing and have not carried out an impact assessment, is consultation with the bank itself. They relied heavily on the bank and its executives in evidence and their response in Committee and, of course, those executives stand to benefit from the sale.

Amendment 17 invites the Government to commit themselves to providing Parliament with information on the remuneration of the bank’s senior management and board after privatisation. That information is currently provided in the bank’s annual report. For instance, how much will the executive team who are in charge of the bank stand to gain personally from the privatisation? How objective can their views be if they are to gain personally from the bank’s privatisation?

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): Are not private sector companies and their directors already under disclosure obligations in relation to executive compensation for directors? What would be the rationale for going further and making the requirements of the Green Investment Bank over and above those of any other company in the economy?

Mary Creagh: This company has been financed by more than £3 billion of taxpayers’ money at a time when my constituents have had the third lowest pay increase in any part of the country since the financial crisis of 2008. The pay of my constituents and those of the hon. Gentleman has been eroded and depressed over the past year as a direct result of the actions of reckless bankers. Given that, and given the journey on which we have travelled in the past 10 years, it would be negligent of us to privatise a fully owned state bank without introducing protections to prevent the huge increase in remuneration that tends to take place when state assets are privatised.

Steve Brine: The hon. Lady’s arguments are, of course, very persuasive while the bank is in public ownership and in receipt of public finance, which justifies the current disclosure regime, but surely, once the bank is in private hands and financed principally—75% or more, I believe—by private money, they will no longer apply.

Mary Creagh: The bank will not be financed principally by private money. We do not know how much it will be sold for, but at present it is financed 100% by public money. I do not know whether whoever takes it over will put in the £3 billion match funding that the Government have put in, but they will certainly not be putting in that money on day one.

This bank was set up to be an exemplar to the banking and financial industry. It was not set up to be just another bank; it was set up to do something special, and to be something special. The Minister has reassured us—we hope it is the case—that the special share will protect the specialness of its green purposes, although I think there is a question mark over how long that will last. What I want to know, given that the bank was also set up to be an exemplar in respect of executive pay, is why that part of it should be lost.

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con) *rose—*

James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con) *rose—*

Mary Creagh: May I develop my arguments? I shall be happy to take further questions a little later.

Following a discussion with my colleagues in the Environmental Audit Committee last week, I wrote to Lord Smith of Kelvin, the chair of the Green Investment Bank, asking for clarification of the proposed remuneration for the bank's senior executives. Our shareholders—taxpayers—could potentially remain as minority shareholders in the enterprise. I think that as long as the UK taxpayer has even a 1% shareholding in the bank, that should be carried forward. Taxpayers have committed £3.8 billion to the bank, and rather than talking about what a future owner will put into it, let us wait until we see the colour of that future owner's money.

In that letter, I made it clear that the Environmental Audit Committee could see no reason for increasing remuneration as a result of a change in the bank's status. We were particularly interested to know the proposed structure both of the management fee that the privatised bank would charge investors, and of any form of profit share or participation rights for management proposed in the offering to new shareholders. We wanted to know the board's view regarding the quantum and structure of executive profit share incentives. We also sought an assurance from the board and management of their commitment to maintaining the staffing levels that the public purse has funded, to ensure that the bank continues fully and effectively to serve the UK's needs for investment in green infrastructure.

Lord Smith's reply to me reassured the Committee that the proposed business plan

“will require the current staff complement with possibly a small number of additions.”

That was reassuring, but less welcome was his response that the information memorandum for investors, which includes projected revenues and costs, including staff costs—this therefore has already been decided and written at board level, and had probably been decided and written when the Minister was in Committee with us—is commercially confidential and cannot be shared.

Richard Fuller: The hon. Lady has special knowledge in this regard, so may I tease out some information from her? She mentioned the £3.8 billion of public money that had been invested at a time of public expenditure reductions in certain areas. What consideration did her Committee give to what valuation would be appropriate when the Government sold the bank? She rightly said that it had constituted an inspiring start by the coalition Government, and that she wanted it to be an exemplar. Do the Government not have a special responsibility to ensure that they let it go into the private sector at the right time?

Mary Creagh: The Committee's remit was not to second-guess what the Government could or could not get for the bank. I am sure that there are people in the City who are much better able to do that than I am, and I am sure that some Members, certainly Conservative Members, could make a good stab at it.

When I worked with small businesses, it was possible to get multiples of income, but that depends on what is being bought. In this case, what is being bought is an

asset book with, it is to be hoped, future revenues from the investments that have been made—as well as what might be described as senior bank management intellectual capital—but what is also being bought is £3.8 billion of Government investment in green projects from which the purchaser will hope to gain revenue and capital streams as, at some point, they are sold off. The situation will also depend on what the purchaser will put into capital projects.

Richard Fuller: The hon. Lady rightly says that there has been a series of investments in the bank, but it would be possible to calculate the net present value of those assets, given certain assumptions. Has her Committee attempted to do that? Such a calculation could provide an evidential base that would enable us to understand whether, if the bank is sold in future, it has been sold on a fair basis.

Mary Creagh: We have not calculated the net present value, but I am sure that it would be quite a simple process and that there will be a number of attempts to calculate it as the sale proceeds. No doubt the Government will wish to let us know whether they think that that has been achieved.

James Berry: May I make a point about the issue of longevity? There is plainly a public interest in the bank's remaining a green investment bank because of the amount of public money that has already been invested, and because of public interest in the development of green fuels and energy. That, together with the work that the Committee will do in scrutinising the bank's future, surely provides enough protection to ensure that it will indeed remain a green investment bank.

Mary Creagh: Once the bank is sold, my Committee will have no locus in scrutinising what it does. We could look into it only as a matter of interest. This is the final legislative opportunity that we have collectively as parliamentarians to say what we want to happen to the bank. We might have a chance to discuss it further if the matter is debated upstairs in Committee, but the process is now at its penultimate stage. The starting gun has been fired; the first round of the bidding process has already started. If the Government decide that they want to sell 100% of the bank by, say, September or Christmas, the Environmental Audit Committee could look into whether best value had been achieved, but only as a matter of interest. However, we want to test the proposals on the special share today to ensure that the public interest is protected, as the hon. Gentleman says, and that the green vehicle can continue to move forward. The Green Investment Bank is a really important financial institution for enabling us to meet our climate change targets.

The Chancellor said in January that the sale of shares in Lloyds would be postponed because of market turbulence. The sell-off was scheduled for the spring, but he has now said that it will come after Easter. We shall wait and see when that happens. Since the start of the year, we have seen a bear market, great turbulence in the financial markets, panic selling of crude oil, and oil prices at a 13-year low. These are worrying times for the global economy and the market is hugely volatile. All bank shares are currently falling in price, whether they are UK bank shares, European bank shares or US bank

[Mary Creagh]

shares. Just this morning, we have heard that the Bank of England has announced it will give commercial banks three exceptional opportunities just before and after the EU referendum to borrow as much as they like to offset any threat of a run on banks and to prevent a repeat of the chaos of the financial crisis in 2007 and 2008. In the light of that bleak, turbulent and choppy financial picture, we have to ask whether the Government's decision to launch the sale of the bank last Thursday was the right one. Whatever one's views on privatisation, this hardly seems to be the most auspicious time to sell off a state asset, let alone a state-owned bank.

Barry Gardiner: I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh), who chairs the Environmental Audit Committee, on her speech. I wholly agree with what she has said. I also congratulate her and her Committee on all the work that they have done to tease out the details of this sale.

In 2012, the Green Investment Bank was set up for a purpose. It was stated quite clearly that its purpose was to address specific market failures and investment barriers in a way that would achieve emission reductions at the lowest cost to taxpayers and consumers. It was going to achieve that by working within the framework of the Climate Change Act 2008 and by risk-sharing between the public and private sectors, identifying and addressing market failures and limiting private investment in low carbon infrastructure, thereby accelerating and delivering green investment on a large scale and with significantly lower capital costs. That was the whole point. The bank was set up precisely because there was a market failure. The private sector was not able to achieve this. It is not just me, an Opposition Member of Parliament, who is saying that. Labour supported the bank. Indeed, it was our idea in the first place when we were in government, and we were delighted when the coalition put it into place.

The coalition Government also set up the Green Investment Bank commission. It was an independent, non-partisan advisory group brought together by the Chancellor himself. It took three years and two official rounds of rigorous market testing and evidence gathering to establish that a green investment bank was needed. The commission collected evidence to inform the bank's aims, its design and the operating model under which it would function. Let us compare the three years and two official rounds of market testing it took to set the bank up with the sudden shock decision to sell it off, which was taken with a complete lack of consultation.

1.45 pm

What did the commission find? It found that without a way of directly addressing market failure and risk-sharing between the public and private sectors through a green investment bank, higher levels of direct subsidy would be required to facilitate low-carbon investment. That would mean higher costs to the consumer and the taxpayer. That is what the Chancellor's own commission, with the hand-picked people he put on it, agreed. That rationale is now being undermined by this sale. Let us be absolutely clear that, according to the Government's own commission, this sale will result in an increased cost to the consumer and the taxpayer.

The Chancellor has given himself something of a problem. By committing to achieve a public finance surplus every year in normal economic times, the Government have ruled out borrowing to fund public infrastructure. The exception is investments through the private finance initiative, which do not affect the headline public finance numbers. Since the financial crisis, there has been less private finance available to invest in either public-private or private infrastructure projects. At the same time, direct public investment has also decreased.

One of the concerns expressed by investors relates to the political risks that have manifested themselves as a result of potential changes in Government policies. Those changes have already been criticised and I will not go into them again today. However, the way in which the Government have chopped and changed the regulatory framework for low-carbon investment has resulted in a decline in the UK's attractiveness for investment, as the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) has commented from the Green Benches. According to the Ernst and Young rubric, we fell out of the top 10 best places for investment for the first time last year.

The way in which this issue has been tackled by the Chancellor has been twofold. The Pensions Infrastructure Platform has sourced less than £1 billion in total over its first four years of operation, despite its aim being £20 billion. Furthermore, instead of the projected £40 billion from the UK guarantees scheme, only £1.7 billion in guarantees was actually issued in the first two years. Let us contrast that dire financial performance with the performance of the Green Investment Bank. Having been set up with just £2.3 billion of public money, it has mobilised more than £10 billion of investment in British infrastructure in the past three years.

Actually, I wish the bank had had a few more failures. It adopted a very specific policy at the beginning, which was to go for safe projects. It went for those projects because it wanted to build up a track record of successful investment so that, at about this point, it could attract much more private sector capital and take on riskier projects. That is the point of a green investment bank. The point is not to do what the market is going to do anyway by investing in areas that will obviously attract a return on capital. The whole point of the Green Investment Bank was to take on those much more difficult technical projects that the market would not finance.

Three years in, we have reached precisely the point at which we should be thinking, "Great! The bank has a successful track record behind it. Now it needs to move into slightly riskier projects." Some of those projects might have failed—that is the nature of banking and investment—but the overall balance of investment flowing into UK infrastructure would have been hugely enhanced. So what do the Government decide to do just at the point of lift-off of the Chancellor's only successful lever to get money into infrastructure projects in this country, the performance of the other two having been quite dismal? They pull the plug. They throw it away—send it off into the private sector, the very place that could not manage this market failure in the first place.

The hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) said earlier that the bank is a success so why can it not go on being a success in the private sector? That was the question that had to be posed by the Green Investment

Bank commission in the first place and the question that the bank was set up to answer. The former chair of the bank, Bob Wigley, pithily provided the best response to the hon. Gentleman's question when he said that there was an "inherent tension" between the GIB's continuing to invest in novel, more complex projects that are profitable over the long term and shareholder pressure to maximise short-term returns on high-value investments, given the focus on quarterly performance.

There you have it. There is a tension in the private sector. It is one that we all recognise. It is well known. It is one that the Governor of the Bank of England has spoken about at great length over the past year. He called it the "tragedy of the horizon." The investment horizon is so short that investors cannot see the payback in these sorts of projects. It is tragic that Government are privatising—neutering—one of the best things that they have established.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a persuasive argument. Does he agree that if we are to be a country represented by, as the Chancellor said, a "march of the makers", part of that is being at the front of the queue when it comes to leadership and supporting innovation in the green energy and green environmental products marketplace? Does my hon. Friend feel that privatising the Green Investment Bank will just create yet another bank—one that will not do the job for which it was intended?

Barry Gardiner: My right hon. Friend has enormous knowledge in this area and I absolutely agree with her. The most successful instrument that the Government have created for energising and putting investment into infrastructure projects in this country is now being neutered. That is a tragedy, which these amendments seek to address.

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise (**Anna Soubry**): It has been an interesting debate, but I must confess that I do not agree with many of the arguments advanced by the Opposition, so I hope that hon. Members will not support any of the new clauses.

If I may deal with things in reverse order, I will first address new clause 8, tabled by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), which seeks to ensure that the Green Investment Bank continues its green investments plans post-privatisation. We agree on what we want the bank to continue to do. We are seeking bidders who can fund the GIB's legally binding commitments and who have the deep pockets to fund its ambitious green business plan. The bank's management is clear that it needs access to private capital to fund its green business plan. That could be equity capital raised as part of the sale process, debt capital, which the GIB can raise when it is in the private sector, or private capital raised as part of a fund structure.

Business plans change and evolve as new opportunities arise, and we will not bind new owners into the current plan, so I cannot accept the hon. Lady's new clause. The new owners of the GIB will have views on the future strategy and business plan. They will assess it as part of their due diligence and make it a part of their offers. Whoever the new owner or owners are, the special share ensures that the business plan, like the GIB, will continue to be green.

It must be said in response to many of the points and arguments that it is almost impossible to understand why anybody would want to buy the Green Investment Bank—the clue is in the name—unless they wanted to ensure that it continued to invest in green projects.

Callum McCaig (Aberdeen South) (SNP): We welcome the general direction of travel, given the special share. The Government will have a clear say during the privatisation process in the selection of the new owners, so will the Minister expand on how they will ensure that appropriate owners, who will respect not only the special share but the green agenda, are put in place?

Anna Soubry: Everyone will, of course, have to comply with the due diligence. I welcome the hon. Gentleman's comments and will dwell on that topic in a moment. I want to make it absolutely clear that it is difficult to believe that anybody would buy the Green Investment Bank unless they absolutely wanted to continue its great work, for which I pay tribute to the bank.

Caroline Lucas *rose*—

Anna Soubry: I will give way, but I want to move on to specifically why Opposition new clause 4, relating to the special share, is wrong and why the Government's proposals are absolutely right.

Caroline Lucas: I have two points. First, this is not just about green purposes. We should remember that the Green Investment Bank has particularly focused on complex and novel innovations, which take longer. It is not such a quick win, which is precisely why a private investor might not want to do the same and why public money is needed. Secondly, the special share is not legally underpinned, which gives us no long-term reassurance.

Anna Soubry: I disagree with the hon. Lady, because the privatisation and sale of the Green Investment Bank is about ensuring that more money is available from the private sector to carry out that particular sort of investment. Forgive me, but it really is not the role of Government to gamble and make investments with taxpayers' money. That was right in 2012 when, as mentioned by the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), the Green Investment Bank was set up because of an accepted market failure. However, the idea that the Government are throwing it away, as he put it, could not be further from the truth. The Green Investment Bank is a real success story. No one is seeking to pretend that it is anything else. We want its success to continue, but in the private sector.

Barry Gardiner: Does the Minister actually believe that there is no longer any market failure that needs to be addressed? The figures on infrastructure suggest quite the opposite. The point made by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) about the innovative and novel projects that the Green Investment Bank was set up to support is that they pay much less return into the private sector, which is precisely why risk-sharing between the Government and the private sector was necessary to launch the bank in the first place.

Anna Soubry: The fact that the Green Investment Bank has been so successful absolutely proves that such investments can be profitable and worth while. In other words, the bank has shown through its success that there is market failure no longer.

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): Members on the Opposition Benches seem to be saying two things. The first is that the private sector does not do long-term projects. Well, Shell, BP and others do many projects over decades. They also say that the private sector does not do innovative projects well. Those suggestions are just nonsense.

Anna Soubry: I thank my hon. Friend for his excellent intervention, which I wholeheartedly endorse. We have always said the Green Investment Bank would stay green after privatisation. Green investment is what it does, as its management have made clear. We have explained that the only reason we are repealing the green protections from legislation is to allow the GIB to move to the private sector, by removing state control over the bank. However, we understand the concerns raised by hon Members and noble Lords, and we have found a device to protect the GIB's green purposes without legislation.

2 pm

I am very grateful to Lord Smith of Kelvin, who, as has been mentioned, has written to Opposition Members in the other place explaining the view of those currently in charge—I shall put it in that way—of the GIB about this special measure and why they absolutely have all confidence in it actually achieving what we all want to achieve. This is the device that cures the mischief.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Anna Soubry: I am not going to give way because I just want to put on the record my thanks to Lord Smith for his letter, which was sent out by my excellent Parliamentary Private Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey), to all Members of this House. I hope all hon. Members, on both sides, have had the opportunity to read it, because it could not be clearer about why what the Government have proposed will ensure and protect those green purposes, and why legislation in this area is absolutely not necessary. One reason why we do not want the Opposition's new clause 4 to be successful and to put this provision into legislation is that we feel the Office for National Statistics will take the view that what we seek to do will not be achieved in this way—the bank will not be off the books—and that is why it is so important that this is done in the way we propose.

Bob Stewart: In support of what my right hon. Friend says, let me read from Lord Smith's letter. He says:

"We are 100% committed to delivering the full intent of the amendment passed in the Lords. I hope that by committing to implement this plan, and doing so transparently, we can secure the necessary confidence of shareholders, and members of Parliament that a special share solution can be delivered without the need for it to be mandated in legislation."

Anna Soubry: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for reading from the letter. Obviously, I am not going to read it out. You will be pleased to hear that,

Madam Deputy Speaker, as we would be here for half the afternoon if I did so. I have, however, placed a copy of it in the Library, as it best explains why this new clause is no longer required and why it is so incredibly important that we get the right device to ensure we keep the green principles of the bank.

Mary Creagh: Lord Smith of Kelvin may or may not be the chairman of the bank when this sale proceeds, so I therefore ask the Minister to answer the question I asked in the debate: will this special share apply if the bank is sold by any future owner, yes or no?

Anna Soubry: This is a short answer—yes. The hon. Lady will have seen this letter and I hope she will have read it—upside down, inside out, backwards and everything else. It is well over two pages long and it could not be clearer as to the way the special share is going to be set up. I shall rely on the fact that it talks about the special shareholder and how difficult it would be to undo this device. That could be done only with the permission, in effect, of the special shareholder. This House can therefore be sure that this is the right way to achieve what we all want to achieve.

That is why it is important to pay tribute—some may say that this is a first, and indeed it may not be the last—to the Scottish Government and to the Scottish National party. I have seen the letter John Swinney has written on behalf of the Scottish Government, quite properly as he is the Deputy First Minister and has responsibility in Scotland for finance, the constitution and the economy. He, too, rightly and understandably, has raised his concerns about how we best protect the green credentials of the GIB. As a result, he, too, has contacted Lord Smith, and letters have been sent back and forth. In short, to the credit of the SNP, it takes the view—I will be corrected if I am wrong—that this device, which is up and running, with the work already having been started by the GIB to secure this special shareholding, means that everybody can be confident that this is the way to secure what we all want, but without the need for legislation, which could completely scupper this privatisation and selling off of the GIB.

Kevin Brennan: The Minister has said on many occasions that she is confident that introducing the special share in this way will work. Our case all along has been that we would like to hear her say to the House that she can guarantee, rather than just be "confident", that the ONS will approve this approach. Can she now say, in terms, on the Floor of the House and on the record, that she can guarantee that?

Anna Soubry: I hope I am being parliamentary when I say that the hon. Gentleman is being a bit of a minx—I mean that in the nicest way. [*Interruption.*] He quite likes that, which is good, although I do not think he will like the next bit. I have already explained in Committee that we cannot give that guarantee, and he was a bit naughty, calling the ONS a bunch of boffins. I think he rather regretted it because the people in the ONS are not that; they are absolutely independent of government and will rightly come to their own conclusions. We are confident that if the measure goes into legislation, the ONS will not take this bank off the books, because it will not be properly in the private sector. If, however, we do it in the way that we are all suggesting—I include

the chairman of the GIB in that—there is every chance in the world that this will then become a successful privatisation. It is confusing to work out what people's real views are; the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh) says that she does not object to the GIB being sold off, although she has raised her concerns. She is in favour of it in principle, but it is not certain whether others are.

Let me now deal with amendment 17, which was tabled by the hon. Member for Wakefield and the right hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint). Again, we firmly believe it is not required. The GIB is currently required to report to higher standards—the standards for quoted companies—which include the level of detail required by this amendment. That is appropriate because it is currently entirely publicly owned. Post-privatisation, there is no reason why the GIB should be singled out to report on its remuneration to Parliament, especially if it is not spending any public money. It is a matter for the board of a company and its shareholders to agree remuneration policy. I note that there was an exchange of letters between the hon. Lady and the GIB's chair, Lord Smith, where she asked about future remuneration policy, and I am sure her Committee will publish the letter in full. If the Government retain a minority stake in the GIB—we have made it clear that our intention is to sell a majority of it—we could express views on this and other aspects of corporate policy. We could agree with other shareholders what level of reporting might be appropriate on this and other matters, but we do not consider that this matter should reside within legislation.

As I said, the GIB has been a terrifically successful venture. It is important to understand that it was set up in 2012 because of a market failure. Opposition Members certainly do not like to be reminded of the perilous financial situation our country faced in 2010, and it certainly was not all the fault of the banks—it was also a pitiful failing of Government policy at the time. What the GIB has done is help investors in the market to better understand the risks of green investment, and this comes back to the point being advanced by the hon. Member for Brent North. We know that, since 2012, long-term debt markets have significantly improved, which suggests an improvement in market conditions. Frankly, we would not set up the Green Investment Bank today, because those market failures no longer exist. The Green Investment Bank has proved that an organisation can be green and profitable, and its success demonstrates that the market can deliver green, which must be a good thing.

I have dealt with the point about the Office for National Statistics, so I will not repeat myself. The hon. Members for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) and for Wakefield asked whether the Government will retain a minority stake in the Green Investment Bank. I have to say that our position has not changed since the Committee stage. I explained then that we intend to sell a majority of the Green Investment Bank. We may retain a minority, but we cannot commit to that. Our report to Parliament makes it clear that decisions on the size of stake in the Green Investment Bank to be sold will depend on the outcome of confidential commercial discussions with investors.

I pay tribute to the Secretary of State for his announcement last week that the Green Investment Bank is now available to be sold. Unfortunately, I can

say no more than that, other than that we are confident that this sale will be successful and will be done at the time when the market is in the right place. Having said that, we will not sell the bank unless of course we know that we will get the right price. For some time now, we have had strong market interest in the Green Investment Bank, which has strong underlying assets that are less exposed to market volatility. The large infrastructure sales that have recently been made, such as that of City airport, have also been very successful, and that gives us confidence in this part of the markets.

Nobody—not even Scottish National party Members—has asked this question, but if they were to, it would be a good question, so I will pre-empt it and say that one reason why the Green Investment Bank has been so successful is that it has been primarily based in Edinburgh, which is an excellent place in which to do business, especially as it is still within a United Kingdom. I can see no good reason—again, this is something that we explored in Committee—why the Green Investment Bank would want to move away from Edinburgh. Why on earth would it? *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Callum McCaig) wants to intervene, I am happy to give way. *[Interruption.]* No, he has changed his mind. That is probably because I reminded him about the price of oil, so we will move swiftly on.

The hon. Member for Cardiff West asked me whether the Government can guarantee that the Green Investment Bank will be off the balance sheet. I think that I have dealt with that. I said that we cannot give a cast iron guarantee about the ONS, but we have confidence, and I hope that that confidence will be shared by the whole House.

We do not need this new clause, because of the assurances that have been given by the noble Lord Smith in his extensive letter to all Members of the House. In that letter, he goes into quite considerable detail about the mechanisms that he is already putting in place to ensure the future green credentials of the Green Investment Bank. That is why we say that this new clause, which will be tested, should be resisted.

The hon. Member for Wakefield and the right hon. Member for Don Valley have quite rightly raised their concerns about the Green Investment Bank and tabled amendment 17. When the bank is sold, it will be a private sector company—this is an important point to put on the record—and, as such, it will be subject to normal company law. For a company the size of the Green Investment Bank, which is unquoted—that means that it is not listed on the stock exchange—the minimum requirement will be to report aggregate information in relation to total remuneration and specific information relating to the highest paid director. As I have said, it is currently required to report to higher standards—the standards for quoted companies—which include the level of detail required by this amendment. That is appropriate because it is currently entirely publicly owned.

I have given considerable praise to the Green Investment Bank—*[Interruption.]* I have just been handed a note, which will doubtless be a blessing to everybody who, in due course, has the great good fortune either to read this in *Hansard* or to be following these proceedings. I will, if I may, pay tribute again to the bank and to all those who work for it, especially the chairman, the noble Lord Smith.

2.15 pm

In conclusion—[*Interruption.*] Cut it out. I certainly shall not forget the heckling of the hon. Member for Nottingham East (Chris Leslie).

The Government have listened—that is the most important point—to the concerns of hon. Members and noble Lords of all parties. We have been open and transparent about our intentions for the Green Investment Bank not only since June of this year, but as far back as the autumn statement in 2013 when we made our position clear. We want what is best for the Green Investment Bank, which is to increase its green impact with greater access to private sector capital. As Lord Smith said in his letter, he wants us to do it our way, and not the Opposition's way, so that it has the access to equity that it so badly needs. We need to give it the freedom to continue doing what it does best, so I hope that all hon. Members will join me in the No Lobby to resist the new clause.

Kevin Brennan: The Minister criticised me in Committee for referring to people who work in the Office for National Statistics as boffins. May I remind her that a boffin, according to Wikipedia and the Oxford English Dictionary, is a person engaged in technical research? In fact, the term originates from the war-winning researchers of world war two, so I do not think that I have anything to apologise for in describing them as boffins.

We have been looking for a guarantee that the mechanism that the Government are proposing would indeed satisfy the ONS. The Minister has confirmed on the Floor of the House today that she cannot offer that guarantee to us. We do not want to let this legislative opportunity pass by to ensure the green purposes of the Green Investment Bank. On that basis, I will be asking my right hon. and hon. Friends to join me in the Lobby as I seek to divide the House on new clause 4.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 202, Noes 284.

Division No. 206]

[2.17 pm

AYES

Abrahams, Debbie	Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Alexander, Heidi	Champion, Sarah
Allen, Mr Graham	Chapman, Jenny
Anderson, Mr David	Coaker, Vernon
Ashworth, Jonathan	Coffey, Ann
Austin, Ian	Cooper, Julie
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Cooper, Rosie
Barron, rh Kevin	Cooper, rh Yvette
Benn, rh Hilary	Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Berger, Luciana	Cox, Jo
Betts, Mr Clive	Coyle, Neil
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Crausby, Mr David
Blenkinsop, Tom	Creagh, Mary
Blomfield, Paul	Cruddas, Jon
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Cryer, John
Brennan, Kevin	Cummins, Judith
Brown, Lyn	Cunningham, Alex
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Cunningham, Mr Jim
Bryant, Chris	Danczuk, Simon
Burden, Richard	David, Wayne
Burton, Richard	De Piero, Gloria
Butler, Dawn	Debbonaire, Thangam
Byrne, rh Liam	Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.
Cadbury, Ruth	Doughty, Stephen
Campbell, rh Mr Alan	Dowd, Jim

Dowd, Peter	Matheson, Christian
Dromey, Jack	McCabe, Steve
Dugher, Michael	McCarthy, Kerry
Durkan, Mark	McDonagh, Siobhain
Eagle, Ms Angela	McDonald, Andy
Eagle, Maria	McDonnell, John
Edwards, Jonathan	McFadden, rh Mr Pat
Efford, Clive	McGinn, Conor
Elliott, Julie	McGovern, Alison
Ellman, Mrs Louise	McInnes, Liz
Esterson, Bill	McKinnell, Catherine
Evans, Chris	McMahon, Jim
Field, rh Frank	Meale, Sir Alan
Fitzpatrick, Jim	Mearns, Ian
Fletcher, Colleen	Miliband, rh Edward
Flint, rh Caroline	Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Flynn, Paul	Morden, Jessica
Fovargue, Yvonne	Morris, Grahame M.
Gardiner, Barry	Mulholland, Greg
Glass, Pat	Nandy, Lisa
Glendon, Mary	Onn, Melanie
Godsiff, Mr Roger	Onwurah, Chi
Goodman, Helen	Osamor, Kate
Green, Kate	Owen, Albert
Greenwood, Lilian	Pearce, Teresa
Greenwood, Margaret	Pennycook, Matthew
Griffith, Nia	Perkins, Toby
Gwynne, Andrew	Phillips, Jess
Haigh, Louise	Pound, Stephen
Hayes, Helen	Powell, Lucy
Hayman, Sue	Pugh, John
Healey, rh John	Reed, Mr Jamie
Hendrick, Mr Mark	Reed, Mr Steve
Hillier, Meg	Rees, Christina
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret	Reeves, Rachel
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon	Reynolds, Emma
Hollern, Kate	Reynolds, Jonathan
Hopkins, Kelvin	Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Howarth, rh Mr George	Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Hunt, Tristram	Rotheram, Steve
Jarvis, Dan	Ryan, rh Joan
Jones, Gerald	Saville Roberts, Liz
Jones, Graham	Shah, Naz
Jones, Helen	Shannon, Jim
Jones, Mr Kevan	Sharma, Mr Virendra
Jones, Susan Elan	Sheerman, Mr Barry
Kane, Mike	Sherriff, Paula
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald	Siddiq, Tulip
Keeley, Barbara	Simpson, David
Kendall, Liz	Skinner, Mr Dennis
Kinahan, Danny	Slaughter, Andy
Kinnock, Stephen	Smeeth, Ruth
Kyle, Peter	Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Lamb, rh Norman	Smith, Nick
Lavery, Ian	Smyth, Karin
Leslie, Chris	Spellar, rh Mr John
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma	Stevens, Jo
Lewis, Clive	Streeting, Wes
Lewis, Mr Ivan	Stringer, Graham
Long Bailey, Rebecca	Stuart, rh Ms Gisela
Lucas, Caroline	Tami, Mark
Lucas, Ian C.	Thomas, Mr Gareth
Lynch, Holly	Thornberry, Emily
Mactaggart, rh Fiona	Timms, rh Stephen
Madders, Justin	Trickett, Jon
Mahmood, Mr Khalid	Turley, Anna
Mahmood, Shabana	Twigg, Derek
Malhotra, Seema	Twigg, Stephen
Mann, John	Vaz, rh Keith
Marris, Rob	Vaz, Valerie
Marsden, Mr Gordon	Watson, Mr Tom
Maskell, Rachael	West, Catherine

Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Hywel
Williams, Mr Mark
Winnick, Mr David
Winterton, rh Dame Rosie
Woodcock, John

Wright, Mr Iain
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Vicky Foxcroft and
Jeff Smith

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Andrew, Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Berry, James
Bingham, Andrew
Blackman, Bob
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Borwick, Victoria
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bradley, Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brazier, Mr Julian
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burns, Conor
Burns, rh Sir Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burt, rh Alistair
Cairns, Alun
Carmichael, Neil
Carswell, Mr Douglas
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Cleverly, James
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Colvile, Oliver
Costa, Alberto
Crabb, rh Stephen
Davies, Byron
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Dinagen, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan

Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellwood, Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Graham
Evennett, rh Mr David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Michael
Fernandes, Suella
Field, rh Mark
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Marcus
Garnier, rh Sir Edward
Gauke, Mr David
Ghani, Nusrat
Gibb, Mr Nick
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
Glen, John
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, Mr James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, Ben
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matthew
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Hayes, rh Mr John
Heald, Sir Oliver
Heapey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rh Nick

Hinds, Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Hopkins, Kris
Howarth, Sir Gerald
Howlett, Ben
Huddleston, Nigel
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Jackson, Mr Stewart
James, Margot
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, Boris
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kennedy, Seema
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lancaster, Mark
Latham, Pauline
Leadsom, Andrea
Lee, Dr Phillip
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, Sir Edward
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewis, Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Lilley, rh Mr Peter
Lord, Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Lumley, Karen
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackintosh, David
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Mr Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Mathias, Dr Tania
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Mordaunt, Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mowat, David
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Nokes, Caroline
Norman, Jesse
Nuttall, Mr David

Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Phillips, Stephen
Philp, Chris
Pickles, rh Sir Eric
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Pow, Rebecca
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pritchard, Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, Mr Dominic
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robinson, Mary
Rudd, rh Amber
Rutley, David
Sandbach, Antoinette
Scully, Paul
Selous, Andrew
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Alok
Shelbrooke, Alec
Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, Julian
Smith, Royston
Solloway, Amanda
Soubry, rh Anna
Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Spencer, Mark
Stephenson, Andrew
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stewart, Rory
Streeter, Mr Gary
Stride, Mel
Sturdy, Julian
Sunak, Rishi
Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
Swire, rh Mr Hugo
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Tredinnick, David
Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
Truss, rh Elizabeth
Tugendhat, Tom
Turner, Mr Andrew
Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
Vaizey, Mr Edward
Vera, Mr Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
Walker, Mr Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, Mr Ben
Warburton, David

Warman, Matt
Watkinson, Dame Angela
Wharton, James
Whately, Helen
White, Chris
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Gavin

Wilson, Mr Rob
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wood, Mike
Wragg, William
Wright, rh Jeremy

Tellers for the Noes:
Simon Kirby and
Sarah Newton

Question accordingly negatived.

New Schedule 1

BODIES EXCLUDED FROM THE RESTRICTIONS ON PUBLIC SECTOR EXIT PAYMENTS

“Payments made by the following bodies are excluded from the restrictions on public sector exit payments—

- (a) Sellafield Ltd,
- (b) Westinghouse Springfields Fuels Ltd,
- (c) Magnox Ltd,
- (d) National Nuclear Laboratory,
- (e) International Nuclear Services,
- (f) Atomic Weapons Establishment Ltd,
- (g) Low Level Waste Repository Ltd,
- (h) Dounreay Site Restoration Ltd,
- (i) RSRL Winfrith and
- (j) RSRL Harwell.”—(*Kevin Brennan.*)

This new schedule would exclude employees of the listed companies operated by the private sector from the scope of the proposed cap on exit payments.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Kevin Brennan: I beg to move, That the schedule be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Amendment 18, in clause 41, page 56, line 18, at end insert—

“(1A) The restriction placed on public sector exit payments must be reviewed at regular intervals and, where necessary, be adjusted in line with inflation and earnings growth.”

This amendment would ensure that the level that the restriction on public sector exit payments is set will be linked to inflation and earnings growth.

Amendment 15, page 57, line 10, at end insert

“, including payments relating to employees earning less than £27,000 per year”.

This amendment would provide that regulations may exempt from the public sector exit payment cap those earning less than £27,000.

Amendment 16, page 57, line 27, at end insert—

“(10A) Nothing in this section applies in relation to payments made by the bodies listed in NS1.”

This amendment would exclude employees of companies listed in NS1 operated by the private sector from the scope of the proposed cap on exit payments.

Government amendments 3 to 9.

Kevin Brennan: I am happy to confirm that the Opposition will be supporting amendment 18, tabled by the Scottish National party, which we discussed in Committee.

This is the bit of the Enterprise Bill that has nothing to do with enterprise; it is largely about spin, to be

perfectly honest. Let me make it clear, as I did in Committee, that Her Majesty’s official Opposition agree that excessive exit payments in the public sector should not be paid, and that any abuses in that regard should be ended. The problem with the Government’s approach is that they are attempting to govern by headline in a very complex area, and in so doing they are creating the sorts of anomalies and unfairnesses that I am sure we will hear about during this debate. Including a headline-grabbing figure—in this case £95,000—on the face of the Bill is, frankly, the worst kind of utterly vacuous government, and it is exactly the sort of rigid legislating that good civil servants advise against, and that bad Ministers promote.

The inclusion of that figure in the Bill is really about allowing the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills to have his tabloid headline about fat cats, which was one of the odious remarks he made on Second Reading. That was an insult to thousands of decent, hard-working people across this country, many of whom have never been paid anywhere near £30,000 a year, let alone the £3 million a year that the Secretary of State used to get when he worked for an investment bank. [*Interruption.*] That has a lot to do with it, because of the language he used.

If I was to accuse the Secretary of State of being a fat cat—I am not going to do that, Madam Deputy Speaker—the Minister would be huffing and puffing in her usual way, muttering “Outrageous” and “Disgraceful” from a sedentary position. She and the Secretary of State like to dish it out, but they do not like to take it when it comes back their way. She was quite content to sit there on Second Reading and cheer the Secretary of State on as he traduced public servants, including long-serving local librarians and even privatised nuclear decommissioning workers, and described them as fat cats. I wonder how they felt about the Secretary of State using that language. Actually, I know exactly how they felt, because they wrote to us in their droves to express their anger at his insulting rhetoric, and that evidence—there was a lot of it—was officially submitted to the Committee.

Amendment 15, tabled by the Opposition, seeks to protect those workers who earn less than £27,000 a year from the proposed exit payments cap—yes, those who earn less than £27,000 a year are the Secretary of State’s so-called fat cats.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): I was present on Second Reading when the Secretary of State described long-serving public servants on low and average pay as fat cats. At the end of that debate, the Minister said at the Dispatch Box that the exit payments cap would not apply to civil servants earning less than £27,000. I hope that she will forgive us if we do not take her word for it, and that she will therefore accept our amendment today to ensure that the promise is in law.

Kevin Brennan: There was a time when what Ministers said on the Floor of the House could be accepted, and I am prepared to accept that the Minister is sincere in what she has said. In fact, I am not sure that she said quite what my hon. Friend says she said. I think that she actually said that it could affect a small number of people on £25,000. However, I think that my hon. Friend is echoing what one of the Minister’s Treasury colleagues had said earlier. If I am not mistaken, the current

Minister for Employment, the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel), when referring to what would be in the Conservative party's manifesto, said that the proposal would not affect anybody earning less than £27,000 a year. We have therefore taken her words, given as a promise from a Minister of the Crown, and put them into an amendment in order to hold the Government to their word. The fact that this Minister was not prepared to repeat that in those terms when she spoke on Second Reading can perhaps be explained by the Government's refusal to support our very reasonable amendment.

Richard Fuller: Following the hon. Gentleman's deliberations in Committee, and from his own analysis—obviously we are looking in the round at public expenditure on exit payments—can he advise the House on what proportion of that expenditure in, say, the last five years was for people earning less than £27,000, and what proportion was for people earning over £100,000?

Kevin Brennan: I do not have that figure to hand, but we did probe the Government to try to get some idea of what calculations they had made of the impact on people earning less than £27,000 a year. I am afraid we have not been able to elicit a great deal of information from them on that subject, other than that they think it would be rare for those people to be affected. If it is that rare—I will come to this in a moment—why do the Government not accept our amendment, because it will not actually cost them much?

Richard Fuller: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. In the absence of data, he has his good judgment and his reasonableness, following his many years in government before 2010. Do his instincts not say that the majority of people will be earning in excess of £100,000? That really is the target of what the Government propose, is it not?

Kevin Brennan: That is what the Government say the target is. As the hon. Gentleman knows, I respect him greatly for his independence of mind and thought, and for his intellect on these matters. As I said at the outset, if abuses are going on in relation to public sector exit payments, we are perfectly willing to say they should be stopped, but we need to look at what the clause actually does. It picks the figure of £95,000 to generate a headline saying that the Bill will stop fat-cat public sector exit payments of more than £100,000. However, what it does not elucidate very well is that that £95,000 is not just a cash lump sum, but includes the so-called strain payments that are paid into workers' pension funds when they are forced into redundancy before retirement age. That is money they will never get in their pockets—they are not walking away with £95,000. They are not fat cats earning more than £100,000, and some are on relatively modest incomes. The Bill will also capture many people in the private sector, which the Government were also not keen to elucidate on.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Will the shadow Minister confirm that the employees affected, who will be earning less than £25,000 a year, will be predominantly women? This being International Women's Day, perhaps the Government should think again.

Kevin Brennan: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Clearly, large numbers of public sector workers, who have often given long service, might have to take redundancy—not surprisingly at a time of severe cuts in, for example, local government. The provisions in the local government pension fund require those strain payments to be made, and those will count towards the £95,000 exit payment.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): My intervention very much complements that of the hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens). One of the big concerns about the change, which I am sure my hon. Friend shares, is that the consultation was so inadequate. The Government have also failed to undertake any public sector equality duty review, as required under the Equality Act 2010. The changes could therefore have many unintended consequences, but the Government are not taking the time to explore them.

Kevin Brennan: Yes. I will briefly touch on the inadequacy of the consultation later.

Amendment 15 is about workers earning less than £27,000 a year. As I mentioned, it was the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel), when she was at the Treasury, who said a year ago:

“those earning less than £27,000 will be exempted to protect the very small number of low earning, long-serving public servants.” She was commenting on the Government's plans to create the public sector exit payment cap.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): Did the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise not take the Committee through a number of worked examples demonstrating that the Bill would not have the adverse effect on pensions that is suggested? For example, a prison officer earning £28,000 a year with 34 years' experience could still retire at as young as 52 without being affected. Does that not illustrate that the hon. Gentleman's concerns are not terribly well founded?

2.45 pm

Kevin Brennan: I recommend that the hon. Gentleman read more deeply into the report of the Committee stage. I commend to him the worked example I gave of somebody on a salary of £25,000 who had given long service in local government and who would be affected.

Obviously, the right hon. Member for Witham did not think at the time that these people were fat cats; she thought they should be protected, and we need to understand why that is not happening in the Bill. Why was a lower earnings floor not included, given that the Conservatives promised they would pursue only—again, I quote from their manifesto—the “best paid” workers? Of course, once the election was over, the Government ignored that.

Problems emerged because the consultation was so poorly conducted, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) said. Usually, a full consultation takes 12 weeks; the Government did this consultation over four weeks in the summer—it began on 31 July 2015 and concluded on 27 August. If the Government were serious in their rhetoric that the Bill would affect only the best paid, it

[Kevin Brennan]

would be very straightforward to include a provision to exclude those on £27,000 or less. In fact, what the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise said on Second Reading, which was alluded to earlier, was:

“What we do know is that there is a very small number of workers”—

that is the figure she gave—

“in the public sector on about £25,000 who could be caught by this... But those are extremely rare conditions.”—[*Official Report*, 2 February 2016; Vol. 605, c. 886.]

What we want to know, therefore—I think this is what the hon. Member for Bedford (Richard Fuller) wanted to know—is how rare those conditions are. If they are that rare, why not exempt the lower paid?

Catherine McKinnell: My hon. Friend briefly mentioned the dates of the consultation—between July and August. Does it not occur to him that if the Government were genuinely keen to hear back from people potentially affected by, or interested in, this change, they would not have introduced the consultation for such a short time over the summer holidays?

Kevin Brennan: My only assumption is that they think fat cats should not have holidays. That is probably why they thought it did not matter that there was only a four-week consultation. That is what they think of the people they were supposed to be consulting. The rhetoric used by the Government is shameful; the contemptuous, short nature of the consultation is shameful; and the way in which the policy has been introduced overall can only be described as shameful.

We are concerned about the Government’s reluctance to make the necessary exemptions to ensure that the unfortunate few—that is what the Government tell us they are: a few—are not disproportionately affected. If the low paid and average paid are affected only in rare circumstances, excluding them from the cap will not result in the Government losing a great deal of money, so what is the problem in exempting them?

Richard Fuller: I am listening intently to the hon. Gentleman. I was in the Committee, and I am wondering whether there may be a flaw in his argument—no pun intended. If we put the floor in at £27,000, what about the person at £28,000? How would we distinguish between the different groups? Is it not better to set a limit to the payment that is made and to be blind on the income that someone gets up to that limit?

Kevin Brennan: I understand the point the hon. Gentleman is making. That would be all right if it was truly a payment that people were going to get in their pocket. The reason these people are captured, however, is that the figure includes the so-called strain payments that are made into the pension fund if they are made redundant before their normal retirement age. That is the unfairness, and that is the reason why, I presume, that the former Treasury Minister said that no one on under £27,000 should be affected. The Opposition have simply taken what the Government originally said their intention was, as elucidated by a Minister of Her Majesty’s Treasury, and put it in our amendment to test why the Government are not acting on what was said.

On Report in the Lords, Baroness Neville-Rolfe indicated that a drop of £500 would not be disproportionate for someone previously entitled to a pension of £12,500—the implication is that there could be a fall in the pension paid ultimately. All I would say is that a 4% drop in income for somebody on a relatively small income—it is lower, after all, than what one would receive on the minimum wage—would be highly significant on that low income. To say that a 4% cut is not significant is hugely out of touch with the reality of many people’s lives.

The Government’s case is that a leaving payment of £95,000 or above is a large amount for any employee, but they are perpetrating the myth that people will actually receive that money. Employees on low to average incomes will never see a large amount, because the payment includes compensation paid to the pension scheme. In fact, some of them will never even receive their pension, so they will never see that money in any way, shape or form.

The cap includes strain payments, and the pension shortfall is adjusted at the time of redundancy. Strain payments could make up a considerable amount of the £95,000. If so, long-serving, loyal workers could finish work with a significant shortfall in the amount that should have been allocated to them to deal with redundancy, unemployment and uncertainty. They will be left with little in their redundancy payment to pay for annuities to provide long-term security. I do not think that was the Government’s original intention, but the fact that they have refused to respond to the concern makes me wonder whether I am right about that.

We have been told that the Chancellor has withdrawn his pensions proposals, which would have raised £10 billion to pay down the deficit. In other words, he has moved swiftly so as not to offend better-off pensioners who might have been hit by the proposals. Why, then, will the Government not turn their hand to those who earn less than £27,000 a year, whose redundancy and access to a pension are threatened by the exit payment cap? The Chancellor has famously said that we are all in this together and that those with the broadest shoulders should bear the biggest burden, so the Government have a chance to prove that by supporting our amendment 15, which is, after all, based on their own words.

Amendment 16 would exclude from the provision employees of the companies listed in new schedule 1, which are operated by the private sector. Those who would be affected are principally employees of companies across the nuclear estate and elsewhere in the private sector, such as Magnox. Why are they affected by a measure that the Secretary of State told us on Second Reading is designed to hit “public sector fat cats”? According to the Secretary of State, Magnox workers who work in the private sector are “public sector fat cats”.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): When companies such as Magnox were privatised, workers such as those at Trawsfynydd in Dwyfor Meirionnydd lost access to their public sector pension scheme, but they are now going to be included in a cap on public sector redundancy payments. Does the shadow Secretary of State agree that the Treasury is trying to have its cake and eat it at the expense of those workers?

Kevin Brennan: I thank the hon. Lady for promoting me temporarily. I agree with her, and I know that she has been campaigning on that issue, as has my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen), who we may hear from later. She is absolutely right. The employees of these companies would never have imagined for one second that they would be hit by the Government's proposals and the Conservative manifesto commitment to cap public sector exit payments. We raised the issue in Committee, but the Minister refused to guarantee that they would be excluded from the exit payment cap.

The companies listed are in a unique position. They are mostly engaged in managing the safe closure of nuclear facilities, which is a task of huge national importance. By its very nature, it involves working towards a specific end date, at which point the employees will effectively make themselves redundant, provided that they have done a good job. That is what they are doing: they are working to make themselves redundant.

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is completely inconsistent to include employees of companies operated by the private sector? My constituents who work at Sellafield are very worried about the proposed redundancy cap. I am concerned that it will lead to highly skilled, experienced workers leaving the industry, which would undermine our ability to deliver the safe decommissioning of our nuclear facilities.

Kevin Brennan: I agree. My hon. Friend will have noticed that Sellafield Ltd is included in new schedule 1, for the very reason she has highlighted.

As I said, the workers in question are working towards making themselves redundant. They accept that their work is a task and finish activity of national importance. In order to get somebody with the necessary skills to commit to that kind of proposition in their early or mid-30s, we need to ensure that they know that they will be provided for if they successfully complete their task by the time they reach their mid to late 50s, when they might find it extremely difficult to find re-employment, given their very specific skills.

If the companies listed cannot afford the packages necessary to compensate someone for the loss of their role when their task has been completed, they will find it extremely difficult to prevent highly skilled workers, who are mobile in the earlier parts of their careers, from leaving. That in itself will drive up costs for the nuclear decommissioning industry and exacerbate an already difficult skills shortage in the sector.

Legislating now to override the long-standing arrangements in the nuclear industry, as the Government are doing, when employers have kept their end of the bargain faithfully, is, to be frank, unconscionable. How can it be right that workers who have stayed with a company to deliver successfully the safe decommissioning of a site see the Government renege on their promised redundancy compensation when it is due to be paid?

Catherine McKinnell: My hon. Friend's argument is powerful, and I am genuinely at a loss as to why the Government do not take heed of it. The proposal will not only cost individuals in the long term; it is also a betrayal of trust and will only benefit, to a small degree,

the company involved. It will not actually benefit the Government, so I do not understand why they do not take action to right what is clearly a wrong.

Kevin Brennan: Exactly. The Treasury's justification is that, even though the companies have been privatised, the workers are still deemed by the Office for National Statistics to be on the Treasury books, because of the nature of their work. It is understandable that their work needs to be underwritten by Government, because they are decommissioning nuclear sites and no one can get an insurance policy for that.

That technical, statistical designation, however, does not mean that applying the cap to those workers is fair or that it necessarily represents value for money for taxpayers in the long term. There is no proof that taxpayers will receive any benefit, as the private operators of the companies often receive higher incentive payments in their contracts as a result of this kind of change. Unless the Government decide to act, employees in the sector will note that the Treasury has excluded them from the public sector when it comes to pension provision and other issues, but considers them within the scope of the capped exit payments.

Catherine McKinnell: If the Government fail to take heed of this issue and that of the pensions of women who were born in the 1950s, I think that the mantra for the 2020 election will be, "You cannot trust the Tories on pensions."

Kevin Brennan: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I hope that the Government will have a last-minute change of heart. Why is a privatised banker not given the fat cat treatment under these provisions?

Chris Philp: Will the shadow Minister give way?

Kevin Brennan: I will in a moment, but first I will repeat my question, just in case Members did not hear it: why is a fat cat banker not being given the same treatment as nuclear decommissioning workers?

Chris Philp: The shadow Minister well knows that the Government have capped the pension contributions of higher earners at £44,000 a year, and that those on the highest incomes of more than £200,000 have had their contributions capped at £10,000 a year. The Government have taken a lot of action in this area, as the shadow Minister well knows.

Kevin Brennan: What the hon. Gentleman may not realise is that the workers of the banks that have been taken into public ownership will be specifically excluded from the exit payments cap under the Government's plans. That might change his mind, so he might like to join us in the Lobby later. Yet again, it seems to be "Up with the bankers and down with the workers." What a shocking value-free zone this policy is, if the Government stick to it.

3 pm

We have received strong representations on the matter from Magnox workers, from trade unions including Unite and Prospect, and directly from the workers.

The bodies that we have included in new schedule 1, which are affected by the “public sector fat cat” policy, are Sellafield Ltd, Westinghouse Springfields Fuels Ltd, Magnox Ltd, the National Nuclear Laboratory, International Nuclear Services, Atomic Weapons Establishment Ltd, Low Level Waste Repository Ltd, Dounreay Site Restoration Ltd, RSRL Winfrith and RSRL Harwell. I note that none of the companies in that list is called “Fat Cats Ltd”, but they are all included on the list of companies with workers that the Government are, by their own admission, treating as fat cats.

The Public Bill Committee received dozens of letters from Magnox workers, and I congratulate them on the quality of the representations that they made. I quoted in Committee from a letter from one of the workers, and I will quote it briefly again. Ian Milligan, who works at Bradwell as a waste engineer, said:

“I should like to start with a definition quoted from the Oxford English Dictionary, the dictionary that has sat on my desk for the duration of my career within the Nuclear Industry which has spanned over 20 years. The question I had was, what does the term a fat cat infer? The answer: A Fat Cat—a wealthy person, a highly paid executive or official.”

He goes on to say:

“I, and many of my work colleagues employed by Magnox Ltd, are likely to be ‘caught’ in the proposed Exit Payment Cap of the Enterprise Bill, to which I, and my work mates across the board were shocked to discover, as we are ordinary working class people and do not consider ourselves to be Fat Cats by any stretch of the imagination.”

Chris Stephens: Will the shadow Minister confirm that on Second Reading, the Secretary of State used the term “public sector fat cats” in his closing remarks in support of the Bill? Is that not in contrast to the workers whom the shadow Minister is talking about, who work in a physically taxing environment for many years?

Kevin Brennan: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. I know that it is difficult to believe—presumably, that is why the hon. Gentleman had to check before making his intervention—but the Secretary of State actually said that the measure was intended to hit fat cats in the public sector, which therefore includes everybody affected by it.

This confirms the understandable anger that is out there. My hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn might add examples of workers from his constituency. Agreements have been made and guarantees have been given. We were told that the provision was to hit public sector fat cats, not employees in the private sector. We have tabled the new schedule, which would exempt the companies listed from the Bill. If the Minister has another way of doing it, as I said to her in Committee, I would be interested to hear it. In Committee she was not able to offer any comfort whatever to the workers of the companies listed in new schedule 1. Her response was disappointing, given the weight of evidence submitted to the Committee and the strength of feeling among hon. Members and their constituents. Workers have made their plans and taken life decisions on the basis of promises that were made to them. As far as we can surmise from the limited information that the Minister

is prepared to provide about the Government’s intentions, the Government are going to take action that will affect those workers.

In Committee, the Minister rehearsed arguments about all sorts of scares that may have been put about by mythical people whom she was not prepared to name, but going by the evidence submitted to us, the workers in question will be affected to quite a large extent. We represented the workers’ arguments in Committee and made their case on their behalf, but all we got from the Minister was a response to issues that had not been raised in the workers’ letters or, indeed, by us, and a vague reference to secondary legislation at some later date that will name some as yet unknown entities that may be excluded from the cap. In other words, all we got was an empty sheet of paper. I am afraid that that is not good enough.

We in the House need to know what the Government’s intentions are, and we need to be able to tell constituents who have written to us, and who are directly affected, whether they will be hit by the exit payment cap. Those hard-working people are the definition of strivers. They are the beating heart of this country. Their letters reveal that they are not swivel-eyed lefty loonies or fat cats but ordinary working people, many whom live in the constituencies of Conservative Members.

Ministers have put things in the Bill that are meant to get them a headline in the *Daily Mail* and *The Sun*. That is fundamentally why the proposal is so flawed. The reality, when we lift the stone and look underneath, is that it will affect all sorts of people whom the Government did not indicate that they intended to hit. Hard-working people are being betrayed by their Government. They would have made very different assumptions about what this policy meant when they read the *Daily Mail* headline or even the Conservative party manifesto. That is why, if the Government will not stand up for those workers, we will.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): I am pleased to follow the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan). I have constituents who work at the Atomic Weapons Establishment in Aldermaston, at the Defence Science Technology Laboratories in Porton Down and elsewhere, so I have an enormously high regard for those extraordinary public servants who contribute so much to the security of our country. I therefore have some sympathy with new schedule 1.

It is easy for the newspapers to produce graphic headlines such as “Civil service pen-pushers get massive pay-offs”, but I am talking about slightly different people. They are not ordinary people in the sense the shadow Minister was talking about; they are really rather special. They work at the forefront of technology to ensure that the nation remains safe and that our realm remains secure. I know from talking to my constituents that people at the AWE, which has been privatised, are very unhappy indeed. The AWE is a unique and important facility. It is the only place capable of designing and producing the successor to our Trident nuclear missile system, and indeed of maintaining Trident until its successor comes into force. I am told that morale at the AWE is at rock bottom. To remove the last major benefit of working there—pay has been historically low because of the decent benefits—risks the nuclear deterrent, in some people’s opinion.

These people are not the only ones to be affected. A constituent of mine who works at DSTL came to see me at my surgery on Saturday. He is a leading scientist, and he brought with him examples of ceramic armour that he had personally developed for the protection of our troops. I do not know how many Members in the Chamber have been to see any of our defence science laboratories. I represent Farnborough, the home of the former Royal Aircraft Establishment, which is now the headquarters of QinetiQ. I have met some of its employees, who used to work in some pretty shabby conditions—no wall-to-wall carpeting, rubber plants or anything of the sort—although they have rather fine offices now in Farnborough, and I have been struck by the fact that they could get a lot more money in the private sector. When I asked them, “Why do you work here?” they replied, “Because we want to give something back to our country.” Those scientists show an extraordinary sense of patriotism, dedication and loyal commitment to our country; in my view, they contribute disproportionately to the defence of the realm.

My constituent told me on Saturday that for decades he had been

“Paying my taxes...Saving hard...Avoiding debt...Obeying the law”

and, of course, “Working hard” to develop these life-saving technologies for members of our armed forces. He went on to say:

“in spite of this...I have received below inflation pay rises since 2004...My pension contributions have doubled...My retirement age has increased from 60 to 67...My redundancy terms & conditions have been degraded significantly...My pay is now 20% lower than MOD colleagues outside of Dstl”.

He drew my attention to the 2015 review of the MOD’s science and technology capability by Sir Mark Walport, the Government’s chief scientific adviser, who said:

“We understand that staff retention is difficult in the mid-career stage. We were surprised that Dstl are able to retain staff (let alone good staff) given the comparative low-pay offered.”

Conditions have not improved owing to the austerity measures that we have had to take, which I understand, but that did not stop the chief executive of DSTL receiving a 30% remuneration increase. In those circumstances, it is understandable that these people do not feel that they have been treated as well as they should have been. The other point about them is that, as Crown servants and the kind of people they are, they do not go around protesting; they come to our surgeries or write us a private letter. They will not write to the national newspapers or stand outside with a placard, because they just want to get on with their jobs. I say to my right hon. Friend the Minister that there is a risk that we may be taking for granted people whose contribution to our national security is, as I said, rather significant.

Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Instinctively, I am entirely sympathetic to his argument, which applies to not just Crown employees, but those in the security services. However, could not his argument about such concerns easily be made about everyone working in the public sector? That is why the Government’s instinctive view is against drawing the distinction that he would like to make.

Sir Gerald Howarth: I have enormous respect for my right hon. Friend and I understand his point, but the place I represent is the home of the British Army, as well as the birthplace of British aviation, and it is steeped in technology. I know these people—I did so when I was a Defence Minister, as I have throughout my constituency experience in Aldershot—and I value them. I am afraid that I think they are rather special and that they have been neglected. I have specifically pointed out that their grades have not been made up to MOD grades, because they are busy in their laboratories doing what they like doing—inventing and helping to protect us all—so I will not resile from singling them out. My hon. Friend is entirely right to say that I am doing so, but I hope he will accept my apology for that.

David Mowat: The point about the entire public sector is a reasonable one, but it would be stronger if the Government had not specifically exempted parts of the public sector, namely those in the City of London, such as the privatised banks, and particularly the compensation schemes in what are public sector bodies, such as the Financial Conduct Authority.

Sir Gerald Howarth: My hon. Friend makes a good point.

Mark Field: My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (David Mowat) will appreciate that the intention is that many of the parts of the City of London that are currently in the public sector will not be there for very long. The idea is to get them out of the public sector in double-quick time. I should say to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth) that I am the son of Army soldier. In my younger life, I lived in Aldershot, as well as in Fleet, which used to be in his constituency, and I have a lot of sympathy with what he says. I am not in any way trying to fob him off. I totally agree about those in military service and our intelligence services, many of whom could get multiples of what they earn if they left GCHQ, for instance, to work in the private sector. None the less, if we are to draw a line, perhaps we should draw it in a sensible place; otherwise, we should not draw it at all.

Sir Gerald Howarth: As my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (David Mowat) implies, the sensible place to draw the line would include these people on the list of exemptions, but there we go.

3.15 pm

Earlier today, I had a meeting with officials from Prospect. They acknowledge that one of our manifesto commitments was to

“end taxpayer-funded six-figure payoffs for the best paid public sector workers.”

They accept that the Government have a mandate for that, but it is worth putting what they say on record—forgive me for doing so, Mr Deputy Speaker—because they feel that the Government did backtrack on the agreement signed in 2010. They use the word “renege”, but let me say “backtrack”. They say:

“The current civil service redundancy terms were agreed by Prospect and other civil service unions and the last Minister for the Cabinet Office”—

our noble Friend Lord Maude—

“just four years before the Conservative party’s announcement that it would seek to renege on that agreement. The minister stated at the time: ‘what the new scheme shows is that constructive negotiations with the unions can work and the result is a package that is fair for civil servants and fair for other taxpayers’. He also said: ‘I believe we now have a scheme which is fair, protects those who need the most support, addresses the inequities in the current system and is right for the long term.’”

I put it to my right hon. Friend the Minister that, despite the use of the phrase

“right for the long term”,

the scheme has not lasted more than six years. I will not vote against the Government today, but I urge her to have a discussion with the Treasury to determine whether this matter can be looked at again, because it is not fair on some of our most dedicated scientists who, as I say, are working to keep us secure.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I rise to speak to amendment 18, which is in my name and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell). The amendment perfectly complements amendment 15, which would add specific protections to part 9. As the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) said, as it stands, and given the rhetoric accompanying it, part 9 is a classic populist move by the Tory Government. They are playing up to the perception of fat cats, saying that people get huge pay-outs that are not comparable with private industry pay-outs, but they are not taking account of long-serving, lower-paid workers.

As I have implied, there is a lot of smoke and mirrors behind this scheme. The £95,000 cap includes pension payments that go not to the workers, but to the pension funds, including in the form of strain contributions for those on ill-health retirement. It is absolutely amoral that somebody who has to retire on the grounds of ill health, having worked hard, perhaps in a manual job, will have their pension capped because of this scheme.

I really do not understand how the Government cannot recognise the impact of the scheme. It was interesting that the House of Lords asked for an impact assessment, but it was not forthcoming. Back Benches have asked the shadow Minister about the impact, but it is not for Opposition Members to provide that; it is the Government’s responsibility to do so at the outset.

The Government have admitted that this provision could affect workers who earn less than £25,000, which includes librarians, midwives, NHS workers and other long-serving employees. Those people are worlds away from the horror stories that we sometimes read about failed chief executives who walk away with massive lump sums. I understand a curb on pay-outs for those people. Even worse, some people receive a massive pay-out and then pop up in another council as a highly paid consultant. Again, I agree that there should be cap on that. I also suggest that the situation I have outlined is more of a problem in England, given that Scotland has only 32 local authorities, but I understand the concept of trying to control that.

The sum of £95,000 is a lot of money but, to put it in perspective, it is only three and a half years of an average salary, and a pay-out potentially puts someone out of the marketplace for good. We already know that many women who have previously taken early retirement are now suffering financially because they were not informed about the increase in the state pension age.

Those women are now being forced into work programmes, but they are struggling to get back into work, which illustrates how difficult it can be to get back into work at a certain age. We should not be imposing exit caps that affect life choices for lower-paid workers who are trying to weigh up their options, given their realisation that they will have to work much longer than they had planned or been notified about by the DWP.

This provision will also hit middle-income earners, who are not meant to be the target. The local authority that I belonged to periodically operated a teacher refresh scheme to allow older, more experienced teachers to be considered for early retirement and replaced by younger teachers. That represents a virtuous circle of creating vacancies for young teachers, protecting the pensions of retiring teachers, and saving the taxpayer money overall due to the lower wages that are paid to new starts. Good governance is needed, not an exit cap that, in its current format, is too much of a blunt instrument.

Given the forced austerity that has been imposed on us, the Scottish Government have implemented a policy of no compulsory redundancies. In Scotland there have been zero compulsory redundancies in the NHS, but in England there have been more than 17,000 since 2010. If the Government really want to play the popularity game, as the hon. Member for Cardiff West said, they should extend this measure to other publicly supported companies, such as those banks with public money behind them. It beggars belief that we have a Chancellor who will stick up for annual bankers’ bonuses against the rest of Europe, but is happy to stand back on important matters such as exit payments and to let lower-paid workers suffer.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): My hon. Friend mentioned the Scottish Government’s record on avoiding compulsory redundancies. In my previous experience as the leader of one of Scotland’s biggest councils, we could not have managed the substantial reduction in our workforce without compulsory redundancies if we had not had the flexibility to offer severance packages that were proportionate to the service that people had delivered. Without that ability, councils in Scotland would have faced large numbers of compulsory redundancies that would have been inhumane in our workforce.

Alan Brown: I agree with that fine point completely. I went through the same experience as a local councillor on East Ayrshire Council. Although some of the payments made would be caught up by this payment cap, they were demonstrated to be value for money because of the payback period of two years. We were able to show good value for the taxpayer.

The Minister for Employment originally pledged to protect workers earning less than £27,000. Amendment 15 would allow that protection to be put in place, while amendment 18 would allow the cap to be reviewed and increased in line with inflation. As the Bill stands, that cap is another part of the ongoing erosion of terms and conditions, given that inflation levels and the cost of living is clearly going to rise. The measures allow the Government to maintain a charade of being a party for workers. That is why we will push amendment 18 to a vote, and hopefully the party of workers on the Government Benches will support us.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) and the hon. Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth) on the eloquent way in which they spoke to new schedule 1. I will not repeat what I said on Second Reading, except to reiterate the point that the people and companies listed in that new schedule are in no way fat cats. I think we need an apology from the Government about that because these are hard-working, ordinary people who have worked in difficult circumstances for many years, and signed up to agreements in good faith with the Government of the day.

I want the Government to honour their promise to safeguard the conditions of service that were agreed between companies and employees over many years, and I will touch on the definition of public sector workers. In no way are the people listed in the schedule public sector workers. Many of them work for private companies. If this cap is imposed on them, it will not benefit the Treasury at all; it will benefit the private companies that have taken on the contract. There will be no great saving, but there will be a breach of trust, and a considerable loss to those individuals who have been given protection.

I know that this Minister listens to reason and I am sure she agrees that many people will be caught unintentionally under the Bill. The protected status goes back to the privatisation of the electricity industry in the 1980s, and regulations were introduced in 1990 to protect many of the categories listed. More than 120 Magnox workers have written to me. As the hon. Member for Aldershot said, they were given protection, with other nuclear industry employees, under schedule 8 to the Energy Act 2004. When the recent pensions Bill was going through Parliament and their conditions were threatened when a vote in the House of Commons took away their protected rights, an amendment in the House of Lords restored that protection. Those protections were given to the workers by Mrs Thatcher and Cecil Parkinson in the 1980s, and they were honoured by other Conservative Ministers.

Sue Hayman: It is also important to point out that the Treasury did not actually allow the employees of those companies to remain in public sector pension schemes when they were privatised, so it is completely inconsistent now to call them in.

Albert Owen: There is huge inconsistency because the workers I am referring to were protected in 2004. They were given that protection in statute. The Government are using a crude analysis by the ONS that these are public sector workers and fat cats, and that they should be treated all the same, but they are breaking their own promises. That is the strong feeling I got in the letters I received from the employees. The safeguards given by previous Governments during privatisation are now being taken away on a whim. I say to Conservative Members that taking away the protected status of these people was not in the Conservative party manifesto. The opposite is the case: it talked about city hall fat cats. Many of us agreed that people should not be rewarded for failure, but the people we are talking about are doing dangerous work now. The measure is due to come in in October, and many private companies are refusing

to put through redundancies now. They are holding them back until October so that the workers receive reduced conditions of service. That is wrong.

Chris Stephens: Surely the biggest safeguard of all is that an occupational pension scheme is deferred pay. The hon. Gentleman's constituents could have made more money working for other companies, but they chose to stay where they were because they were going to get a good occupational pension scheme.

Albert Owen: That is absolutely right. The reality is that the Bill will take away the conditions of service that these people signed up to.

David Mowat: I am listening carefully to what the hon. Gentleman says and I have a lot of sympathy with it, but I do not follow one point he made regarding private companies versus public companies. If they really are private companies, how can the Bill apply to them? Am I missing something?

Albert Owen: It is very confusing. This has not been made clear, but my understanding is that if these people were to leave today, they would be given the full package, yet the companies have been told that the measure will apply from October and those very companies are now saying that people cannot go until then. That is what is being said by the hon. Gentleman's constituents and my constituents who have been writing in.

The Minister could end the confusion today. She could say that she will honour, as Mrs Thatcher and other Tory Ministers did, the protected rights and status of these individuals, and we could have a vote. Lawyers will argue about whether people can be protected, but we should not leave it to the lawyers—the House of Commons has the opportunity to act today. I hope that Members across the House will support new schedule 1.

Anna Soubry: Government amendments 3 to 9 will enable Welsh Ministers to make regulations on exit payments that they feel are suitable and devolved to them through the Government of Wales Act 2006. That has been agreed with Welsh Ministers through the Welsh Assembly, and I am grateful for that.

The Conservative manifesto was very clear that we would introduce the cap and that we would set it at £95,000. It is extremely important to remember that this relates to redundancy pay. The cap will curb only the top end of exit payments—just the top 5% in value of all exit packages across the public sector. Amendment 15 is merely a device based on an article in *The Daily Telegraph* written by my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel) back in January 2015. It was not part of the manifesto promise that was made. There is no honour, if I may say, in putting that forward as anything other than a junior Treasury Minister praying it in aid in an article she wrote in *The Daily Telegraph*.

I want to make it absolutely clear that the cap will not affect a classroom teacher earning the maximum of the upper pay range of £38,000 with a normal pension age of 60. It will not affect anyone working in the NHS earning below £47,500 or firefighters. I am told that police officers cannot be made redundant, and in any event no police officer earning below £54,000 would be caught by the cap. The Cabinet Office has confirmed

[Anna Soubry]

that no civil servant earning below £25,000 will be captured. Some earning around £25,000 may be captured, but we can find no such example. A librarian earning £25,000 with 34 years' experience could still retire on an unreduced pension at the age of 55.

3.30 pm

We also think it unlikely that anyone earning less than £27,000 would be hit by the cap. It is important that we remember that it is extremely rare in the private sector for anyone on a wage of £25,000 to expect, on redundancy, a payment of £95,000—nearly four times their annual earnings. Having said all that, my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Richard Fuller), who is no longer in his place, made one of the most important points: it is right that we look at the value of the cap, as opposed to the salary or income someone is earning when they leave.

Finally, I want to address the important points about new schedule 1 and ask hon. Members not to support it. I listened with great care to the excellent points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth)—I pay tribute to the workers he mentioned—and the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen). I must make it absolutely clear, however, that we oppose the new schedule because we think it wrong to put the exemptions in the Bill. The relaxation provisions allow for special circumstances but only after proper ministerial scrutiny. I can assure them that I will continue to speak to right hon. and hon. Friends in the Treasury.

I agree with the helpful and wise interventions from my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field), and I hear the points hon. Members are making. I will continue to speak to them, but now is not—

Sir Gerald Howarth: Will the Minister give way?

Anna Soubry: No, forgive me, but the clock is against me.

Kevin Brennan: No it's not.

Anna Soubry: No, there may be reasons. There is no need to interrupt.

Now is not the time to do what some hon. Members propose. There are other ways of doing it, if it is the right thing to do. It is right, however, that we be true to our clear manifesto commitment to set the cap at £95,000.

Kevin Brennan: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): It is not a point of order. Come on.

Kevin Brennan *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Brennan, I think it is for me to decide. I am sure it was going to be about time, and I am sure we are all aware of the time and what time the debate has to end.

Anna Soubry: I was bobbing up and down like a November the fifth apple, Mr Deputy Speaker. In any event, I do not know what all the fuss is about, because I am concluding my comments.

I believe that all points have been made, and based on everything I have said, I urge hon. Members to support the Government's new clauses and to reject all the other amendments; they are not necessary.

Kevin Brennan: I respect your ruling, Mr Deputy Speaker, that my point of order, which I did not make, was out of order.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. It was going to be about time, but it is not for me to tell you how much time is left, as you know better than I do.

Kevin Brennan: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I simply note that the Minister was unwilling to give way because of time.

On the comments by the former Treasury Minister, now the Minister for Employment, the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel), I thank the Minister today for confirming to the House that we cannot believe a word Ministers say. I thank her for putting that officially on the record.

Anna Soubry *indicated dissent.*

Kevin Brennan: Would the Minister like me to give way? I am happy to do so, if it is in order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Minister, are you commenting from a sedentary position, or would you like to make a point of order?

Anna Soubry: The record will confirm that I did not say that a Minister's word could not be trusted. I was talking about a comment in a newspaper that does not form part of Conservative party policy and was not in the manifesto. That is what matters the most.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister has clarified her position.

Kevin Brennan: It was not in a newspaper that the policy was announced. As I said, we cannot believe a word Ministers say.

Let me say simply that, as in Committee, the Minister has confirmed nothing at all that will give any comfort to these workers. I am therefore going to ask my hon. Friends, and other hon. Members if they support these workers, to support us in the Division on new schedule 1.

Question put, That the schedule be read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 266, Noes 291.

Division No. 207]

[3.35 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Anderson, Mr David
Abrahams, Debbie	Ashworth, Jonathan
Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina	Austin, Ian
Alexander, Heidi	Bailey, Mr Adrian
Allen, Mr Graham	Bardell, Hannah

Barron, rh Kevin
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berger, Luciana
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
 Blenkinsop, Tom
 Blomfield, Paul
 Boswell, Philip
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brake, rh Tom
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Burden, Richard
 Burgon, Richard
 Burnham, rh Andy
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Chapman, Jenny
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clegg, rh Mr Nick
 Coaker, Vernon
 Coffey, Ann
 Cooper, Julie
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Cox, Jo
 Coyle, Neil
 Crausby, Mr David
 Crawley, Angela
 Creagh, Mary
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Danczuk, Simon
 David, Wayne
 Day, Martyn
 De Piero, Gloria
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.
 Donaldson, Stuart Blair
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Jim
 Dowd, Peter
 Dromey, Jack
 Dugher, Michael
 Durkan, Mark
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan

Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Ellman, Mrs Louise
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farrelly, Paul
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Field, rh Frank
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Flynn, Paul
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Gardiner, Barry
 Glass, Pat
 Glindon, Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goodman, Helen
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Mr Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hillier, Meg
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Hunt, Tristram
 Irranca-Davies, Huw
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh Alan
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Graham
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Kerevan, George
 Kerr, Calum
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lamb, rh Norman
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leslie, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.

Lynch, Holly
 MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
 Mactaggart, rh Fiona
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mann, John
 Marris, Rob
 Marsden, Mr Gordon
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCaig, Callum
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahan, Jim
 Meale, Sir Alan
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Carol
 Monaghan, Dr Paul
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morden, Jessica
 Morris, Grahame M.
 Mulholland, Greg
 Mullin, Roger
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owen, Albert
 Paterson, Steven
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Pugh, John
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Jamie
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret

Robertson, rh Angus
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rotheram, Steve
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Starmer, Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Stuart, rh Ms Gisela
 Tami, Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Michelle
 Thornberry, Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vaz, Valerie
 Watson, Mr Tom
 Weir, Mike
 West, Catherine
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Wilson, Corri
 Winnick, Mr David
 Winterton, rh Dame Rosie
 Wishart, Pete
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Vicky Foxcroft and
Jeff Smith

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Allen, Heidi
 Andrew, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, Stephen
 Baron, Mr John
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Sir Henry
 Benyon, Richard
 Beresford, Sir Paul

Berry, Jake
 Berry, James
 Bingham, Andrew
 Blackman, Bob
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Borwick, Victoria
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bradley, Karen
 Brady, Mr Graham
 Brazier, Mr Julian
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Robert
 Burns, Conor
 Burns, rh Sir Simon
 Burrowes, Mr David
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Cairns, Alun
 Carmichael, Neil
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Mr Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Cleverly, James
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Colvile, Oliver
 Costa, Alberto
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Davies, Byron
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Dinéage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellison, Jane
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Graham
 Evnnett, rh Mr David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Michael
 Fernandes, Suella
 Field, rh Mark
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark

Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Marcus
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward
 Gauke, Mr David
 Ghani, Nusrat
 Gibb, Mr Nick
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, Mr James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gummer, Ben
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matthew
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hart, Simon
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Hayes, rh Mr John
 Heald, Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Hopkins, Kris
 Howarth, Sir Gerald
 Howlett, Ben
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, Boris
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kinahan, Danny
 Kirby, Simon
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lancaster, Mark

Latham, Pauline
 Leadsom, Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, Sir Edward
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
 Lewis, Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Lord, Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Lumley, Karen
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackintosh, David
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Mr Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Mathias, Dr Tania
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mowat, David
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Nokes, Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Phillips, Stephen
 Philp, Chris
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew

Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Solloway, Amanda
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
 Vaizey, Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watkinson, Dame Angela
 Wharton, James
 Whately, Helen
 White, Chris
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wigg, Bill
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, William
 Wright, rh Jeremy

Tellers for the Noes:
 Sarah Newton and
 Mel Stride

Question accordingly negated.

3.49 pm

More than three hours having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on the programme motion, the proceedings were interrupted (Programme Order, this day).

The Deputy Speaker put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83E).

Clause 41

RESTRICTION ON PUBLIC SECTOR EXIT PAYMENTS

Amendment proposed: 18, page 56, line 18, at end insert—

‘(1A) The restriction placed on public sector exit payments must be reviewed at regular intervals and, where necessary, be adjusted in line with inflation and earnings growth.’—(*Alan Brown.*)

This amendment would ensure that the level that the restriction on public sector exit payments is set will be linked to inflation and earnings growth.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 268, Noes 293.

Division No. 208]

[3.49 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Chapman, Douglas
Abrahams, Debbie	Chapman, Jenny
Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina	Cherry, Joanna
Alexander, Heidi	Clegg, rh Mr Nick
Allen, Mr Graham	Coaker, Vernon
Anderson, Mr David	Coffey, Ann
Ashworth, Jonathan	Cooper, Julie
Austin, Ian	Cooper, Rosie
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Cooper, rh Yvette
Bardell, Hannah	Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Barron, rh Kevin	Cowan, Ronnie
Beckett, rh Margaret	Cox, Jo
Benn, rh Hilary	Coyle, Neil
Berger, Luciana	Crausby, Mr David
Betts, Mr Clive	Crawley, Angela
Black, Mhairi	Creagh, Mary
Blackford, Ian	Cruddas, Jon
Blackman, Kirsty	Cryer, John
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Cummins, Judith
Blenkinsop, Tom	Cunningham, Alex
Blomfield, Paul	Cunningham, Mr Jim
Boswell, Philip	Danczuk, Simon
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	David, Wayne
Brake, rh Tom	Day, Martyn
Brennan, Kevin	De Piero, Gloria
Brock, Deidre	Debbonaire, Thangam
Brown, Alan	Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Brown, Lyn	Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Donaldson, Stuart Blair
Bryant, Chris	Doughty, Stephen
Burden, Richard	Dowd, Jim
Burgon, Richard	Dowd, Peter
Burnham, rh Andy	Dromey, Jack
Butler, Dawn	Dugher, Michael
Byrne, rh Liam	Durkan, Mark
Cadbury, Ruth	Eagle, Ms Angela
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Eagle, Maria
Campbell, rh Mr Alan	Edwards, Jonathan
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Efford, Clive
Campbell, Mr Ronnie	Elliott, Julie
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Ellman, Mrs Louise
Champion, Sarah	Esterson, Bill

Evans, Chris	Mahmood, Shabana
Farrelly, Paul	Malhotra, Seema
Ferrier, Margaret	Mann, John
Field, rh Frank	Marris, Rob
Fitzpatrick, Jim	Marsden, Mr Gordon
Fletcher, Colleen	Maskell, Rachael
Flint, rh Caroline	Matheson, Christian
Flynn, Paul	Mc Nally, John
Fovargue, Yvonne	McCabe, Steve
Foxcroft, Vicky	McCaig, Callum
Gardiner, Barry	McCarthy, Kerry
Glass, Pat	McDonagh, Siobhain
Glendon, Mary	McDonald, Andy
Godsiff, Mr Roger	McDonald, Stuart C.
Goodman, Helen	McDonnell, John
Grady, Patrick	McFadden, rh Mr Pat
Grant, Peter	McGinn, Conor
Gray, Neil	McGovern, Alison
Green, Kate	McInnes, Liz
Greenwood, Lilian	McKinnell, Catherine
Greenwood, Margaret	McLaughlin, Anne
Griffith, Nia	McMahon, Jim
Gwynne, Andrew	Meale, Sir Alan
Haigh, Louise	Mearns, Ian
Hamilton, Fabian	Miliband, rh Edward
Harman, rh Ms Harriet	Monaghan, Carol
Harris, Carolyn	Monaghan, Dr Paul
Hayes, Helen	Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Hayman, Sue	Morden, Jessica
Healey, rh John	Morris, Grahame M.
Hendrick, Mr Mark	Mulholland, Greg
Hendry, Drew	Mullin, Roger
Hillier, Meg	Nandy, Lisa
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret	Newlands, Gavin
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon	O'Hara, Brendan
Hollern, Kate	Onn, Melanie
Hopkins, Kelvin	Onwurah, Chi
Hosie, Stewart	Osamor, Kate
Howarth, rh Mr George	Oswald, Kirsten
Hunt, Tristram	Owen, Albert
Irranca-Davies, Huw	Paterson, Steven
Jarvis, Dan	Pearce, Teresa
Johnson, rh Alan	Pennycook, Matthew
Jones, Gerald	Perkins, Toby
Jones, Graham	Phillips, Jess
Jones, Helen	Pound, Stephen
Jones, Mr Kevan	Powell, Lucy
Jones, Susan Elan	Pugh, John
Kane, Mike	Rayner, Angela
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald	Reed, Mr Jamie
Keeley, Barbara	Reed, Mr Steve
Kendall, Liz	Rees, Christina
Kerevan, George	Reynolds, Emma
Kerr, Calum	Reynolds, Jonathan
Kinahan, Danny	Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Kinnock, Stephen	Robertson, rh Angus
Kyle, Peter	Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Lamb, rh Norman	Rotheram, Steve
Lavery, Ian	Ryan, rh Joan
Law, Chris	Saville Roberts, Liz
Leslie, Chris	Shah, Naz
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma	Shannon, Jim
Lewis, Clive	Sharma, Mr Virendra
Lewis, Mr Ivan	Sheerman, Mr Barry
Long Bailey, Rebecca	Sheppard, Tommy
Lucas, Caroline	Sherriff, Paula
Lucas, Ian C.	Shuker, Mr Gavin
Lynch, Holly	Siddiq, Tulip
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan	Skinner, Mr Dennis
Mactaggart, rh Fiona	Slaughter, Andy
Madders, Justin	Smeeth, Ruth
Mahmood, Mr Khalid	Smith, rh Mr Andrew

Smith, Angela
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Starmer, Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Stuart, rh Ms Gisela
 Tami, Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thomson, Michelle
 Thornberry, Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen

Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vaz, Valerie
 Watson, Mr Tom
 Weir, Mike
 West, Catherine
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Wilson, Corri
 Winnick, Mr David
 Winterton, rh Dame Rosie
 Wishart, Pete
 Woodcock, John
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Owen Thompson and
Marion Fellows

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Allen, Heidi
 Andrew, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, Stephen
 Baron, Mr John
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Sir Henry
 Benyon, Richard
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Berry, James
 Bingham, Andrew
 Blackman, Bob
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Borwick, Victoria
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bradley, Karen
 Brady, Mr Graham
 Brazier, Mr Julian
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Robert
 Burns, Conor
 Burns, rh Sir Simon
 Burrowes, Mr David
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Cairns, Alun
 Carmichael, Neil
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Mr Christopher
 Churchill, Jo

Clark, rh Greg
 Cleverly, James
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Colvile, Oliver
 Costa, Alberto
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Davies, Byron
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellison, Jane
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Graham
 Evennett, rh Mr David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Michael
 Fernandes, Suella
 Field, rh Mark
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Marcus
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward

Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, Mr David
 Ghani, Nusrat
 Gibb, Mr Nick
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, Mr James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gummer, Ben
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matthew
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hart, Simon
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Hayes, rh Mr John
 Heald, Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Hopkins, Kris
 Howarth, Sir Gerald
 Howlett, Ben
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Hurd, Mr Nick
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, Boris
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kennedy, Seema
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lancaster, Mark
 Latham, Pauline
 Leadsom, Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, Sir Edward
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
 Lewis, Brandon

Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Lord, Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Lumley, Karen
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackintosh, David
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Mr Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Mathias, Dr Tania
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mowat, David
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Nokes, Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Phillips, Stephen
 Philp, Chris
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris

Smith, Chloe	Truss, rh Elizabeth
Smith, Henry	Tugendhat, Tom
Smith, Julian	Turner, Mr Andrew
Smith, Royston	Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
Soames, rh Sir Nicholas	Vaizey, Mr Edward
Solloway, Amanda	Vara, Mr Shailesh
Soubry, rh Anna	Vickers, Martin
Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline	Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
Spencer, Mark	Walker, Mr Charles
Stephenson, Andrew	Walker, Mr Robin
Stevenson, John	Wallace, Mr Ben
Stewart, Bob	Warburton, David
Stewart, Iain	Warman, Matt
Stewart, Rory	Watkinson, Dame Angela
Streeter, Mr Gary	Wharton, James
Stride, Mel	Whately, Helen
Sturdy, Julian	White, Chris
Sunak, Rishi	Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Swayne, rh Mr Desmond	Wiggin, Bill
Swire, rh Mr Hugo	Williams, Craig
Syms, Mr Robert	Williamson, rh Gavin
Thomas, Derek	Wilson, Mr Rob
Throup, Maggie	Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Tolhurst, Kelly	Wood, Mike
Tomlinson, Justin	Wragg, William
Tomlinson, Michael	Wright, rh Jeremy
Tracey, Craig	Tellers for the Noes:
Tredinnick, David	Simon Kirby and
Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie	Sarah Newton

Question accordingly negated.

Amendments made: 3, page 58, line 7, at end insert—

“() by the Welsh Ministers, in relation to relevant Welsh exit payments;”

This amendment confers power on the Welsh Ministers (instead of the Treasury) to make regulations under new section 153A of the Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Act 2015 restricting the total amount of exit payments made to the holder of an office in Wales mentioned in amendment 5.

Amendment 4, page 58, line 27, at end insert—

“() if made by the Welsh Ministers, may not be made unless a draft of the statutory instrument containing them has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, the National Assembly for Wales.”

This amendment provides for the procedure in the National Assembly for Wales in relation to regulations under new section 153A made by the Welsh Ministers (see explanatory statement for amendment 3).

Amendment 5, page 58, line 32, at end insert—

“() In this section “relevant Welsh exit payments” means exit payments made to holders of the following offices—

- (a) member of the National Assembly for Wales;
- (b) the First Minister for Wales;
- (c) Welsh Minister appointed under section 48 of the Government of Wales Act 2006;
- (d) Counsel General to the Welsh Government;
- (e) Deputy Welsh Minister;
- (f) member of a county council or a county borough council in Wales;
- (g) member of a National Park Authority in Wales;
- (h) member of a Fire and Rescue Authority in Wales.”

This amendment specifies the offices in Wales in relation to which the Welsh Ministers can make regulations under new section 153A (see explanatory statement for amendment 3).

Amendment 6, page 58, line 37, at end insert—

“(2A) The Welsh Ministers may relax any restriction imposed by regulations made by the Welsh Ministers under section 153A.”

This amendment ensures that the Welsh Ministers have power to relax restrictions imposed by them under new section 153A (see explanatory statement for amendment 3).

Amendment 7, page 59, line 1, at beginning insert—

“except in relation to exit payments made by a relevant Welsh authority,”

This amendment ensures that the Treasury are not able to impose limitations on the power of the Welsh Ministers to relax certain restrictions imposed by Treasury regulations (see explanatory statement for amendment 8).

Amendment 8, page 59, leave out lines 18 to 24 and insert—

“(6) Regulations under section 153A made by the Welsh Ministers may—

- (a) make provision for the power under subsection (2A) to be exercisable on behalf of the Welsh Ministers by a person specified in the regulations;
- (b) where provision is made by virtue of paragraph (a), make provision for a requirement to be relaxed only—
 - (i) with the consent of the Welsh Ministers, or
 - (ii) following compliance with any directions given by the Welsh Ministers;
- (c) make provision as to the publication of information about any relaxation of a requirement granted.

(6A) Regulations made by the Treasury under section 153A(1)—

- (a) must, if they make provision in relation to exit payments made by a relevant Welsh authority, provide for the power conferred on a Minister of the Crown by subsection (1) to be exercised instead by the Welsh Ministers in relation to those exit payments;
- (b) may provide for the power conferred on a Minister of the Crown by subsection (1) to be exercised instead by the Welsh Ministers in relation to exit payments made by any other authority who is not a relevant Welsh authority but who wholly or mainly exercises functions in relation to Wales (but this does not limit the provision that may be made under subsection (4)(a)).”

This amendment allows the Welsh Ministers to provide for another person to relax on their behalf restrictions imposed by them under new section 153A (see explanatory statement for amendment 6). It also requires the Treasury to provide for the Welsh Ministers to be able to relax certain restrictions imposed by Treasury regulations, and gives the Treasury power so to provide in relation to other such restrictions.

Amendment 9, page 59, line 26, at end insert—

“relevant Welsh authority” means an authority who wholly or mainly exercises functions which could be conferred by provision falling within the legislative competence of the National Assembly for Wales (as defined in section 108 of the Government of Wales Act 2006).”—(*Anna Soubry.*)

This amendment defines “relevant Welsh authority” for the purposes of the provisions inserted by amendments 7 and 8.

Ordered, That further consideration be now adjourned.—(Julian Smith.)

Bill to be further considered tomorrow.

Backbench Business

International Women's Day 2016

4.4 pm

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): Given that the previous business concluded earlier than expected, will the Minister please clarify, for the benefit of the House, whether it is her intention for the present debate to continue beyond 7.30?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinage): It is not our intention to keep the House beyond 7.30.

Mims Davies: Thank you.

I beg to move,

That this House expresses its solidarity with International Women's Day; notes with concern that, despite women making up 51 per cent of society as a whole, more progress needs to be made in electing women to Parliament, as well as in establishing equal pay and parity between men and women in positions of leadership; and calls for greater action against FGM and other practices that are harmful to women.

It is a great honour to open this debate. I begin by thanking the Backbench Business Committee for granting the debate and the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns), who lobbied the Leader of the House—

Mr Speaker: Order. I apologise for interrupting the hon. Lady. For the benefit of the House, colleagues should be clear that this debate will not continue beyond 7 pm. There is, of course, an Adjournment debate to follow. What the hon. Lady meant was clear to me and it is important that it is clear to the rest of the House. There is, in effect, a provision of three hours for this debate. I hope that is helpful to colleagues. I admit that on this occasion I was tipped off by the Whip on duty who felt the need for clarification, and I think his tip-off was a shrewd one.

Mims Davies: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I thank the Leader of the House for the time allocated for this debate, which I hope will be as full as possible.

There are many areas in which inequality still exists for women. This debate will range, I hope, across complex and varied parts of our society and across the world. In the run-up to International Women's Day, I have engaged with many colleagues across the House and in the other place, talking about the importance of this day and the issues facing women at home and abroad, and I have discussed with many gentlemen the importance of International Men's Day. Today's debate will perhaps boil down to this question: in the age in which we cherish equality of opportunity, why do women not actually get the same chances as men, and what is this Parliament doing to see that happen here and around this wonderful planet of ours?

Women have the chance to run or lead a business, to contribute properly to their community, to influence the world around them, to be paid the same, to be treated the same, to speak in this cherished Chamber and to be heard. Women do not want to be under threat or in danger just from walking home alone, or because of

the dangerous or threatening nature of our personal relationships, or because of our religion or perceived position in our community or society.

On this day we have the opportunity to talk about and celebrate the achievements of women across the world, but also on this day we must highlight all the inequalities that still exist. I have two daughters and I want to see them grow up in a society where their gender has no relevance to their opportunities and what they can achieve. Today is my second daughter's birthday. [HON. MEMBERS: "Happy birthday!"] She is six, and International Women's Day has real meaning in my house. I hope she is a truly international woman in the making.

There are invisible barriers to my daughters' futures and to those of other girls. Today I hope we will go some way to confronting them. Equality is about choice. It makes me very proud to know that here, in the mother of Parliaments, we can act as a beacon of equality for women across the world. Today sixth-form girls from across the country are joining us. They have taken part in a series of events throughout the day and I know that some are watching us now from the Public Gallery.

As the chair of the all-party women in Parliament group, it fell to me and my team to make sure that we mark this day appropriately. We open Parliament today to students from across the UK. I want to thank my team and all those supporting me, including other MPs, for their help in making this important event happen, because almost 70 girls, from Aberavon to Ayrshire, and from Eastleigh to Ealing, have come here to be part of this day, to take this opportunity to contribute and to hear our democracy in action. I want to welcome two local students, in particular, from Barton Peveril Sixth-Form College and Eastleigh College.

Yet it was only in this parliamentary Session that we finally got a Women and Equalities Select Committee, which looks at the key issues that this Parliament is involved in. I am very proud to serve on the Committee, under the brilliant chairmanship of my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller)—her son also has a birthday today, so many happy returns to him.

It is very easy today to think that the challenges of equality are in the past, but it took until 1995 for us to have the first woman chief constable, until 2009 for us to have the first woman poet laureate, and until 2011 for us to have the first woman commander of a Royal Navy warship. Of course, this country has been led by only one mighty female Prime Minister, and this House has been led by only one female Speaker. Rapid progress for women is absolutely not a subject for historical study; it is an urgent, continuing and pressing need now.

In our panel debate earlier today we listened to students discussing whether successful women are still seen as pushy, bossy or tokens, and indeed whether we do not actually get the opportunities we want because it is just about confidence. Thinking about successful women, it is worth noting that one in seven chefs hired in Michelin-starred restaurants in London are women—I wonder what Mary Berry has to say about that.

Are stay-at-home mums currently given the opportunity to make the choices that are right for them, or are they still being judged? I chose to stay at home and be with my children when they were very little, but I wonder

whether I would still feel that that was a safe decision to make. Are we still judging our women? Are we really offering them answers to all these questions and allowing them to be part of the community in any way they choose? In order to get true parity, that is what we need to strive for.

All too often it is these set-piece debates in the Chamber that draw the focus of political commentators, so we perhaps see women in only one way. The press will focus on the high politics of our nation, rather than the huge contribution that many people make every day. We need more women councillors, school governors, magistrates, mayors, MEPs, Assembly Members and police and crime commissioners. Often women step forward for those roles but move on too quickly. Why is that? Is it because women take on those roles to deal with single issues, or do they still see barriers to the top?

In business, we need more women on boards and in senior roles. Of course, this Government have taken action to get more women into science, technology, engineering and maths and to get the next generation into leadership roles, but progress remains too slow. In 2013, 33% of local councillors in England were women, compared with 28% in 1997. We need to step up the pace.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Lady and the Backbench Business Committee on securing this really important debate. On the question of progress, when I went to study electrical engineering at Imperial College in 1984, 12% of those studying engineering were women. Today the figure is exactly the same. A quarter of a century has passed, yet we seem to have made no progress in ensuring that science, engineering and maths represent the half of the world who need them as well. Does she agree that that is absolutely unacceptable?

Mims Davies: Exactly that issue was highlighted in our panel debate this afternoon. I absolutely agree that we need to encourage more women into this area. There are 40,000 jobs available in the construction industry, and 45,000 in the agricultural industry. We are perhaps barring women from future opportunities. It absolutely worries me that we have not changed since the 1980s.

We in this House must be reminded that women's power is at the ballot box. Women should be registered to vote, and we should make sure that all women feel it is important for them to make their own decisions.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): Everyone knows that women were given the vote at the end of the 1914-18 war, but that cloaked the fact that working-class men were also given the vote. Does the hon. Lady, like me, celebrate the fact that women, through their campaigning, also led to those men accessing the vote? That should never be forgotten.

Mims Davies: I always think that women campaigning do make things generally better for men.

We must be reminded of the power that women have at the ballot box. It was women voting in higher numbers for the Conservatives in May last year who returned a Conservative majority Government. It will also be women who decide whether we are in or out of the EU and who is the Mayor of London. We need women to come

together to vote and to be active in politics, because their effect is always extraordinary, as we have just heard.

Hon. Members around the House will be thinking of the brilliant work of women campaigners. That includes the Women Against State Pension Inequality campaigners, who have come together and had a real impact. I watch with interest to see what results they will achieve. Those women will not stay quiet, and I salute them in their cause. It is a genuine challenge to this Parliament that we get the best outcome for those and all our women.

I am pleased the Government are taking the necessary action to bring about further equality. There are now more than 1 million more women in work than in 2010. The Government have also introduced legislation that deals with stalking, and I welcome that. We are not afraid to tackle issues that Parliament has left unaddressed for many years.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate from the Backbench Business Committee. Does she also welcome the Government's action on outlawing revenge pornography, which for too long has blighted the lives of many women in this country?

Mims Davies: I absolutely concur. Just on Thursday, we had action on people posing behind aliases—the Crown Prosecution Service is carrying out a consultation on the issue—and using bullying and threatening behaviour on social media. It is absolutely right that the Government continue to lead the way in dealing with bullying, stalking and using personal relationships to affect people's futures. We will be in a dangerous place if we do not tackle that.

The Government's recent announcement on the gender pay gap should continue to shine a light on those companies that do not do enough to ensure parity in their workforces. We need more women on company boards, and work on that continues. There has been a huge leap forward, but we can expect to wait for 70 years for full parity at executive level, and that is not right.

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Lab): On the gender pay gap, a lot of women in my constituency are in part-time work, and they are typically three times more likely than men to be paid below the living wage. These women are often not well off, and I ask the hon. Lady to join me in calling on the Government and Opposition Front Benchers to do all they can to address that pay gap, which affects the low paid so badly.

Mims Davies: On the Women and Equalities Committee, we are shining a light on that issue. On part-time work—I will touch on this shortly in my speech, which the right hon. Lady may have been reading—it is interesting that, when it comes to men, we talk about agile working, while women appear, sadly, to be the downtrodden part-timers in some places. That needs to be corrected.

We need to put a better structure in place for our carers. I was a carer to my mother, and I am a mother myself. For many people in my shoes, there continue to be too many obstacles to being at home and a part-time worker. This country needs a true carers revolution that does not penalise women or, indeed, men who choose to stay at home with their children or to look after

[Mims Davies]

their loved ones. I spent time with my parents at that age, and I would never, ever change that, but I had the choice.

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): Does the hon. Lady agree that flexible working allows parents and carers to look after their loved ones while they continue to work, and that it is imperative that employers take that into account?

Mims Davies: I absolutely agree that flexible working is really important for people to be able to attend doctor's appointments and to know what is going on at home without being worried about work. Many people who work part-time open their laptops of an evening to make sure that they are up to date, because they have had to go home to care for their children or loved ones.

Part-time work is valuable. It is important and useful both to workers and to employers, yet part-timers are often seen as a stopgap. They are not taken seriously enough and are viewed as expendable employees. It is time to view part-timers as agile, capable multi-skilled workers who are flexible and come in and make a real difference. They look after families, homes and communities, and hold down equally important part-time roles. I challenge anyone in business who does not believe such workers to be as valuable and helpful and just as useful as their full-time members of staff. Perhaps it is time for such employers to reassess and listen harder to those vital and often more nimble workers.

I want to make it clear that it is not my intention to exclude men from this debate. Many male colleagues will want to contribute their own ideas about how men, as fathers, grandfathers and proud dads of daughters, can make a more just and equal society. International Men's Day on 19 November highlighted some serious concerns about men's mental health, male suicide and the modern pressures on men. This changing society will have a bigger impact if we do not bring men fully on this equality journey with us.

I am the 380th woman to be elected to Parliament. Women have not played anywhere near an equal role in the history of this House, but we are getting there. I welcome the fact that we are moving towards better representation both in this Chamber and in all the issues on which we focus. However, there is much left to be done. Madeleine Albright, the former US Secretary of State, has said:

"There's a special place in hell for women who don't help each other".

Many hon. Ladies and hon. Gentlemen have come to the Chamber to mark this important day. There is a unified view in this House that our work can bring true equality on International Women's Day. I am delighted to have wide and broad support from men.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for securing this debate. As well as women's representation in this Parliament, we should also consider what happens around the world. For example, Benazir Bhutto was the first female Prime Minister of Pakistan—indeed, she was the first female Prime Minister in the Islamic world—and she lost her life to an act of terror as she returned democracy to

her country. We should pay tribute to women around the world. By way of declaration, I served as an adviser to Benazir Bhutto from 1999 to 2007.

Mims Davies: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Parliaments across the world will be looking at themselves today and rightly asking whether they are doing enough to make equality a reality. This debate on International Women's Day is our chance to do just that.

4.23 pm

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) and my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) for securing the debate. Members will not be surprised by what I rise to speak about.

In 2015, a woman was murdered in the UK every three days—women murdered by men who they should have been able to trust. Commonly, women are murdered by their partners, husbands or boyfriends, but also in some cases by their fathers, sons or brothers. We wish to give voice to honour the women who died.

Today, I stand to honour every victim in the fight to end violence against women. Here are the names of the women who have died since International Women's Day last year: Lucy Ayriss, aged 25; Alison Wilson, 36; Janet Muller, 21; Sarah Pollock, 41; Jill Goldsmith, 49; Zaneta Balazova, 23; Cecilia Powell, 95; Marian Smith, 74; Violet Price, 80; Karen Buckley, 24; Susan Davenport, 63; Sandra Thomas, 57; Sarah Fox, 27; Bernadette Fox, 57; Aileen Bell, 60; Frances Cleary-Senior, 49; Tracey Woodford, 47; Mariola Cudworth, 36; Anna Rosenberg, 43; Wendy Milligan, 46; Gloria Perring, 76; Mahala Rhodes, 42; Marta Ligman, 23; Emma Crowhurst, 36; Joanna Doman, 55; Shigi Rethishkumar, 35; Neha Rethishkumar, 13; Niya Rethishkumar, 13; Grace Kissell, 33; Jan Jordon, 48; Ramute Butkiene, 42; Anne Dunkley, 67; Phyllis Hayes, 65; Nazia Akhtar, 31; Nadia Khan, 24; Jennifer Edwards, 45; Stacey Henderson, 35; Rita Stephens, 67; Jennifer Williams, 25; Amy Smith, 17; Anita Kapoor, 34; Linda Norcup, 46; Lisa Anthony, 47; Ava Anthony, 14; Lorraine Barwell, 54; Laura Davies, 21; Tracey Baker, 42; Florisse Corette, 81; Jill Moon, 62; Isobel "Becky" Parker, 23; Gillian Phillips, 54; Amal Abdi, 21; Jenny Foote, 38; Miriam Nyazema, 35; Denisa Silman, 25; Jennifer Dornan, 30; Jan Bennett, 67; Laura Holden, 36; Elife Bequ, 34; Katelyn Parker, 24; Elizabeth Nnyanzi, 31; Wendy Mann, 26; Lauren Masters, 20; Sam Ho, 39; Natalia Strelchenko, 38; Julie Collier, 55; Karen Reid, 53; Petra Atkinson, 42; Anne-Marie Cropper, 47; Nicola Cross, 37; Shelley Saxton-Cooper, 45; Sarrah Garba, 27; Jourdain John-Baptiste, 22; Maxine Showers, 42; Helen Lancaster, 54; Malgorzata Marczak, 29; Usha Patel, 44; Leighanne Cameron, 29; Imelda Molina, 49; Kerry Reeves, 26; Christine Tunnicliffe-Massey, 57; Bianca Shepherd, 58; Barbara Barniecka, 43; Kayleigh Haywood, 15; Susan Mitchelson, 45; Kelly Pearce, 36; Jean Robertson, 85; Wendy Goodman, 48; Josephine Williamson, 83; Sian Roberts, 36; Hilda Mary Oakland, 71; Ravinder Jutla, 43; Jackie Abbott, 54; Lija Aroustamova, 52; Mumtaz Member, 56; Sian Blake, 43; Kathleen Griffin, 57; Mambero Ghebreflafi, 22; Daria Pionko, 21; Katie Locke, 23; Rita King, 81; Marjorie Elphick, 83; Katy Rourke, 25; Katrina O'Hara, 44; Georgina Symonds, 25; Lisa Lyttle, 49; Andrea Lewis, 51; India Chipchase, 20; Guida Rufino, 38; Elidona Demiraj, 25; Geraldine Newman, 51;

Caroline Andrews, 52; Sheila Jefferson, 73; Leanne Wall, 36; Jessica McGraa, 37; Maria Byrne, 35; Lisa Reynolds, 31; Natasha Bradbury, 28; Julie Hill, 51; and Rose Hill, 75.

I want to thank Karen Ingala Smith and the Counting Dead Women project. She does not allow these women to be forgotten; she shouts their names so we can do better. I want to note that as I read each and every woman's story, the variety of the women struck me. These were not all poor women. They were women of every age. They were teachers, dinner ladies, doctors, dancers and daughters. Their perpetrators were not feckless drunks, but respected fathers, City bankers and eminent lawyers. Violence against women has no one face. We must do better. These women are gone. Here, in this place, we must not let them die in vain. We owe them that much. We owe them much more than what they got. [*Applause.*]

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I call Maria Miller.

Mrs Miller *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Sorry; moved by the significance of what we have just heard, I have neglected my duties. I should tell the House that, on account of the very large number of Members wishing to contribute, there will be a four-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches with immediate effect. I thank the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) for what she has said.

4.31 pm

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): It is difficult to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips). I call her my hon. Friend because we are fellow members of the Women and Equalities Committee, and we have a shared passion for making sure that the voices of women are heard loud and clear in this House. What she has done has helped to make sure that the stories of those women are remembered and that their voices are heard, even if they are now departed.

International Women's Day comes around every year, but since we last celebrated it we have had something else to celebrate, which is the establishment of the first ever Select Committee for women and equalities. Everybody in this House who was involved, and those no longer in the House, should be congratulated on the work they did to establish the Committee, which I have the privilege of chairing. Today, we have turned the tables in the Committee: young women have taken evidence from Members of Parliament. I particularly welcome my constituent, Aheng Negargar. She has been able to be with me today, and I know she has enjoyed it immeasurably.

Congratulations must go to my fellow Hampshire MP, my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies), and to the hon. Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler). Both ladies were a formidable force in front of the Backbench Business Committee. I had no doubt that they would secure a debate on the Floor of the House, and they did so at once. I should add that we thought about adding an extra criterion for being a member of the Women and Equalities Committee—having a child born on International Women's Day. However, looking at the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn

(Tulip Siddiq), who was a member of our Committee, I hope that she does not feel that it is necessary to give birth today, although I am sure many people would be on hand to help out.

I will make two very brief points in my contribution today. As you know, Mr Speaker, there are more men in the House of Commons today than there are women who have ever been elected to Parliament. I was elected in 2005, as the 265th woman to be elected to this House, which is a shocking fact. I was not aware of that when I was elected. Since women were given the vote in this country in February 1918, 34 million women have been born, but just 450 have ever sat on the green Benches. No other position has been worse at attracting women than that of MP. How can we hope to change ingrained prejudice in our society if we fail to hold a mirror up to ourselves and realise that, as an institution, we are not making the progress that we need to make to encourage more women to take their position on the green Benches?

It is not rocket science. Working in two places, a lack of certainty, a culture of long hours and presenteeism are not conditions that will encourage more women to join us on the green Benches. I ask Members to think long and hard when they consider the way that we organise the business of the House, and I ask them to make us more representative in the future and a place of work that people want to join.

My second point is about leadership. I have no doubt about the Government's commitment to putting equality at the heart of their policy, or their desire to see more women in leadership positions. The symbolic importance of Lord Davies's work in getting 25% of women in non-executive positions is important, but we must go further than that. We have no shortfall in talent in this country; we have an underperformance of that talent because of ingrained prejudice.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): When we organised the photo that is now in the Admission Order Office for all visitors and Members to see, there had been only 370 women MPs. There have now been 450 female MPs over 98 years, but there are currently 459 male MPs in this House alone. The right hon. Lady and I are privileged and happy to be among those female MPs in the House today, but does she agree that those figures are not good enough?

Mrs Miller: I could not agree more, and we need to hear from the leaders of every political party represented in this House a complete commitment to increase the number of women MPs at the next election. That will be a challenge with the boundary changes, but it is a challenge that we should take on. It is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to increase significantly the proportion of women on the green Benches representing the people who live in our country.

The workplace, whether in Parliament, the City, or other institutions, was designed by men for men, and it has not changed fast enough to retain women in day-to-day positions or leadership positions. We must ensure that jobs, whether in Parliament or beyond, are designed for people who are living lives today, not as they were lived 20 years ago. I know that Ministers understand that from the policies that they are implementing, and I urge them to continue that work. The Women and Equalities Committee will always hold their feet to the fire.

4.37 pm

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), and I congratulate everyone who is taking part in the debate. I apologise for squeezing a nine-minute speech into four minutes.

This debate takes place against the background of the recent murder of Berta Cáceres, a feminist activist who was shot in her home in western Honduras because of her defence of the rights of indigenous people. I hope that many women will continue her work. The Secretary-General of the United Nations has said that when he took office there were nine Parliaments in the world without women. That figure is now down to four, but that is four too many, and there has still been no female UN Secretary-General. Hon. Members are right to mention the percentage of women in this Parliament, which now stands at 29%. Her Majesty's Opposition, the Labour party, has 43% female MPs, which is nearing equality.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): My hon. Friend remarks that we have not had a female UN Secretary-General, but will she join me in congratulating the current secretary-general of the Commonwealth, Baroness Scotland?

Valerie Vaz: I will, and I am delighted that she was selected. However, the statistics are still damning. In law, one Supreme Court judge is a woman, and only 13% of QCs are women; in science, women make up only 14.4% of the science, technology, engineering and maths workforce in the UK; in business, only 5.5% of chief executive officers in FTSE 100 companies are women. What about the gender pay gap? In 2014, according to the Office for National Statistics, it was 14.2%, which means that in effect, women work from about 9 November to the end of the year without any pay.

I want to raise two issues about women in my constituency. Locally, there was an equal pay judgment in 2008, and the poor women who worked for Birmingham City Council are still waiting for a pay-out. The men who did the same sort of work picked up extra pay through routine overtime and other bonuses. Mary Ashby and Josephine Haynes are retired, and they have a right to their pay-out. The Government can find £375 billion for quantitative easing, so will they please find the money to make sure that all the women get their pay-out?

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): The hon. Lady makes a powerful point about women's pay. According to the OECD, the Scandinavian countries of Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Finland score highly in where women are most equal. Those countries also lead the UN human development index and a number of other indicators. When women are doing well in a society, everybody does well. That helps the hon. Lady's argument.

Valerie Vaz: I absolutely agree.

The second issue I want to raise is the closure of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs offices in Walsall South. Some 90% of the 60 jobs that will be lost are done by women. They have been offered jobs in Birmingham, but they have caring responsibilities, so they need to stay local. There is also the issue of higher travel costs.

The Public and Commercial Services Union has worked out that when 50 jobs are lost, it costs a local economy £1.5 million. That is too much for Walsall to take. If the Government are serious about tax evasion and tax avoidance, they need local staff who have the institutional memory to help people with their tax affairs. The staff build up the skills over the years, which helps them to get promotion through the civil service.

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Valerie Vaz: Would my hon. Friend mind if I do not? I am running out of time.

On Saturday morning, more than 500 people in Walsall town centre signed a petition to ask the Minister to look again at this dislocation of women's lives and stop the relocation to Birmingham.

Internationally, there may have been a fantastic victory in Burma for the National League for Democracy, but the Burmese army has used rape and sexual violence against women for decades as part of its warfare against ethnic minority groups in the country. Many victims were gang-raped and many were killed, and United Nations reports have described rape and sexual violence as "widespread and systematic". The Burmese army accounts for 25% of the Burmese Parliament. We must keep up the pressure to get rid of the army from the Parliament in Burma.

In Delhi, there was an outcry following the gang rape, assault and murder of Jyoti Singh on a bus. Leslee Udwin's film "India's Daughter" showed the devastating impact of Jyoti's murder. Who can forget the late Sue Lloyd-Roberts' interview with the cleric from Gambia in which she challenged him about female genital mutilation, or the Nigerian girls who were kidnapped almost two years ago this April?

We need to do more than just have a hashtag, and that is where Governments come in. Almost every major piece of legislation that has improved the lives of working women has been introduced by a Labour Government: the Work and Families Act 2006, which extended the right to statutory maternity leave to a full year for all employed women, regardless of length of service; the introduction of paternity leave in 2003; and legislative protections for women and mothers under the Equal Pay Act 1970, the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the Equality Act 2010. Everybody knows how brilliant Sure Start centres are in helping local children, mothers and fathers in our communities. We need to save them.

Education is the key. As Gandhi said, if we educate mothers we educate society. Women cannot wait for the trickle-up to promotion—there needs to be positive action. Marin Alsop, who in 2013 was the first female conductor of the last night of the Proms, admitted to being

"quite shocked that it can be 2013 and there can still be firsts for women".

Let us hope that by this time next year, women's place at the highest levels will be commonplace. We owe it to future generations.

4.43 pm

Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): Last week, when I was in Nigeria, I had the honour of meeting a very small team of dedicated and passionate

campaigners. On arrival at the hot, dusty open-air venue, I could hear them chanting and singing, and a lot of them were wearing red. Every day, this small group—mainly of women, but with some men—meet at Unity Fountain in Abuja. They campaign for the return of 276 girls taken by Boko Haram from their school on 14 April 2014. Fifty-seven of the girls escaped shortly after their abduction, but 219 remain missing. These young girls from Chibok were just like our girls. They were daughters, they were granddaughters, they were sisters, they were cousins and they were nieces. They were loved. They had been encouraged to embrace education—and they had, and their families had—and they were preparing for their final school certificate. They had hopes, dreams and aspirations, and then disaster struck.

Notwithstanding world condemnation and the support from Michelle Obama, our Prime Minister and others, the girls have not been returned. It is likely that many are still being held by Boko Haram, probably in smaller groups. Many will be pregnant as a result of rape, often by different men, over prolonged periods, and many will have been forced into marriage. Some will have been used as suicide bombers, and some will have died as a result of physical and mental abuse.

The Chibok girls are a small proportion of an estimated 2,500 women and girls abducted by Boko Haram in 2014. As they return, many face discrimination and rejection by their families and communities. Some fear that the girls have been radicalised. Others believe that the children conceived, carrying the violent characteristics of their biological fathers, will be the next generation of fighters. As a result, children, new-born babies and mothers are facing stigma and rejection, and risk further violence.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Lady is making an incredibly powerful speech about her experiences last week. Is she not as saddened as me that this is a situation not just in Nigeria, but in many countries around the world? I met today representatives of the Yazidi community that is still missing hundreds of women captured by Daesh and taken into sexual slavery. Does she agree that we have to put the protection of women and girls at the heart of all our international policies to stop these tragedies happening?

Mrs Grant: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point, and I wholeheartedly agree with him.

These children, babies and mothers are victims—they have done nothing wrong—and should be getting all the help and support they deserve and need to move on in their lives and reintegrate. As I stand in the Chamber today, I can still hear the chants of those Nigerian women, and I can still see their round and pained faces. They said, “Bring back our girls now and alive. Bring them back now.” Rarely have I witnessed such strength and determination.

Now these brave, strong women need our support, as we approach the second anniversary of the girls’ abduction. From 7 April to 14 April, there will be an international week of action to raise further awareness and to keep the issue in the spotlight. We want people everywhere to write, email, and tweet #BBOG; and to hold rallies, vigils, talks and Google chats. We need Governments

and agencies around the world to share credible evidence and intelligence, and we need to keep these innocent girls in our thoughts and prayers. Just one tweet or one post can make a difference and bring our girls home.

4.48 pm

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): I want to structure my speech around the motion, which starts by expressing solidarity with International Women’s Day, as I have done today by dressing in the suffragette colours—just one symbol of that solidarity. Underneath, I am wearing a Fawcett Society feminist T-shirt.

The second part of the motion

“notes with concern that, despite women making up 51 per cent of society as a whole, more progress needs to be made in electing women to Parliament”.

Like you, Mr Speaker, I was a member of the Speaker’s Conference on representation in this place. We have made progress. I am proud of the Labour party, which still provides more than half the women in this place, for taking the decision, which was not an easy one within the party, to use women-only shortlists. I was originally called a “quota woman”, but everyone has forgotten that now because they realise that I am quite an effective Member of Parliament.

We need to go further. I welcome the new Conservative women to the House. In some ways, I am glad that they were beneficiaries of the collapse of the Liberal party which, in my view, has done less than any other party on this issue. Let us remind ourselves why it is so important to have women here. At the moment, democracy fails if people cannot hear their voices in Parliament. Do women make a difference? Absolutely, they do.

I remember asking the Clerk of the Defence Committee at the turn of the century what difference having women on that Committee for the first time had made. I was not sure what the answer would be but, “Of course it has made an enormous difference, Fiona,” was what this rather stuffy Clerk said. I said, “What?” He said, “Well, we just used to talk about how big the bombs were, but now we talk about the families of the people who fight.” I just know that what would make me brave is knowing that my family is safe.

Women bring something additional to Parliament. One thing we achieved under a previous Prime Minister was the first ever stealth tax cut, when he could not bring himself to mention during his Budget that the level of VAT on sanitary protection had gone down. I am disappointed when we get patted on the head on some of these issues, in that the most recent san pro tax cut turned into a way of making this a kind of voluntary tax—“Guess what? We’ll give it to the Eve appeal.” I am glad that the Eve appeal is getting the money—I am a survivor of ovarian cancer myself—but if san pro is being taxed, the money should go into strategic support from the Government.

Jess Phillips: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Government should look at some of their big strategic wins on women’s issues, such as human trafficking legislation and the Modern Slavery Act 2015? Should they not focus the money on something like that?

Fiona Mactaggart: My hon. Friend anticipates where my speech is going next.

[*Fiona Mactaggart*]

The next part of the motion refers to equal pay. We have made some progress on that, but I am glad that the Women and Equalities Committee is looking at the fact that older women are being left behind when it comes to equal pay. They are being left behind in many other ways, too, so we need to try to sort that out.

The final part of the motion

“calls for greater action against FGM and other practices that are harmful to women.”

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): I commend the Government for setting up the National FGM Centre, which helps women and communities to fight against this barbaric act. It is run, as hon. Members may know, by Barnardo's and the Local Government Association, and a funding decision on the centre is due at the end of this month. Will my right hon. Friend join me in calling on the Government to continue this funding that keeps our daughters safe?

Fiona Mactaggart: It is essential that we have a strategic response to violence against women and girls. We have all been moved by the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips), and we know that women—internationally and in the UK—are particularly likely to be victims of violence, which might be through so-called cultural practices such as FGM, or victims of human trafficking.

I am glad that the Government have introduced the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and are focusing on the issue. We know that, internationally, the biggest reason for trafficking in human beings is trafficking for sexual exploitation. With women who are murdered, we know that if they have been in prostitution, their perpetrator is much less likely to be caught and convicted. Our average murder conviction rate is 75%, but at the moment we convict only 23% of the murderers of prostitutes. That is a shocking figure. We fail to have an intelligent, strategic response to the existence of prostitution, recognising that it is, as it is actually practised, a mechanism for violence towards women, for the sexual exploitation of children and for turning women into commodities, thus making all women's lives less safe.

I am glad that the Home Affairs Committee is looking at this issue, but until we follow Sweden's lead by targeting the men who create this problem and saying that it is an offence to pay for women's sexual services, I do not think we will end the horror that is the reality for most women and girls involved in prostitution—the horror of drug addiction; the horror of pimping; and the horror of exploitation and trafficking. That is something that we really need to focus on. When I first came to this House, we were reluctant to discuss the word “prostitution”, and I am glad that we now have a Chamber that is prepared to talk about it. However, we now have to do things to end this form of exploitation.

4.54 pm

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart). Let me also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) on securing the debate.

It was 20 years ago yesterday that I, as Women's Minister, opened a debate on International Women's Day that was taking place in Government time. I hope that Ministers will consider allowing a full day's debate on this subject in Government time, because I think that that would be appreciated by Members on both sides of the House.

Twenty years ago, we had a lady Speaker—and very formidable she was—but only 60 MPs were female, and even today we have only 191. Although the percentage figures have increased, I think—as, I believe, do many other Members who are present today—that that is still not good enough. We are still not doing enough to inspire more women to take up political careers. That, of course, is little wonder, given that—notwithstanding what was said by my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller)—the way in which our parliamentary system operates is viewed through the prism of Prime Minister's Question Time which, on a good day, often seems little better than a primary school playgroup. Indeed, I have seen primary school playgroups whose behaviour has been better.

On that occasion 20 years ago, I had recently returned from Beijing where, at a United Nations conference, a group of us had negotiated a platform for action. I was supported by Baroness Chalker and the then Member of Parliament for Tiverton and Honiton, Angela—now Baroness—Browning. More than 36,000 women attended that conference. I think that women's lives have improved since then but, as I have just four minutes in which to speak, I can give only two brief examples of how.

Back in the 1990s, the global average number of maternal deaths per 100,000 live births was 338. The highest level was in sub-Saharan Africa, where it rose to an appalling 510. By 2015, the figure had fallen to 169. I welcome the fact that a further target of 70 has been set as part of the sustainable development agenda. Meanwhile, the percentage of women parliamentarians worldwide has doubled in those 20 years—from 11.3 in 1995 to 22.7 now.

A crime that particularly affects women is cybercrime. As we have heard, there is new technology that can assist women, but can also be used as a weapon. According to UN Women, one in 10 women in the European Union has experienced cyber-harassment since the age of 15, including unwanted, offensive, sexually explicit e-mails or SMS messages, or offensive, inappropriate advances on a social networking site. The risk is highest among young women between the ages of 18 and 29.

Tomorrow I shall be very pleased to be supporting the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts), who will introduce a ten-minute rule Bill covering cybercrime of that kind. It has cross-party support, and has been prepared through the all-party parliamentary group on digital crime, with the able assistance of Harry Fletcher and the Digital Trust. As an officer of the group, I hope that it will initiate some more updated laws to deal with technology-enabled offences, as well as consolidating areas of the law that relate to cybercrime. While we know how helpful technology can be, we need to ensure that our Government act so that it is not used as yet another weapon with which to beat women.

4.58 pm

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): It is a pleasure to be taking part in the debate. However, notwithstanding all the good will and consensus, we should not forget

the long and bitter struggle in which women in this country had to engage in order to ensure that their voices were heard and the issues that affected them were debated and addressed. It goes without saying that we should take a moment to reflect on the thousands of women across the world who are still fighting that good fight today—in some cases, in very desperate circumstances.

I hope that the House will forgive me if I briefly break the lovely consensus to score one quick political point. The position of Minister for Women, as it was then, was created by Labour back in 1997. Women have played key roles in Labour from our earliest days, and of all the sweeping changes to Government introduced in 1997, I am glad to say that the creation of a ministerial position dedicated to women's issues has been one of the most quietly enduring.

I would like to mention two issues. The first is the issue of gender pricing. We are all familiar with the issues of unequal pay and discriminatory employment practices, but the often larger price tag associated with items marketed specifically at women is the reverse side of the same coin. I shall give the House a couple of examples. In research undertaken recently by *The Times*, it was found that razors for women cost, on average, nearly 50% more than the equivalent products for men. At Tesco, a pack of 10 pink disposable razors is twice the price of a standard pack, whose only difference is the colour. At Argos, a child's scooter is £5 more expensive in pink than in blue. And—this is something I still cannot quite get my head around—Bic sell “For Her” ballpoint pens that cost more than the standard model.

Overall, it has been estimated that women's products cost more 42% of the time, whereas men's products cost more just 18% of the time. In some cases, it may well be that items aimed at women genuinely cost more to produce than those aimed at men, and that retailers pass that cost on to consumers. But in far too many cases, women are being told that they should buy a specific product because it is the only version suitable for women, when in reality there is no real difference in the product. In those cases, it can be argued that they are being misled. I urge the Minister to ensure that independent analysis and further study is carried out to identify the extent of unfair gender pricing and marketing practices in the UK. We need to quantify the full cumulative impact of gender differentials in pricing for women, so that we can start to get to grips with this issue.

Mrs Miller: I am trying to resist the temptation to intervene, but is the hon. Lady as surprised as I was to discover that, despite the fact that the Select Committee has written to a number of the companies involved in this investigation, we have not yet had a response from all of them?

Paula Sherriff: Yes, that is pretty shocking. The right hon. Lady has pre-empted my next point. I was about to ask the Minister to meet the major retailers to identify what steps they are taking to rectify the situation.

My second point is related. Colleagues will know that over the last few months, along with many other Members, I have been banging the drum for the abolition of VAT on female sanitary products. Periods are a fact of human biology, not a leisure activity that women choose to indulge in. Tampons and other sanitary products are an

absolute necessity, and certainly not the luxury that they are absurdly taxed as. More than 300,000 people have now signed a petition calling for a change to this ludicrous state of affairs, and it is about time that decision makers in Westminster and Brussels sat up and took notice.

We have heard time and again from the Government that this is all in the hands of the European Commission, and that the UK is keen to press this issue in conjunction with our European partners, but the apparent lack of progress has left many of us wondering how committed the Government really are on this issue. I ask the Minister—as I asked her colleague, the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, the hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin)—to guarantee that the Prime Minister or the Chancellor will come to the House and make a statement once the Commission has responded to our request, so that the public can know exactly where we stand before the referendum. The official United Nations theme of this year's International Women's Day is “Make it Happen”, and that is precisely what I urge the Government to do.

5.3 pm

Mrs Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) on securing this debate. For many years, it was impossible to hold such a debate in the main Chamber, so the fact that we are here today is a mark of progress in itself. Today, as we observe International Women's Day, the charity Women for Refugee Women is launching a new campaign in which 99 women stand in solidarity with refugee women. I have the privilege of supporting this campaign along with many notable women including Mary Beard, Charlotte Church and Romola Garai, who recently appeared in the excellent film “Suffragette”, which I commend to any hon. Members who have not yet seen it.

The campaign was created to reflect the 99 pregnant women who were detained in the Yarl's Wood detention centre in 2014. Of those 99 women, only nine left detention to be removed from the UK. Indeed, the figures I have seen suggest that only a very small minority of detained women are removed while pregnant, suggesting that the practice is somewhat obsolete. I recently had confirmation from the chief executive of Serco that the total number of pregnant women held at Yarl's Wood last year was 69; fewer than the year before, but still too many. I strongly urge the Government to do all that they can in 2016 to stop the holding of pregnant women in detention centres once and for all. There are better places for the detention of a woman who is expecting a baby. Sarah—not her real name—was detained while pregnant and said:

“When I was in Yarl's Wood I found it hard to believe that I was in the UK. I seemed to be in a place where human rights don't exist. I saw so much misery and depression and mental illness while I was in there. There is constant crying and self-harm because the women don't know why they are there or for how long.”

Some 2,000 asylum-seeking women are locked up in Yarl's Wood each year. The majority are survivors of sexual violence and rape. Up to 93% of the women detained at Yarl's Wood claim to have suffered sexual violence of some form. The most vulnerable women we can think of are being kept in far from ideal circumstances. The new “adults at risk” policy should reduce the

[Mrs Caroline Spelman]

detention of vulnerable women and stress the need to move away from detention overall, and I commend the Home Office for those important steps. The recent report by Stephen Shaw also made strong recommendations in that area and I believe that Home Office Ministers have recognised the need for reform. Along with Women for Refugee Women, I hope that discussions will soon bear fruit, so that pregnant women seeking protection in this country as refugees will no longer face detention. The cost for individual women is so great that we cannot afford to wait any longer.

I also met the Yazidi women who are here today and was reminded of what drives women to seek safety in a country such as ours. Some 3,000 Yazidis are still in captivity in northern Iraq and Syria under Daesh occupation. Their children aged 11 to 16 are pressed into military service for Daesh and children as young as seven are being trained for action. These women are abused and raped. They are not in the UNHCR camps from which we have promised to take refugees, so a separate programme is clearly needed. Those two issues remind us of the drivers that bring pregnant women here and why we must ensure that we welcome them appropriately to our country.

5.7 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): The theme of this year's International Women's Day is gender parity, and I want to focus on the plight of low-paid women. We like to think that we live in an enlightened age of women's rights, but, shockingly, the World Economic Forum has calculated that the gender gap in health, education, politics and the economy will not close until 2133. It will therefore take another five generations before women are on an equal footing with men.

Turning to women's economic parity with men in the UK, a quarter of women now earn below the real living wage, which is £9.40 an hour in London. Our so-called economic recovery and increasing employment are being achieved off the backs of low-paid women. A staggering 60% of new jobs for women created since 2010 have been in the lowest-paid industries. Women make up three quarters of those in part-time work, earning on average 25% less an hour than their full-time colleagues. They dominate the lowest-paid sectors, where 62% of workers paid below the living wage are women. Some 90% of nurses are women and 84% of carers are women. Over 70% of hospitality waiting staff are women. In all those professions, women perform important work, but they are hugely undervalued.

Even in higher-paid jobs, women earn significantly less. The figure for median gross earnings for men is almost £30,000, but it is just over £24,000 for women—a 25% gap. While women make up half of all apprentices, they are being short-changed because of implicit gendered occupational segregation. Women dominate the lowest-paid apprenticeships, making up 83% of health and social care apprentices and 91% of childcare apprentices. Meanwhile, men dominate the highest-paid apprenticeships, where only 3% of engineering apprentices, 2% of construction apprentices and 10% of IT apprentices are women. The outcome is a gender pay gap in apprenticeships that is now at 21%. That means that a woman apprentice

will earn just £4.82 an hour on average, which compares with £5.85 an hour for her male colleague. There are, however, a few promising developments for future generations, and I would like to take the opportunity to celebrate Hewlett Packard Enterprise's sponsorship of TechFuture Girls, which I welcomed to Parliament last week. This is a remarkable network of clubs inspiring young girls into tech, where they are currently hugely under-represented, and it is available free to all schools in the UK.

We also know that the Government's gendered policies have seen benefits cuts that have hit women disproportionately, in favour of tax cuts for high earners, disproportionately benefiting men. Since 2010, £26 billion-worth of cuts have been made in benefits, tax credits, pay and pensions, and a staggering 85% of that total has been taken solely from women. At the same time, the Government have watered down the Treasury's gender impact assessments, meaning that the true extent of these changes and their real impact on women is being disguised.

We might think that the introduction of the so-called "national living wage" would make the situation a lot better for women. I ask every woman in the House, when she listens to the Budget next week, just to consider that many women will take home less next month because of the national living wage, as a result of the stripping out of benefits, London weighting and double time on a Sunday. Let us then, as women, all stand together and say that those women deserve more, not less.

5.11 pm

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): When Eleanor Rathbone was elected to this House, one of her first speeches in the 1920s was about female genital mutilation.

She then went on to talk about the need for family endowment, saying that it was ludicrous to think that the earnings, generally of a man, at paid work can support a family of varying size. That is why she argued for family allowances, which were opposed by all parties, for their own reasons, until the wash-up session before the 1945 elections, when that measure went through this House and the House of Lords with nobody opposing it. That shows the endurance needed to push good ideas to their eventual adoption. After that, we moved on to child benefit.

When I was first elected, a Chancellor of the Exchequer—a Labour one, but that is not terribly important—argued that there was no need to bring in family allowance for the first child because the married couple's allowance made up for that, not realising that half the married men had no dependent children and half the married men had a working wife. It was therefore one of the least directed ways of trying to support the needs of children while they are necessarily dependent—they are not allowed to work, so they cannot work and cannot earn.

I wish to make two brief additional points. The first is that we need to equalise work, by taking paid and unpaid work together. We ought to have an indicator that comes out every two or three years showing how much of the unpaid work in a household is done by the men and how much is done by the women. Until we start getting that more consciously becoming more equal, the opportunities for equality in paid work will remain distant.

The second point I wish to make is about expectations, hopes and opportunities. Anybody who went to see the exhibition in the Attlee Room in Portcullis House yesterday, where scientists, mathematicians and technologists were showing what they were doing, would not have been able to tell by the posters, except by looking at the name, whether the work and research had been done by a woman or by a man. One that particularly struck me was about the woman who had found a marker for prostate cancer. It was very important, low cost and effective, and it had no false positives. This was the kind of work that one would have expected to get a Nobel prize for if it had been done 30 years ago and if it had been shown to be working.

When we can get every child in primary school to feel at ease with maths and when everyone with talent can move on, we will find that all our children can reach forward. Whether they end up as mathematicians, engineers or scientists does not really matter, but they need to be as familiar with those subjects as they are with the arts, literature, drama, sport and the like. Let us therefore have the same expectations, opportunities and hopes here.

Tied to that, may I suggest that we also try to get more attention paid to an article in today's *ConservativeHome* about the Marmot curve and how we can try to get it into a flat line? No matter what the deprivation of the household we are born into, no matter whether we are Asian or black, in a lone parent family or not, we have the opportunity that education gives us, and that the hopes and expectations of our parents can give us, and we do not have our life chances determined by who are parents were, but more by what our parents do and what we can do ourselves.

5.14 pm

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): We are just less than one month short of the 105th anniversary of Emily Wilding Davison's night in the Undercroft here. In and of itself, that action was not a turning point, but it was part of a larger movement and societal change that have at least made strides in the right direction.

Emily Davison is a fine example of how it often takes straightforward thinking and direct action to make the changes that later generations come to see as normal. Changing the normal view of things is what drives society forward and it is very seldom easy, especially for women. I suggest then that it is the responsibility of every decent Government in every civilised nation on this earth to help advance the rights of women.

Less than two weeks ago, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom told us how his Government had helped arms manufacturers from the UK sell arms to Saudi Arabia. That is a country where women cannot open a bank account without their husband's permission, or try on clothes in a shop—the thought of an undressed woman behind a door, it seems, would be too much for Saudi men. It is a place where a woman cannot drive a car. I think that I am right in saying that it is the only country in the world where it is illegal for a woman to drive.

When a teenage girl was gang raped in 2006, the courts sentenced her to corporal punishment for being out of the house without a chaperone. She received 90 lashes for getting raped. Just last year, Suad al-Shamari, a Saudi women's rights activist and the first female lawyer

to appear before a Saudi court, was released from prison where she had been detained for three months without trial for advocating women's issues. She was released when she promised to reduce her activism. This is the nation that the UK Prime Minister feels it is appropriate to celebrate doing business with.

Human rights are women's rights and the rights of the women of Saudi Arabia should be at the top of the agenda for inter-Governmental relations. International Women's Day has to be about promoting the rights and freedoms of women across the world. It has to be about ending repression, about engendering respect, and about parity of esteem between women and men.

The Government of the UK should be crowing when they make advances in those areas rather than providing more weapons to what is, essentially, a repressive regime for women. In the face of all that, women in Saudi Arabia are changing the face of their country. Despite the roadblocks put in their way, we see ground-breaking women such as Haifaa al-Mansour who wrote and directed the first feature film to be shot there, and Samira Ibrahim Islam and Hayat Sindi, who are Saudi scientists who proved that Saudi women can match men in science. Using humour to chip away at the patriarchy is female Saudi comedian Amy Roko. They are transforming their lives and making the changes that will create a new normal for future generations of Saudi women, but they need the help and support of the international community if they are to succeed.

A Foreign Secretary stood in this Chamber once and promised an ethical foreign policy. He has gone and so has any semblance of an ethical foreign policy—it left here before he did—but the civilisation that we so readily pretend or aspire to demands that just such a policy be the guiding light of our international relations. On International Women's Day, please let each Member here pledge that the rights and protection of women should be uppermost in their thinking about international relations.

5.18 pm

Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): Like many women sitting at home watching this debate today, I remember catching a glimpse of a female MP on telly and wondering what kind of woman one had to be to enter politics. What kind of woman is she, I thought. Now, working alongside them, I have encountered strong women, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) who have brought this debate to the Chamber today. Their strength comes from knowing who they are. They are tenacious and determined women who have gained respect in this male-dominated field of politics. There are 191 of these pioneers in this House, and we on the Government Benches should be proud to claim 68 of them, 27 of whom were newly elected last year. However, while being proud, we must also be ambitious for more. We who are lucky enough to be here must take seriously our responsibility to those who are not.

I would like to ask the House to join me in saluting all women and especially all female parliamentarians. It is often suggested that we are pioneers, and that we must buck trends, refashion the system and upset the milk cart. Yes, in a way we must—we are all pioneers and have shared experiences of the fight and struggle

[Nusrat Ghani]

for the privilege of sitting on these green Benches. It is our duty to raise issues that have previously gone unspoken. The collective female membership of this House is a powerful forum for change, and I want to raise three brief points.

First, how do we as a collective compel legislators, parliaments, the United Nations and all the decision brokers to better represent the lives and aspirations of women? Here today we have a groundswell of energy to represent women from all walks of life, and we need to hold national and international organisations to account to perform for women and not just for men.

Secondly, how do we harness technology to promote and support women? We heard earlier about online stalking, bullying and cybercrime. We are all on social media and all of us female parliamentarians must have been trolled at some point. Imagine the response there would be if we women who are targeted by misogynistic trolls all supported each other in shouting them down. Let us challenge Facebook and Twitter to support women to get online and shame the bullying tactics of anonymous people, mostly men, who dare to put us in our place. We must come together not just for one day, but use our collective voice to shout more loudly every day. We must take over those social media spaces and make them our own.

Finally, as an MP in this Parliament I do not have to justify my gender to represent one of my constituents, nor do I have to justify the way in which I represent someone because of my gender. That is how it must be in society too, and in every community, every family and every organisation, but that, unfortunately, is not the case throughout the country. In my constituency, Wealden, men earn 20.8% more than women. We must champion those women in this House.

In sharia courts in this very country, the testimonies of women are worth half as much as those of men. We must represent those women in this House. In communities where gangs groom and abuse children, their victims' testimonies are often ignored by the authorities. We must speak up for those women.

We still have a long way to go to ensure that the testimonies of women are taken as seriously as those of men. When all of society accepts that our daughters, our sisters and our mothers are not owned by any man—are not owned by anybody but themselves—and have something to offer because of, rather than in spite of, their gender, only then will we have succeeded.

5.22 pm

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab): It is an honour to speak in today's debate and to follow the hon. Member for Wealden (Nusrat Ghani).

My constituency is not short of formidable, tenacious, and inspiring women. It is a great privilege for me to be the first woman to represent Neath in the House, and to have the responsibility of carrying on the legacy of all the women who have made contributions to public life in Neath. I am, in more ways than one, standing on the shoulders of giantesses.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to Gwenda Thomas, the first and only woman Welsh Assembly Member for Neath, who is retiring at the end of the month after 17 years of service to both her constituency

and Wales's devolved Administration. Winifred Coombe Tennant, a British suffragette and philanthropist, made her home at Cadoxton Lodge, in my constituency. She was a leading figure in the campaign for women's suffrage in south Wales. Katherine Jenkins, the globally recognised soprano, was born and grew up in Neath, and her mother remains a committed activist. The recently ennobled Dame Siân Phillips, a world renowned actress and singer, is from Gwaun Cae Gurwen. Another of Neath's famous singing women, Bonnie Tyler, needs no introduction, nor does her song, "Lost in France".

During the miners' strike of 1984, women led from the front of the picket lines, organised valley support groups, and kept spirits alive in homes and heartlands across south Wales. The story of the 1984 miners' strike was most recently told in the triumphant film "Pride", which tells how the lesbian and gay community supported miners in the Dulais valley, and the story of the tireless and fearless Hefina Headon, a woman who was as much a leader during those times as any lodge chairman.

Out of that story of pride, adversity, camaraderie and success grew an innovative community organisation called the Dove Workshop, set up by women for women. Its founders include Hefina Headon and Mair Francis. The organisation has been held up across Europe as a model for community adult education. Established to offer women opportunities to retrain during the years that followed the miners strike, it was the birthplace of the Community University of the Valleys and has subsequently supported thousands of women to gain qualifications, including undergraduate degrees.

The Dulais valley is also home to Bethan Howell, Welsh rugby international, founding member of Seven Sisters RFC ladies' rugby team and champion of equality. I must also pay tribute to two exceptional women who have had a profound impact on sport in Wales, Professor Laura McAlister and Sarah Powell, both of whom have had outstanding sporting careers and are now leading the way as the first female chair and CEO of Sport Wales respectively. Of course, one of Great Britain's greatest Olympians of all time is Baroness "Tanni" Grey-Thompson of Eaglescliffe. In my sport of squash we have Welsh international Tesni Evans, who has recently reached a career-high world ranking of 24. Of course there is also Margaret Coleman, wife of Donald Coleman, one of my predecessors, one of the most tenacious women I have ever met, and one of the busiest octogenarians I know.

Stephen Doughty: My hon. Friend is offering an impressive list of powerful Welsh women, and obviously she is one of them. Will she join me in paying tribute to Baroness Gale of Blaenrhondda in the other place, who has done so much in the Welsh Labour party to stand up for the rights of women, and who continues to do so to this day?

Christina Rees: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, because it would be remiss of me not to mention Baroness Gale.

I am proud to be taking through a private Member's Bill—it is scheduled to have its Second Reading next Friday—that would bind in law the need to include mothers' names on marriage certificates, something that does not currently happen, and an inequality that is yet to be set right.

It was a Labour Government who passed the Equal Pay Act 1970, a monumental occasion in women's history, but one that, unfortunately, did not mark the end of inequality. Forty-six years on, women still earn only, on average, 81p for every £1 earned by a man. There is much more to be done.

5.27 pm

Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): I hope that you will not think it boastful of me, Mr Speaker, if I declare that my constituency of Louth and Horncastle in Lincolnshire leads where others follow, particularly when it comes to electing female MPs, for I am not the first female MP to represent the seat. In 1921 the good people of Louth elected Margaret Wintringham. She has an important place in history; she was the first English-born female MP in this place, and the third ever female MP elected to this place. Fast-forward to 2015, and I am the 428th female MP, because since 1918 only 450 women have been elected to this place. That total is lower than the number of men in the House of Commons just in this Parliament. Therefore, when people ask why we need campaigns such as International Women's Day, I have to say that sadly we do not need to look too far.

We need more women in politics, not just in the House of Commons but across the board. We need more women, of every party, standing up for local communities in councils. We need more women reporting on national and local politics. We need more women shaping policies in think-tanks and universities across the country. We need more women in Whitehall advising Ministers on implementing policies. We need that not because women's experiences are in any way better or worse than men's, but because they are different. We must reflect the experiences of women and men across the country.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): Does my hon. Friend think that we perhaps do not have so many women in higher positions because women are not so good at putting themselves forward in the systems that are in place, which they have to go through to get to those positions? Men—I obviously have massive admiration for our colleagues—are very good at that, but women are not so good. I have two daughters going through the process now.

Victoria Atkins: I congratulate my hon. Friend's daughters. A lot of women are perhaps used to being the power behind the throne, to use a well-worn phrase. I hope that one of the things we have done today, in celebrating International Women's Day and inviting young women from our constituencies into the House of Commons, is to give those young women a little more confidence and courage in putting themselves forward when they want to achieve something.

Let me return to 1921 for a moment. My predecessor Mrs Wintringham campaigned on an issue that, sadly, is familiar to us in 2016: equal pay. After 95 years, there is still inequality of pay. We know that the situation is getting better, and the Government are doing a great deal to tackle it, but I welcome the promise of my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) to hold them to account so that we can do even better.

Why does any of this matter? It matters because it is the right thing to do. It matters when we meet young women in our constituencies. Today, I have had the

pleasure of being visited by two young constituents, Jessica and Ellie—they made the trip down from Louth and Horncastle, which is three hours' drive at best. They have seen Downing Street, they have seen this place in action and they have listened to the 50:50 panel. That is all important stuff, which I hope will really energise and enthuse them in their careers in the future. For Jessica and Ellie, and for the millions of women across our constituencies, this debate is so important. However, this is not just about today; it is about what we do from now until the next International Women's Day and beyond.

I am pleased that the Chamber has been so busy this afternoon. May I say thank you to all the male Members of Parliament who have come to support the campaign? Although women may form 51% of the population, we must not forget that men form the other 49%. I may just have been terribly controversial there without meaning it, but anyway, I thank everyone who has supported the debate.

5.32 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): This is the second debate I have spoken in on international women's issues recently. At an event last week, the right hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) commented on the fact that it was much harder for women to get elected to Parliament than it was for many of the mediocre men who are here. I am therefore happy to speak on behalf of mediocre men.

Yesterday, I had the pleasure of meeting two young women, Alalea and Liza, who came here as part of the SET for BRITAIN event. They are both PhD students from Imperial College—my old college. Alalea is working on the subject of concrete, and Liza is working on wear particles. Although neither subject might sound totally stimulating, I can assure Members that the two young women's presentations were absolutely brilliant.

However, we cannot deduce too much from what those young women are doing. Clearly, at an international level, a huge amount of work still needs to be done on women's rights. Many Members will have received the email from Amnesty International setting out the six reasons why it thinks we still need an International Women's Day. One of the examples it provides is that in Ireland, for instance,

"women with fatal health conditions are often refused life-saving treatment because of the risk it poses to the foetus."

Clearly, therefore, we still need to make major advances on women's rights abroad.

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Tom Brake: I am afraid I will not, because many Members want to speak, and if I give way, that will mean less time for others.

There are still strong international challenges that need to be addressed, and there is certainly no room for complacency at a local level. The domestic violence statistics from my own borough show that domestic abuse forms 40% of all violent crime in Sutton, in the south-west London suburbs, which is relatively affluent. Of course, domestic violence is also severely under-reported, so perhaps only 50% of incidents are reported to the police.

[Tom Brake]

The right hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) made a rather ungenerous comment about the Liberal Democrats as a party. She and I have discussed gender issues, and she could have asked me what the Lib Dems have been doing. I would have explained to her that our five most winnable Westminster seats in Scotland have been allocated to women candidates, so barring a dreadful election result in 2020—which I know some will wish on us—there should be a significant improvement. The same will be true in England, because our party conference is going to agree, I hope, to something for which I have been pushing, namely an all-women shortlist for every English seat from which a man is standing down. Barring unforeseen bad results, there should be a significant improvement.

I want to finish on the subject of female genital mutilation. My colleague Lynne Featherstone, who is now in the House of Lords, pushed very hard on the issue when she was a Minister. I want to leave the Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice, who will respond to the debate, with one point, which is that if we are serious about doing something about FGM, there needs to be mandatory personal, social, health and economic education, because otherwise the issues will not be addressed in some schools. I hope she will respond positively to that point.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry to have to reduce the time limit for Back-Bench speeches with immediate effect to three minutes, but I am trying to get as many people in as possible.

5.36 pm

Andrew Griffiths (Burton) (Con): It is a delight to speak in this debate and to follow on from the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins) about the male contribution. Anybody who reads the *Hansard* of last year's debate will see that no male MPs made speeches, but some made interventions, so it is great to see so many men taking part in today's debate, because this issue affects all of us. It affects our wives, sisters, daughters and grandmothers. None of us in this House would accept it if our daughters were prevented from reaching their true potential, if our wives were paid less than a man doing the same job, or if our mothers were discriminated against. We must all work together to ensure that we bring fairness and equality to Britain, and this debate is an important part of that.

It is important to consider the aims of International Women's Day, one of which is to root out bias in the workplace. Of course, this place is a workplace, and I am delighted that there are now 191 female MPs, which is a big improvement on the 141 in the last Parliament, but we have much more to do. It is fantastic that almost 30% of Members are women. That is the highest number ever and a fantastic step forward, but we cannot be complacent and take our foot off the gas.

I am incredibly delighted that 68 women are part of this Conservative Government. One of the reasons for that was the work of Women2Win. I want to pay tribute to some formidable women, including my right hon.

Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) and Baroness Jenkin of Kennington, who, along with the late Baroness Ritchie of Brompton, did a huge amount to develop Women2Win, which brought in new women, gave them confidence and helped them to deliver. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman), who did a great deal to continue that work.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that having more women in Parliament is in the national interest and that it will improve the tone and tenor of debate and, dare I say it, the quality of our legislation?

Andrew Griffiths: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is no surprise that when we widen the gene pool and get more women and diversity around the table, we make better decisions.

In the time I have left, I want to talk about something close to my heart. Engineering has a turnover of more than £1 trillion, which is a quarter of all UK enterprises, yet 64% of employers say that there is a shortage of engineers. That shortfall will lead to there being 55,000 fewer engineers by 2015 than the UK economy needs. Women make up only 9% of the engineering workforce. That is a scandal, and we need to do more to address it.

Fiona Mactaggart: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andrew Griffiths: I will not, if the right hon. Lady does not mind, because I have only a few seconds left.

A paper by EngineeringUK shows that UK has the lowest proportion of female engineers in the EU. The figure is 9% in the UK, but 30% in Latvia. Girls outperform boys in STEM subjects but fail to continue those studies to A-level and beyond. In the past five years, 12,000 STEM A-levels were taken by women, but in 2013-14 only 3.8% of engineering apprenticeships were taken up by women. That represents a huge missed opportunity. We need to make sure that the girls who are coming through schools now become the engineers, designers and entrepreneurs of tomorrow. That is how women will take their place in the UK economy.

5.40 pm

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) for securing the debate along with my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler). I am pleased that we are here in Parliament to recognise and celebrate International Women's Day, along with women and Parliaments across the world. I am also happy to be the third consecutive woman to represent Brentford and Isleworth. We must remember that although women have guaranteed rights in law in the UK, there are still cultures, attitudes and practices that hold women back, subject them to violence and deprive the economy of the benefit of their full involvement.

So many issues that disproportionately affect women are worthy of debate, but I will focus on women's status in the workplace. In the past 30 to 40 years, there has been a significant increase in female employment. As a consequence, there has been positive Government policy change on matters including workplace rights, childcare and anti-discrimination law. One of the big issues now

is flexible working. Employees can have flexible working, but they have to have been in post for six months. Many employers are beginning to realise the value of flexible working. An employer in my constituency, Debbie Leon, who represents a successful and growing company called Fashionizer, recognises that having flexible working practices enables her to get the best employees in the field.

Unfortunately, such practices are not always to be found in traditional workplaces, and I hope that Ministers will review the position. In fact, the Minister for Skills, the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles), told the Women and Equalities Committee that he used flexible working arrangements at the point of recruitment in the organisation that he ran to get the best staff for the job. If a Minister could do that in a previous workplace, I hope that Ministers will be encouraged to introduce a right for employees to request flexible working from the outset. I want women at all stages of their caring responsibilities to feel free to apply for jobs and not to be constrained by fixed work times and work days.

We cannot talk about flexible working hours and workers' rights without talking about the European Union. Britain's membership of the EU gave British workers the right to minimum paid maternity and paternity leave, and to equal pay and anti-discrimination laws. That is why I will be voting to stay in the EU.

5.43 pm

Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) on securing this important debate. I am delighted to speak today as chair of the all-party group on women and enterprise. I really enjoy that role, although I have to admit that when I was first asked whether I would carry it out, I was worried that someone had misread my name and put it back to front. Thankfully, that was not the case and it is now my pleasure, through the APPG, to work with a talented group of inspiring female entrepreneurs from across a range of different backgrounds and business sectors. I want to focus on one of the key aims of our APPG, which is to encourage aspiration and entrepreneurship among women of all ages, but particularly young women.

Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that Young Enterprise represents an excellent way of inspiring teenage girls to consider becoming entrepreneurs and business women in the future?

Craig Tracey: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It was good that she raised that point in Prime Minister's Question Time last week.

There is overwhelming evidence that harnessing female entrepreneurship can only be positive for our economy. Indeed, a report that was published in 2013 calculated that boosting female entrepreneurship could deliver approximately £60 billion extra to the UK economy. We also know that women bring a diversity dividend, whereby gender-balanced boards are more successful on every measure, according to a study by McKinsey & Co.

We are making good progress, but we still lag somewhat behind the USA, where women are twice as likely to be entrepreneurially active as UK women, although the rates for men in both countries are the same. In 1988,

the USA put in place a women's business Act, which introduced long-term infrastructure measures, such as the women's business centre programme, and created the National Women's Business Council. It is no coincidence that since those initiatives went live, over 30% of US enterprises have been female-owned. I ask Ministers to look carefully at such models to determine what lessons can be learned.

Evidence suggests that one of the biggest barriers to women starting their own business is a fear of failure. Studies often say that female entrepreneurs are held back by risk aversion and low confidence. In fact, it is not necessarily a lack of self-confidence, but an informed assessment of how prepared they feel to embark on the all-important first step. That is backed up by the fact that women who have undergone some form of enterprise training are twice as likely to be engaged in entrepreneurial activity, with specific female-focused business support being vital to greatly encouraging participation.

With that in mind, it is imperative that we offer our potential female entrepreneurs the best possible chance to achieve by giving them effective information, advice and guidance in schools. Schemes such as the Careers & Enterprise Company are a welcome addition and provide an excellent opportunity to plug an all-too-evident hole in our current careers advisory process. That alone is not enough, however, so we need to encourage more female role models and entrepreneurs into our schools, colleges and universities. A big step forward in that respect would be for senior women in business and politics to engage practically with their local students—to tell them their story, which would undoubtedly not have been all plain sailing, and, in essence, to inspire and support a new generation of female entrepreneurs.

We are in an exciting place in our history. We understand more than ever what we can do to support, nurture and encourage female enterprise. With the right long-term strategy from the Government, in partnership with our current entrepreneurs, the goal of equality and parity in business is a lot closer than we might think. I look forward to playing my part, through the all-party group, to help to make that happen.

5.47 pm

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): I am delighted to speak in this important debate. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies)—before this debate started, she chaired an excellent cross-party panel with young women about International Women's Day—and, indeed, to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) for her excellent contribution to the debate.

There is no doubt that huge progress has been made for women around the world in the 97 years that have passed since Nancy Astor took her seat on the green Benches. Many hon. Members will recall the story of how, when the first female MP tried to reach her usual place in the middle of a row, other MPs moved closer together to leave no space for her to get through, and then laughed and jeered as she forced past them. The braying some of us still hear in the Chamber seems a tired relic of those distant days—it is time to move on. Perhaps we should move on from the outdated "Hear, hear" to modern applause. That would be a welcome change, but it is probably best described as work in progress.

[*Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh*]

I should say that while 17 of us on the SNP Benches are women, the 54 of us are 100% feminists. I am very glad that my party has led the way, with Nicola Sturgeon's gender-balanced Cabinet. More than two thirds of our new candidates in the elections to the Scottish Parliament are women.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): My hon. Friend mentions our First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, who has received plaudits internationally for having a gender-balanced Cabinet. Will my hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to Winnie Ewing, our first female SNP MP, who came up against some of the outdated practices that my hon. Friend mentions?

Ms Ahmed-Sheikh: Absolutely. We stand on the broad shoulders of the giants who came before us and had to deal with so much in this Chamber and beyond. Huge strides have been made to improve the representation of women in Parliament at Westminster and Holyrood, but there is much more to do. I pay particular tribute to the significant work of the Women 50:50 campaign in Scotland.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Is it the case that advances in female representation came about from positive action, and that more positive action is required?

Ms Ahmed-Sheikh: I agree with my hon. Friend, and until we believe that there is a level playing field in how people are chosen, positive action is welcome.

It is as important to seek to modernise practices and attitudes towards women in public and political life now as it was 100 years ago. We cannot stand still. It is vital for democracy that those who make laws across the world are representative of their countries at large, and that is important in the fight against Daesh and in the debate on our continuing membership of the European Union. Last year, I was privileged to chair an event that aimed to give a platform to the female perspective in Syria. Women are so often the forgotten victims of conflicts, and the forms of terrorism that we see today greatly impact on them.

Women have been at the forefront of action in Syria to combat child recruitment to armed groups, and they have led and co-ordinated the disarmament of men in public places in some refugee camps so that children do not have to walk around and see armed men. Those initiatives also disguise the names of their community projects to keep their work hidden from Daesh networks. Only by taking such action can we prepare Syrian society for a future beyond the current conflict. Women have so much to offer, and to date the debate on the European Union seems largely to have been led by men in grey suits jockeying for position. It is time for women's voices to be heard. We must not underestimate the part that the EU has played in protecting and promoting equality and the rights of women across our continent.

I wonder what the world might look like if more women were at the top table, heading campaigns in EU institutions, peace talks and diplomacy. I respectfully suggest that it would be a more equal world, and a better place for us all. The Scottish Government are

committed to working towards gender equality, and I look forward to hearing from my hon. Friend the Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley), who will speak further on that matter. Everybody appears to believe in gender equality, but simply believing in it is not enough. The WASPI women, the female workforce and victims of domestic violence are waiting. We must get on with the job.

Here is to those women who championed equality before us, against greater odds and much higher obstacles. To all the girls who will follow us, we are here to support you; to the men who support us, we welcome you. Women and girls hold the key to change and progress, so let us not waste a minute in unlocking these doors and creating opportunities across the world. Equality is a fundamental human right.

5.53 pm

Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con): I am honoured to speak in this important debate, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) for securing it. I am one of 68 female Conservative MPs, and one of 191 female MPs who have the privilege of representing their constituents and their gender in Parliament. In what remains a male-dominated environment, we have illustrated that not only can we compete with our male counterparts, but our input plays an essential part in good, balanced decision making.

When considering the impact made by women in positions of leadership, particularly in business, we should be proud that there are more women-led businesses than ever before. Historically, this country's business culture has hindered women, who are just as accomplished as men when it comes to work. When I started in the retail sector, very few women held management positions and they were kept predominantly on the shop floor. Women often lack confidence and the belief that they can do any job as well as any man. I believe that we must instil a girl's belief in herself at an early age.

My city of Derby has a rich history in the engineering and manufacturing sector, and STEM subjects are often at the core of that. There is an ever-increasing demand for skilled workers in these areas. I want to encourage more women to get involved in STEM, if they wish to, and to eliminate the ongoing perception that that is a male-dominated area.

I want to ensure that women and girls have choices and that all doors are open so that should a young woman wish to become a chef, she can; so that if she wants to become a doctor, she can; and so that if she wants to be an engineer, she can. For me, this is about supporting girls in their careers of choice and encouraging aspiration, something to which this Government are undoubtedly committed. Along with the great strides made in tackling the root cause of the gender pay gap, it is clear we are heading in the right direction.

I could, of course, continue at length, but I would like to finish by highlighting a very special woman: my grandmother who, at the age of 97, had an amazingly full life. She worked all her working life and was as fiery at 97 as she was when she was 27. She is proof positive that all women, whatever they do, should be proud of themselves and their achievements. I am proud to be an MP, a mum and a wife, but most of all I am proud to be a woman.

5.55 pm

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I speak today as my party's first female MP and the first woman to represent to Dwyfor Meirionnydd—and proudly so. I am a member of a party that elected its first female leader, Leanne Wood, four years ago almost to the day. I thank the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) for securing this debate, and hon. Members for all the extraordinary speeches we have heard so far—I am very much enjoying them.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): The hon. Lady notes that her party is now led by a woman. As has probably been said, the devolved Administrations in Scotland and Northern Ireland are led by women. Will she accept the hopes of SNP Members that that will also be true of Wales come the elections in May?

Liz Saville Roberts: I do, of course, agree with the hon. Gentleman very sincerely.

I speak as a Member of an institution that is still heavily male-dominated, in a profession that is still male-dominated. As others have said, although men are still in a minority in the Chamber today, it is easy to see why women might feel excluded from politics. A woman watching recent debates about increasing the state pension age for women would have seen a Chamber dominated by men arguing that women did not need to be given more notice that they would need to work longer before retirement, and that that somehow did not count as discrimination.

It is with this awareness that I firmly support means to propel us towards a fairer society and a fairer economy. We still live in a society where the important workplaces—the boardrooms, the debating chambers, the engineering consoles and the fighter jets—are dominated by men. It is in those places that are considered insignificant to society—the nurseries and the nursing homes—where we find that poorly paid women make up the great majority of the workforce doing the things that do not really matter, such as looking after their fellow human beings. Surely the time has come for us as a society to adjust our values. Why is it that those spheres of activities that are traditionally women's work are so undervalued? Why should maintaining machinery and playing tricks with money have such high status, and thus be better paid, than caring for people in their old age?

While girls have traditionally been directed towards certain careers, equally boys have grown up thinking that caring for their fellow human beings is not for them. In activities such as politics, taking risks is valued and respected, but girls are still conditioned to tread carefully and live carefully—not causing offence, not drawing attention to their intelligence and not being adversarial. To describe a man as ambitious is complimentary, but to describe a woman as ambitious implies criticism. That is why we must lead by example.

The National Assembly for Wales became in 2003 the first gender-balanced national legislature in the world, helped in part by positive discrimination towards women. Plaid Cymru leader Leanne Wood became a Member of the National Assembly in 2003 under Plaid Cymru's positive discrimination policy for regional list nomination. At my party's spring conference this weekend, four years after she was made leader,

Leanne was introduced to the stage by 17-year-old Lucie Wiltshire, who got involved in politics after meeting Leanne.

I think that we would all agree that no young person should ever be prevented from reaching their goals because of their gender. What is equally important, however, is how society enables girls to imagine their goals. As a former teacher, I urge us to encourage others—girls and women—to take risks, to be fearless and to embrace ambition. As always, we are limited only by our imaginations.

5.59 pm

Rebecca Harris (Castle Point) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak briefly in this important annual debate. In the time left, I wish to focus on the gender pay gap and the lack of women in senior professional roles in this country.

The gender pay gap is stubbornly persistent, despite the Equal Pay Act 1970 having been passed more than 40 years ago, and women are still woefully under-represented in the higher levels of British industry. We are aware of the depressing statistic that more men called John serve as chief executive officers in FTSE 100 companies than women. We can laugh at the statistics, but they reveal a depressing truth: our major industries are still not reflecting our society and are therefore not drawing on as wide a gene pool as they could.

The causes often begin early. I believe that schools need to play a significant role in overturning stereotypes, both in what they teach and what careers advice they offer, given that the gender pay gap is, in part, driven by the types of job women do. We all know that attitudes can change. Nearly 40 years ago, my own sister was a straight-As pupil and informed her school that she wanted to go into medicine. The reaction of those at her school was to suggest that, as a girl, she might prefer to consider nursing. Characteristically, she totally ignored that advice, and fortunately the world was spared a first-rate but horrendously bossy nurse. Instead, we got a superb doctor.

Nearly 40 years later, the majority of applicants to medical school are women, and something similar is occurring in law, so we know that we can change attitudes. We need to make the same changes in other careers for women, especially in engineering, where we have a desperate need for more talent, but we need to do it faster than we have changed attitudes towards other careers. I welcome the progress the Government have made over the past five years and the huge improvement in the number of girls taking STEM A-levels, but we need to keep pushing the case to get more into engineering.

The problem does not end when girls leave schools. Women still face unconscious discrimination in the workplace, and too many women feel they must choose between motherhood and building a career. I therefore welcome the Government's move to achieve shared parental leave. Anecdotally, we know that when women have families, their managers often feel they are less committed to the organisation, especially if they choose to take part-time work. Conversely, it seems, anecdotally, that when men become fathers, their managers sometimes feel they must require a pay rise and a promotion.

Shared parental leave, even if men do not take it up, will at least force men to face the dilemma and think through what effect it might have on their career prospects,

[Rebecca Harris]

which, if they become managers of women in the future, could be of enormous benefit. As we have said, we want both men and women fighting to make sure this annual debate becomes something for the history curriculum in the future.

6.2 pm

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): When we miss out women from our legislatures, we make grave errors that seriously affect women and their families: we do not give the attention we should to maternal health and breastfeeding; we do not consider the impact of legislation on women; we leave women destitute without recourse to public funds; we get a Chancellor who believes that women paying the tampon tax for their own domestic abuse services is appropriate; and we see the introduction of welfare reforms such as the household payment in universal credit, the two-child tax credits policy and the rape clause.

In the brief time I have, I would like to concentrate on the two-child policy and the rape clause. It is a vindictive piece of policy that passes judgment and says the Government consider only the first two children worthy of support. To ask a woman to prove that her third child has been born as the result of rape to gain eligibility for child tax credits is utterly abhorrent. It stigmatises that woman and her child and is inconsistent with our obligations to treat children equally under the UN convention on the rights of the child.

There seems to be an assumption by some that rape just happens somehow. It is not acknowledged that it is most likely to happen to women already in coercive, abusive relationships. These women are in a particularly vulnerable place.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): My hon. Friend will be aware of the additional funding announced by Scotland's First Minister today to help abused women get back into work. Does she agree that we need more of these initiatives across all Governments to help women in such positions?

Alison Thewliss: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend.

Members will be aware that I have been questioning the rape clause since last July's Budget, but I have still not had a satisfactory answer to explain why this policy is required and how it will work. Lord Freud suggested on 27 January in the other place that proof that a woman's third child was born of rape might not come via the criminal justice system, but instead come from a third-party official such as a GP or a social worker. This does not, however, resolve the problem. For many reasons, these women may not be able to tell their GPs about their circumstances, and there may be no social work involvement.

I am not sure how many women will end up claiming under this policy. If a woman is in a relationship and suffering domestic abuse, she might be putting herself at serious risk by making the claim in the first place. A similar issue arises in the household payments system and universal credit—if a woman requests a split payment, her partner will almost certainly know about it. She may well be doubly damned by this Government, because Lord Freud has also refused to allow an exemption to

the two-child policy for women escaping abusive, controlling relationships, which is what the Scottish Government are trying to counteract.

There is still a distinct possibility that a woman could tell her story to the Department for Work and Pensions and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and not be believed. Those organisations are not known, after all, for taking people at their word. There is not yet guidance, and the Government will not say who they are consulting.

The two-child policy also fails completely to recognise the complex nature of families in 2016. A couple who have children from previous relationships will, under the two-child policy, lose their child tax credit eligibility when they come together. There is no detail yet on exactly how multiple births will be protected. There is no acknowledgement of the impact on those who, for religious reasons, may traditionally have larger families. That is hardly fitting for a Government who vaunt their "family test".

I have heard it said that families should have only the children they can afford, but that point of view does not acknowledge the challenges that life presents. A family may have three children and be well able to afford them, but what if one parent loses their job, takes ill or dies? There is no safety net whatever in the two-child policy to cover that eventuality, particularly if the remaining parent is required to work less to care for the family.

The two-child policy is rigid, ineffectual and unnecessary. The rape clause stigmatises vulnerable women and their families. This is a policy made on the hoof for the sake of a *Daily Mail* headline and a Tory conference press release. It is tantamount to social engineering. My plea on International Women's Day 2016 is that we reject this kind of policy—the two-child policy and the rape clause—and we support every woman and every child equally.

6.7 pm

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) for securing this hugely important debate. Today, on International Women's Day, I want to draw Members' attention to an international crime that is now being perpetrated against young girls and women here in our country today. I refer to breast ironing. For the benefit of any Members who might not have heard of it, this is a ritualised form of child abuse that originated in Cameroon but is now happening in the UK whereby hot objects heated on a stove are placed on a girl's breasts during puberty to retard the growth of the breast in the bizarre and wrong belief that this in some way makes them less sexually attractive to men.

This is a hidden crime in the same way that female genital mutilation was a hidden crime just a few years ago. It is hidden because it is carried out by a very close family member, normally a mother, sister, aunt or grandmother. A charity called CAME, which is run by lady called Margaret Nyuydzewira, estimates that 1,000 girls and young women in this country are having their breasts mutilated today because of this cultural activity. Because it is so hidden, I decided to do a freedom of information request to all police forces in the UK to try to find out what they are doing about this abhorrent practice. I am devastated to say that 15% of all police forces did not even know that this practice existed, and 38% of those that responded said that they had no information about it and could not tackle it.

Having revealed those shocking figures, I want to talk briefly about what action we can take. On International Women's Day we must send out a clear message that this is a crime and that the perpetrators, whoever they may be, must and should be prosecuted. I know of one case reported to the police in 2013; they had an existing pool of offences to choose from, but there is considerable confusion in this area of the law. I hope that I can call on the Government today to create a stand-alone offence of breast ironing to protect young girls and women in our country.

We are a Government who have taken fantastic action on female genital mutilation. In the Serious Crime Act 2015, we provided anonymity for victims and created an offence of failing to protect someone from FGM. We also issued statutory guidance. I hope that we can raise the profile of breast ironing, and that it can be treated in the same way. It is a crime that is secret in nature, it has a long-term and irreversible effect on women's breasts, and people will not report a family member. Unless we do something about it, this hidden crime will remain just that: hidden.

6.10 pm

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): I started today by being interviewed by a researcher from Brunel University about the subject of women as leaders. One of the questions that she asked me was, "What qualities make a woman a good leader?" I do not actually think that leadership skills are gender-specific, but what women do need are more female leaders to act as role models, and for it to be seen as commonplace for women to take the lead in business, politics, sport, and other areas that tend to be male-dominated, such as science and engineering.

The motion refers to the need to get more women into Parliament. As many Members have pointed out, we currently have 191 female MPs. I am proud to say that 99 of them are Labour MPs, and I am proud to be a member of that group. In respect of female representation in Parliament, we are getting better, but we clearly have a long way to go. I believe that one of the issues is that this place is still perceived as being very male-oriented. However, improvements have been made in sitting times, and I do not want any retrograde steps to be taken in that regard.

Women often have to dance to men's tunes. I am reminded of Ginger Rogers, who, when she was asked about dancing with Fred Astaire, replied, "It's simple: I just follow what Fred does." Then she added, "But backwards, and in high heels." For me, that sums up many situations in which women find themselves today. We need to find new ways of working that suit us, our families, and our responsibilities and commitments.

A few Members—including the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies), in her excellent opening speech—have referred to the raising of the women's state pension age. The WASPI women have shown themselves to be committed campaigners against that injustice. These are women who have been excluded from occupational pension schemes because they work part-time. These are women who took long periods out of work to bring up children, childcare not being available to many. These are women who have suffered ill health: many of those who have contacted me have had to leave work because of health issues, and are surviving on minimal incomes. These are women who are caring for elderly

relatives. One of my constituents told me that she had had to give up work to care for five elderly relatives, and she also provides respite foster care.

These are hard-working, committed, caring women, who have given much to their communities, families and workplaces, yet it appears that their reward is to have to wait longer for the state pension on which they were relying. Would it not be a wonderful gesture if, on International Women's Day, the Government were to commit themselves to proper transitional arrangements for the WASPI women? Let them walk not backwards in high heels, but forwards, and in sensible shoes.

6.13 pm

Dr Tania Mathias (Twickenham) (Con): I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) for securing the debate. In the short time is available to me, I wish to focus particularly on female genital mutilation. On this one day of the year, we have a chance to audit where we have come from and where we wish to go. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry) that we have some good legislation, notably the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 and the Serious Crime Act 2015. As has already been mentioned, it is now a crime to fail to protect a woman or a girl from female genital mutilation, which is very important.

I believe that good training is available. I myself have just completed the Home Office's free online training. However, improvements can be made. It is excellent that the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children has a free 0800 telephone number, and the Government are doing brilliant work with The Girl Generation, an African-led movement to end female genital mutilation. I applaud every African woman, and every African girl, who is part of that incredibly important movement. However, more than 120 million women and girls in the world have suffered from FGM, including 100,000 in our community, and we can do more. There have been no successful prosecutions in this country.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that raising issues such as FGM and breast ironing in this place raises awareness of the issues and ensures that more action can be taken against these horrendous crimes?

Dr Mathias: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend.

What more can we do? Having read the motion, I believe that we should not hide behind letters and acronyms; we should call it female genital mutilation. The Home Office online training has clinical diagrams, but they hide the absolute barbarity of the crime. The training should include images of it, however appalling they might be. In fairness to the Home Office training, however, it pointed out that the equivalent of female genital mutilation in a man would be the removal of the head of the penis and of a third of the shaft. That is what we are dealing with, and this practice has to be abolished.

We can do more. The most vulnerable people in this country are isolated migrant populations. We are not reaching out to them, and they are not reaching out to us. Speaking as a doctor, I know that if a woman comes to my clinical practice but cannot communicate with me

[Dr Mathias]

in the same language, it is difficult for me to ask very personal questions through an interpreter. It is even harder if that interpreter is a male friend or relative. We have to do more.

I shall finish by quoting Gloria Steinem, because we cannot have International Women's Day without her. She has said:

"The human race is like a bird with two wings, and if one wing is broken, no one can fly."

6.16 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate, and I thank the hon. Members for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) and for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) for setting the scene so vividly and efficiently and for focusing our attention on the issues.

I look forward to the day when there are no longer issues that adversely affect women more than men, but still in 2016 we have a long way to go. Each year more than 100,000 people in the UK are at imminent risk of being murdered or seriously injured as a result of domestic abuse. Women are much more likely than men to be the victims of severe domestic abuse. Nearly one in three women who suffer from domestic abuse report that the first incidence of violence happened while they were pregnant and at their most vulnerable. Victims of abuse have a higher rate of drug and/or alcohol misuse. At least 20% of high-risk victims of abuse report using drugs and/or alcohol, and 40% of victims at high risk of abuse report mental health difficulties. More than 90% of these victims are female; only 5% to 10% are male. There is of course a plethora of other issues still facing women, but I found those statistics most disturbing and worrying.

Of course, it is not all doom and gloom. We see women across the world breaking the glass ceiling each and every day. As we approach our centenary in Northern Ireland, we usher in a new era under our new First Minister, Arlene Foster. She has been in post for 10 weeks, and she is securing Northern Ireland's future and leadership in a way that is unrivalled. As First Minister, she is truly exceptional. She has been through the worst of what Northern Ireland was associated with in the past and she is now at the helm, building what we in Northern Ireland hope to be associated with in the future.

When Arlene entered politics, she was directly affected by the troubles. Her school bus was blown up when she was a child, and her father, who served in the police, was shot. Arlene is no stranger to our dark days. With one eye looking to the past to learn and one eye firmly focused on the future, we have a real opportunity to make Northern Ireland better than ever. Arlene is living proof that gender is irrelevant and that equality in the workplace should be based on merit. She has merit in abundance.

This is International Women's Day, and there are many parts of the world in which women, ladies and girls do not have the necessary opportunities, whether in education or health, and in which they are often abused and raped, and end up being married at an early age. We need to be a voice for those people who are voiceless. We have two female First Ministers in the United Kingdom, as well as other female party leaders, and it is important to remember these advancements

today and to resolve to build on them in the years ahead. We need to continue to harness such role models, whether in politics, business, academia or any other field, so that the glass ceiling can be firmly broken and we can live in a world that rewards solely on merit. It has been a pleasure to participate in this debate.

6.19 pm

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) on securing this debate. It is a day not only to celebrate women and their achievements, but to highlight what still needs to be done. I praise the Government for bringing forward policies that are helping to bring about balance and fairness for women.

I will not reiterate everything that has been covered today and will cut to the chase and get to one of my main points, which is rather cosmetic, but it affects all women none the less. It is the thorny issue of ageing. I was tempted to don a grey wig to make this point today, but I believe that props are not allowed in this place. [Interruption.] Perhaps some are! Earlier in my career, I spent a lot of time as a television presenter and every day, like many women, I faced the reality of whether to show that I was growing older. The question was, "To grey or not to grey?" A woman showing signs of growing older, wrinkles and grey hair, is still perceived differently; not always, but it does happen, especially in the media.

Yesterday, out of interest, I googled many of my colleagues in the House to see what questions were most asked about them on the internet. For all the women I googled, many of whom are here, the most-asked questions by the public were, "What is their age? What is their marital status? Do they have children?" I tried the same for male colleagues and—guess what?—not one of those questions was asked about any male MP. Is that not shocking? It seems that we are not rated on experience, wisdom, knowledge or achievements, which brings me to rather a grey note to finish on. A fine head of hair of that particular hue seems to be revered among the male fraternity. I give you the names of the silver fox, Mr Clooney, and Paul Hollywood and even our own Speaker. While a few revered women, such as our Home Secretary, have adopted the style, they are few and far between.

To sum up, like it or not, admit it or not, there is huge pressure on women to conform to youthful ideals. I want to change that view and this House can help. That is what this day is all about. Let us speak up for the experience and wisdom that women bring to the table through work and, if they choose to do so, through bringing up children. Give them the reverence that they deserve. We should get away from the value judgments that are often made on the basis of our hair colour. Let us continue with the many policies that my party is putting in place to empower women and young girls, of which I have two, and let us continue to tackle all taboos.

6.22 pm

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): On around 22 June this year, I am due to become a father for the first time. While it is not yet clear whether this baby girl's middle name would best be Europa or Brexit, she will in due course become an international woman. Being born in Britain, she will over the course of her

school and working life encounter opportunities that remain almost unimaginable for many born elsewhere. She will have a mother whose science and medical background will inspire her, or put her off, careers where women have traditionally been desperately under-represented, but her father's jobs as a journalist and a politician may make her wonder why men are drawn to jobs in which the public do not believe a word that we say.

However, girls born in Britain do not only face first-world problems. While it is sometimes unhelpful to talk about a sex war in which a strain of feminism aggressively alienates men, arguments about language and presentation should not obscure the facts: seven out of 10 women say that they have experienced harassment in the street; childcare still falls predominantly on women; and men who take advantage of the Government's hugely positive changes to parental leave are likely to be a tiny percentage of the majority. Even in this place, while we talk about paternity leave, it is apparently beyond the wit of man or woman to sort out a system that works. I hope my naked self-interest does not invalidate the fact that as long as Parliament says that businesses must do as we say, not as we do, we will deserve to make little progress nationwide.

International Women's Day must surely be about one thing above all else: equality. It is about equality of opportunity for girls to study any subject they like and not those whose culture persists in saying that boys or girls specialise in certain subjects. It is about equality of access to their parents because society does not pretend that men have to go to work and women look after children. And it is about equality of access to the workplace, because it is time that we all acknowledged that men and women, Britain and the world benefit if we jointly celebrate diversity and difference, while acknowledging that each of us has strengths and that some of those may derive from gender as much as they do from background.

I do not think that the pay gap will have closed by the time my daughter is born or even before she is working, nor do I pretend that we can have so much equality that men and women will ever be equal in bearing children, but I know that unless we all—men and women—have this inequality in mind, in this place and everywhere, we will not be able to lead by example or to ask those who think they have something to lose from equality to see what, in fact, they have to gain.

6.25 pm

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): As the token man on the Women and Equalities Committee until very recently, it has been very nice to be in a minority in some parts of this place, and I feel as though I have lit my own bra many a time in support of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips).

It is an absolute privilege to be called in this debate on this really important International Women's Day. May I join in all the congratulatory comments to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) and the hon. Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) on securing this debate? I have also had the pleasure of serving a superb mentor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), the Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee. No one has championed the equality of women more than her in this place.

I want to take this opportunity to concentrate on science, technology, engineering and maths—the STEM subjects—which have been a focus of my attention since I started in this place. The statistics are staggering and speak for themselves: a 2012 survey by Girlguiding of girls between the ages of seven and 21 found that the top three careers they would choose for themselves were teacher, hairdresser and beautician; only 3% of engineering degree applicants are girls and just 6% of the UK engineering workforce are female, according to the Women's Engineering Society; and physics is the third most popular A-level for boys but only the 19th for girls. That simply has to change if we are to work towards a more gender equal society, and International Women's Day is a perfect time to highlight this issue. I know that the Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Caroline Dinenage) has spoken many a time about her passion for championing this case and the need today to end up reducing the silos within government. I pay tribute to her work and I hope that in her summing up she will be able to make that case a lot clearer.

As a man, and as someone on the Select Committee, it is an absolute privilege to be able to call to arms every single man in this country to say that standing up and championing equal rights is not just a job for women, but a job for every single one of us—it is a job for every man in our country, too. That is why I am absolutely privileged to end up speaking in today's International Women's Day debate.

6.28 pm

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): I am delighted to be able to speak in this very important debate, partly because the issue is such an important one, but also because too many women do not have a voice. We have heard some moving speeches today, but I want to spend my time highlighting some great women in my constituency, who are all great role models.

First, I wish to highlight three businesswomen: Caroline Steed, who exports her sofas across the world, including to China and Russia; Sheila Mason at Cluny Lace, which made the lace for the Duchess of Cambridgeshire's wedding dress; and Sandra Lee, who just last Friday quadrupled the size of her gift shop. When it comes to educators, Joan McCarthy exudes enthusiasm to all her students in her role as head at Saint John Houghton Catholic Voluntary Academy. There are many more women teachers I could name as being outstanding, but I wish to mention a lady who plays an important part at one of my local schools, Chaucer Junior School—dinner lady Kerry Wheatley. Kerry does far more than just be a dinner lady; she runs the school's gardening club and even takes students to the Chelsea flower show. But Kerry's enthusiasm stretches even further than the dinner table or the garden; just last Friday she was instrumental in getting the students to clean for the Queen—another great lady.

When we turn to charities and the voluntary sector, the list gets even longer. We have Holly Saunders who set up the Erewash Valley Gymnastics Club, which recently featured on the BBC's "East Midlands Today" to raise awareness of the impact of obesity on young lives. Brenda Davies is chief executive of Community Concern Erewash. Stella Scott and Linda Brown play key roles at Erewash Voluntary Action and Joe and

[Maggie Throup]

Bren are dedicated to Home-Start Erewash. They all deserve recognition. However, we must never forget the women who dedicate many years to raising our future generations, so often sacrificing their careers in support of their children.

We do not know what challenges those women had to overcome to play their roles in Erewash, but I can guarantee that they will have had to overcome some. By recognising and celebrating International Women's Day here in this place, I believe that, in a small way, we are playing our part.

6.30 pm

Suella Fernandes (Fareham) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) on securing the debate.

Raped, beaten and destitute, Sarah had nowhere to go. Aged 28, and with her young son, she faced no option other than to leave her own home. Tom, her partner, had become increasingly violent over the past year, stripping her of her self-esteem. On one occasion, he had tried to push her out of an upstairs window. On another, she awoke at night to find that he had poured methylated spirits all over her, trying to set her alight. It stopped only when their young son saw what was happening and called the police. She had tried to leave over the years, but on every occasion Tom had persuaded her that he was a changed man and that he could not cope without her. One night, though, everything changed and she realised that she could not take any more. This is not a storyline in a soap opera; this was one of my clients when I was a barrister. I was instructed late one evening to apply to the court for an emergency order to get a judge to provide her with accommodation. The move was designed to provide her with a safe place and support for her son and to keep her away from the very real threat posed by Tom.

Two women die at the hands of domestic abusers each week in England and Wales. On average, a woman will be assaulted 35 times before seeking help. In 2009, the cost to the UK economy was estimated to be £15.7 million a year. Although we need to celebrate the achievements of women, we also need to pause and reflect on the areas in which, as those statistics show, women and girls are still being failed. Although words are important, it is action that will make a real difference.

In March 2014, the Government introduced Clare's law, which is named after Clare Wood, who was tragically murdered by her ex-boyfriend in 2009. The law allows people to ask the police whether their partner has a history of domestic abuse, and it has already helped more than 1,000 people. We have introduced new domestic violence protection orders that protect victims in the immediate aftermath of domestic violence, when they are at their most vulnerable. Domestic violence is not always physical. It can be psychological and emotional, which is why we have introduced a new offence of coercive and controlling behaviour. Of course, all those numbers mean nothing to women and girls who are still suffering abuse, and it is for them that I speak today. No one in this country should live with the threat of violence or in fear of harm.

6.33 pm

Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): I look forward to the day when there is no longer any need for International Women's Day; when "Woman tipped to become next M&S boss announces she is taking maternity leave" is no longer a newsworthy headline for the *Daily Mail*; when we have 50%, not 22%, of parliamentarians across the world being women, and we no longer feel any need to measure or report the statistic; and when we do not need to discuss how to encourage more young women into science and maths.

Yes, we have come a long way. Government after Government have brought in legislation to ensure that we have equal treatment, but we are still striving for parity. Why is that? I do not profess to have the answers, but I recently read an article about a transgender person who had therefore experienced life as both a woman and a man. Ben Barres is a biologist at Stanford who lived and worked as Barbara Barres until he was in his 40s. He said that, as a woman, he often experienced bias, but when he became Ben he noticed a difference in his everyday experiences. He said that as a man, people treated him with much more respect. He noticed that he was more carefully listened to and his authority less frequently questioned. He wrote:

"The reasons why women are not breaking into academic jobs at any appreciable rate is not childcare, not family responsibilities."

He went on to say:

"I have had the thought a million times: I am now taken more seriously".

So I welcome International Women's Day, but I would welcome more a time when there is no need to celebrate it, when women are recognised and lauded for what we have done as individuals, not for our achievements as women.

6.35 pm

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): Today we celebrate International Women's Day, an opportunity to celebrate great women and also to reflect on what more we can do as parliamentarians. It is true that there are more women in Parliament today than ever before, which is primarily why it is incumbent on us to take this opportunity to ensure equality across the board.

Women's rights are human rights, yet when it comes to employment, women repeatedly suffer discrimination. We have seen Women Against State Pension Inequality campaigning vigorously for transitional arrangements.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): Does the hon. Lady agree that there is a compelling need for the Government to resolve the WASPI issue through transitional protection, perhaps with an announcement in the Budget next week?

Angela Crawley: Absolutely. I would wholeheartedly welcome an announcement in the Budget next week that the Government will make transitional arrangements for those women.

We have heard about the issues of pensions, employment and domestic violence. I recognise the powerful contribution of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips), which highlighted the fact that too many women lose their life to violence every day.

On welfare, more women than men are lone parents and carers, a fact that must be recognised. The Government must ensure support for those women. There are many gaps that need to be addressed before we have full gender parity. I have called on the Prime Minister to take five key actions for International Women's Day. First, the rape clause in the Welfare Reform and Work Bill must be scrapped. A woman who has a third child as a result of rape will be required to justify her position to a Government official in order to claim tax credits. That proposal is abhorrent. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss), who has campaigned tirelessly against it, and I support her efforts unequivocally. I hope the Government will remove that barbaric proposal.

I have urged the Prime Minister to ratify the Istanbul convention and to take serious action to tackle violence against women. Every day in the UK, women lose their life to physical violence. Ratification of the treaty would not only co-ordinate the policies of Government, local authorities and charities, but would send a clear message that the UK is committed to tackling all forms of violence.

The tampon tax must be scrapped. Labelling women's sanitary products a luxury item is ridiculous. Those items are a necessity, so an additional VAT charge is wrong. Instead of the Government forcing the European Commission's hand to lift the unfair tax, women will continue to pay that charge, and as a result continue to pay for their own services. We must remove that unfair tax, and the UK Government must use the money to support services.

We must also take firm action on the gender pay gap. The Scottish Government have committed to 50:50 by 2020, to encourage public sector, third sector and private sector companies to ensure equality on boards. The Scottish Government plan to legislate to ensure that public authorities with more than 20 employees will publish information on that. I hope the UK Government will consider that, as the current threshold of 250 employees is not good enough to tackle the gender pay gap in the way that they hope it will.

Unlawful maternity and pregnancy discrimination is more common in Britain's workplaces than ever before, with many women being forced out of their employment. The Government are trying to help people into work, yet they are introducing employment tribunal fees that may be a barrier to many women tackling rogue employers. The Government must look at those fees and challenge discrimination in all its forms.

I have presented those five points to the Prime Minister. We need deeds, not words, and I urge the Government to take those recommendations on board. As parliamentarians, let us be bold in delivering the kind of society we want to achieve—a more equal future for everyone. Let us deliver it—it is possible.

6.39 pm

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I start by congratulating the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies), the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) and my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) on securing today's debate. I also thank the Backbench Business Committee for making time available for it and all the Members who have participated, women and men, for their contributions.

The debate has been an important opportunity to celebrate women's achievements and share in an ambition that exists around the world to achieve gender equality, not only as a matter of justice to women but as a prerequisite for a successful, prosperous and peaceful future for our world. Equality for women is not a zero-sum game that means men must lose out if women do well. Whenever women are poor, insecure and unsafe or disempowered, everyone suffers—families, children and communities. When women do well, by contrast, society thrives; health, educational attainment and economic performance all improve. That is why our ambition of gender equality in every country is so important.

Of course, we have made great strides forward, especially here in the UK. Women are achieving educationally, professionally and in public life in ways that our grandmothers could not have dreamed of. More women occupy senior positions in business, in the professions and in sport, as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Christina Rees). We have choices that were denied to previous generations of women.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Kate Green: I will not, if my hon. Friend will forgive me, because I am very short of time.

As we have heard today, there is still a long way to go. There is a long way to go on economic equality, as we heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart), my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh), my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff), who talked about gender pricing, my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury), who talked about the importance of our membership of the European Union in protecting women's economic position, and many other hon. Members. We heard about the gender pay gap, which is nearly 20% higher in this country than the European average, and about the average apprenticeship wage for young women being more than £1 lower than it is for young men. We heard about women being trapped in low-paid sectors such as catering, caring and retail. We heard from many hon. Members about the disproportionate representation of men in STEM jobs, and we heard that the disadvantage that women experience in the labour market feeds into their poverty in retirement.

No one who was in the Chamber this afternoon can have failed to be moved and appalled by the names read out by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) of women who are among the two killed every week in this country by a partner or former partner. We heard from hon. Members throughout the House of many other appalling examples of gender-based violence. We heard from the hon. Member for Fareham (Suella Fernandes), my right hon. Friend the Member for Slough, who talked about the violence endemic in prostitution, and the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry), who talked about breast ironing, a new and horrific form of abuse that has arrived in this country. We also heard about female genital mutilation. Although we did not hear much about this today, we should also remember the special circumstances of lesbian and transgender women who suffer appalling gender-based violence.

[Kate Green]

The right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan) and the hon. Member for Wealden (Nusrat Ghani) rightly talked about cyber-abuse. I join the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) in urging the Government once again to consider introducing compulsory sex and relationships education.

May I make a special mention of the contribution of the right hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman), who spoke up for detained refugee women? Their plight in a civilised country is something that shames all of us. I was proud to sit in this Chamber this afternoon and hear her speak out on behalf of those women. It is a cause that we must continue to champion together.

We also heard that this Parliament has, pleasingly, seen the highest level of representation of women that we have ever had. However, as many hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Eastleigh, my hon. Friends the Members for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) and for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) and the hon. Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), said, we still have some way to go. When just 29% of our MPs are women, it is clear that our Parliament continues to fall a long way short of reflecting the population of our country.

Given the contributions that we have heard this afternoon, I am pleased that the sustainable development goals, to which we, along with all other countries, are signatories, include a goal dedicated to gender equality and women's empowerment. The sustainable development goals are not just for developing economies but apply to every country, including the UK. As we celebrate International Women's Day, we recognise that the challenges women face here at home are the same as those faced by our sisters everywhere. For sure, there are differences of degree, but not differences of kind. We have heard some shocking examples—the plight of the Yazidi women, women in Saudi Arabia and the girls kidnapped by Boko Haram—but the pattern of poverty, inequality, inadequate representation and gender-based violence exists in every country. As the challenges are the same worldwide, we can learn from and support each other to achieve solutions. We can work together to ensure that we embed gender equality into every aspect of our policy and practice.

I know that the Minister shares my passion for gender equality, and I am sure she will take the opportunity today to reaffirm the Government's commitment to systematically addressing gender inequality, wherever and whenever it arises. As we sign up to the vital sustainable development goals, I hope she will say that they will shape and underpin policy right across Government—both domestic policy and the way we use our influence and share learning with others internationally.

I also hope that Members will today affirm our determination that this debate will take place every International Women's Day—in this Chamber and in Government time, as the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham suggested, in solidarity with our sisters around the world and as a measure of our resolve to place gender equality at the heart of our politics.

In conclusion, Madam Deputy Speaker, may I take this opportunity to wish you, all right hon. and hon. Members, and our sisters and brothers around the world a happy International Women's Day?

6.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinenage): May I, too, start by congratulating the right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House who secured the debate? I congratulate everybody who has taken part. We have had outstanding and excellent speeches from male and female Members from across the House.

I am pleased to be able to chart the significant progress that has been made under the Government. There are now more women in work than ever before. There are more women on boards than ever before. There are no all-male FTSE 100 boards. There are more women-led businesses than ever before—about 1 million small and medium-sized enterprises in the UK are women-led. The gender pay gap is the lowest on record and has virtually been eliminated among full-time workers under the age of 40. While it is important to celebrate how much progress we have made, we must be clear that, in today's society, there is no place for any pay gap. The theme of this year's International Women's Day is the pledge for parity, and I am delighted the Prime Minister has pledged to close the gender pay gap within a generation.

It is vital to the Government that our economy benefits from the talents of everyone, and that everyone is able to fulfil their potential in the workplace, regardless of gender or background, so this year the Government are taking a bold step. We will redouble our efforts to complete the fight for equality, starting with the introduction of regulations to require large employers to publish their gender pay gaps. By working with businesses and employees, with a focus on transparency, I am confident that we will begin to see results.

The gender pay gap usually starts in the type of work that women do in the sectors in which they typically end up. As we have heard in some of today's excellent speeches, occupational segregation is particularly apparent in the science, technology, engineering and maths sectors, where jobs carry a significant wage premium, but a shortage of girls and women are entering them and working their way to the top. We are working closely with schools and businesses to deliver initiatives such as the STEM diversity programme to address that.

Crucially, our work on girls' aspirations is about dispelling the myth that there are girls' jobs and boys' jobs. There are, simply, just jobs. Last year we published guidance entitled "Your Daughter's Future", which empowers parents and teachers to support girls in making decisions about subject and career choices, free from gender stereotypes.

There is also much more that we can do to support women in their careers and in achieving their potential. Women now lead about 20% of UK small businesses, which are the lifeblood of our economy, yet they are still setting up businesses at about half the rate of their male counterparts. The Women's Business Council estimates that if women started businesses at the same rate as men, there would be 1 million extra businesses, yet research tells us that many women say that they lack the confidence, or perceive themselves to lack the necessary skills, to be able to do that.

We must not let the fear of failure hold back talented female budding entrepreneurs from achieving their full potential. That is why we continue to fund the £1 million

women and broadband programme, which has been incredibly successful. In fact, many of our women and broadband projects across the country, from Durham to Devon, are themselves celebrating International Women's Day.

We have also endeavoured to address the issues that are most pertinent to women in work. From the introduction of the right to request flexible working, to shared parental leave, we are helping women to achieve a better balance between work and motherhood. Realistically, however, women's caring responsibilities rarely end when their own children fly the nest. The challenge of balancing care with a fulfilling career can often become most acute in the later stages of a woman's working life, whether they are caring for an elderly relative or for grandchildren. Let us not forget the remarkable sandwich generation, either, who are somehow doing both. We need to find ways to support them all. That is why the Women's Business Council has established a working group on older workers and will consider what business can do to support them. We have also invested money in nine pilots across England to explore ways to support carers to balance work and caring responsibilities. When we talk to women—and men—it is clear that, on work-life balance, childcare is the most important issue. That is why we are investing more than £1 billion more a year on free childcare places.

Turning to parity of representation in politics and public life, we come full circle. We know just how valuable female role models can be to young girls and women—raising aspiration is vital to the talent pipeline. We all take great pride in being part of the most gender diverse Parliament in British history. The Government are committed to improving the public appointments process and have set an aspiration that 50% of new appointments should go to women.

Equality, however, is about more than just economic parity—protecting women and girls from violence, and supporting victims, are also key priorities. The list of murdered women at the hands of domestic violence that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) read out earlier makes that argument more powerfully than any speech. I wholeheartedly agree with her that the voices of those murdered women must remain at the forefront of effective Government policy making. Our new violence against women and girls strategy, which was published today, will focus on service transformation and prevention.

We are also working with partners such as the PSHE Association to ensure that schools have access to safe, effective and high-quality resources. We have launched the next phase of our teen relationship abuse campaign, Disrespect NoBody, which encourages young people to think about their views on violence. We have funded the revenge porn helpline and the Freedom charity, which educates schoolchildren and their teachers about forced marriage.

We have made significant progress since 2010, including by criminalising forced marriage and revenge porn, as well as strengthening the law on domestic violence. We have strengthened the law on female genital mutilation so that it includes mandatory reporting and introducing FGM protection orders.

Tom Brake: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Caroline Dinenage: I will not. I am desperate to give the hon. Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) an opportunity to conclude the debate, because she did so well to secure it in the first place.

Let us celebrate today how far we have come and the achievements of past years, but at the same time we need to redouble our efforts to do more to close the gender pay gap and to ensure that no woman is deterred from achieving her aspirations and realising her potential. No woman should feel that she has to live her life in fear because of her gender.

6.54 pm

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): I thank all the participants in the debate and the Backbench Business Committee for the time that it allocated. The right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) touched on the battle—it was a bit of battle, I must say—that we had to ensure that the debate was held in the Chamber. I took a deep breath when it was suggested that we hold the debate in Westminster Hall, although the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) was a little more generous than me—subtlety was never one of my strong points. The number of Members from both sides of the House who have spoken today, on International Women's Day 2016, in this passionate debate showed that we were right to hold the debate here in the Chamber.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) highlighted the women who have been killed by men since International Women's Day 2015, reading out 121 names. Internationally, five women are killed every hour, so during this debate 15 women have been murdered. That is a sobering thought. The hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Mrs Grant) talked about Boko Haram and the “Bring Back Our Girls” campaign, and said that there would be a renewed emphasis on that issue. We must never forget the women and girls who have been murdered, killed or kidnapped, or who are still missing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) highlighted the gender differentials. My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) mentioned the Yazidi women who have been captured and raped. My right hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) mentioned prostitution and trafficked women, and she talked about the motion. The motion took a while to write, because so many issues could have been included that it was difficult to know what to focus on. A common theme that has come out of the debate is that the abuse of women is always used as a weapon of war. Whether it be in gangs, wars or other violence, women and young girls are always used and raped. We must never, ever forget that.

I have a little bit of a confession to make. Last night, I was thinking about the Chancellor in bed—[*Laughter.*] It is true. I was thinking that he has a deleterious effect on women, and I am fearful about next week's Budget.

Mr Jim Cunningham: On that subject, surely the Chancellor could take a step in the right direction on International Women's Day by looking at transitional arrangements for women who were born after 1951.

Dawn Butler: Absolutely. We have to do more on the transitional arrangements for women. The situation is not fair and it is just not right.

[Dawn Butler]

As I say, I worry about the Budget next week. It sometimes seems as though revenge is being taken against women, because 81% of the cuts made in this Parliament will affect women. In UK households, 744,000 individuals are on zero-hours contracts, and the majority of those people are women. In 2007, 62,700 equal pay claims were made. We all know, as has been said in the debate, that women are not being treated better at work, but only 9,621 equal pay claims were made in 2014-15, because of the changes that have been made to the law.

Twenty per cent. of small and medium-sized enterprises are led by women. Women often start their own businesses to ensure that their worth is acknowledged, and the number who do so increases every single year. Forty-nine per cent. of lone parents are on prepayment meters, which means that they pay more, and that contributes to household debt. Guess what? The majority of lone parents are women. As I have said, 744,000 people are on zero-hours contracts, and the majority of them are women. Would it not be great if we could outlaw zero-hours contracts in this Parliament?

We in this House have a duty to ensure that we make laws that are not harmful to women. We have to empower women in this place; that is our duty. As has been mentioned, PSHE is an important part of education. It sets the foundation in schools, from a very early age, for constructive relationships. In my opinion, it should be compulsory.

I thank the House for the way in which the debate has been conducted, and I thank the Backbench Business Committee again for granting it.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House expresses its solidarity with International Women's Day; notes with concern that, despite women making up 51 per cent of society as a whole, more progress needs to be made in electing women to Parliament, as well as in establishing equal pay and parity between men and women in positions of leadership; and calls for greater action against FGM and other practices that are harmful to women.

Mrs Miller: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. We have just had a very powerful, thought-provoking and emotional debate, thanks to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) and many other Members who have contributed this afternoon. By my reckoning, 38 right hon. and hon. Members contributed to the debate, and not everybody was able to get in. What advice can you give me about talking to the relevant authorities to ensure that, in the future, we are able to secure an even longer debate? We are grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for supporting today's debate, but I think that there is a great case to be made for having even longer to discuss an issue that is relevant to every single Member of the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): I think that the right hon. Lady has just made that point to the relevant authorities, and I think they have heard it. Just for confirmation, 38 Members spoke, and everybody who wanted to get in did get in. It was very tight at the end, and I am grateful to hon. Members for keeping to such a tight limit, but everybody did get in. I thank you all very much, and I thank the right hon. Lady for her point of order.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

FINANCIAL SERVICES AND MARKETS

That the draft Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Regulated Activities) (Amendment) Order 2016, which was laid before this House on 22 February, be approved.—(*Sarah Newton.*)

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN UNION DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 119(11)),

EU MEASURES TO COMBAT TERRORISM

That this House takes note of European Union Document No. 14926/15, a Proposal for a Directive on combating terrorism and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/475/JHA; endorses the Government's decision not to opt in under Protocol 21 on the Position of the United Kingdom and Ireland in respect of the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice annexed to the EU Treaties; and supports the Government's approach of working with other Member States to support our international partners and strengthen the international response to the threat from terrorism, recognising that national security is a matter for individual nations through their sovereign Parliaments.—(*Sarah Newton.*)

The Deputy Speaker's opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 9 March (Standing Order No. 41A).

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 119(11)),

EU ACTION PLAN FOR THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

That this House takes note of European Union Documents No. 14972/15 and Addendum, a Commission Communication: Closing the loop—An EU Action Plan for the Circular Economy, No. 14973/15 and Addenda 1 and 2, a Proposal for a Directive amending Directives 2000/53/EC on end-of-life vehicles, 2006/66/EC on batteries and accumulators and waste batteries and accumulators, and 2012/19/EU on waste electrical and electronic equipment, No. 14974/15 and Addenda 1 and 2, a Proposal for a Directive amending Directive 1999/31/EC on the landfill of waste, No. 14975/15 and Addenda 1 to 3, a Proposal for a Directive amending Directive 2008/98/EC on waste, and No. 14976/15 and Addenda 1 to 3, a Proposal for a Directive amending Directive 94/62/EC on packaging and packaging waste; and supports the Government's continuing efforts to amend these proposals in order to secure measures increasing resource efficiency and reducing waste whilst avoiding costs to business, householders and Local Authorities which are disproportionate to environmental and economic benefits.—(*Sarah Newton.*)

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

Tobacco Levy

7.1 pm

Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab): Cuts to public health funding mean that vital stop smoking services are being closed down. Such closures are preventing smokers from accessing the most effective way to make them quit. Some 16,112 people have agreed that smoking inflicts a massive financial burden on our

country, costing society approximately £13.9 billion each year in England alone. The petitioners therefore request that

the House of Commons urges HM Treasury to make the tobacco industry pay for the damage they cause by introducing a tobacco levy to help fund Stop Smoking Services and advertising campaigns to help people quit.

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of residents of the UK,

Declares that cuts to public health funding mean vital Stop Smoking Services are being closed down; and further that these closures are preventing smokers accessing the most effective way to make them quit.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges HM Treasury to make the tobacco industry pay for the damage they cause by introducing a tobacco levy to help fund Stop Smoking Services and advertising campaigns to help people quit.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P001675]

Third Crossing (Lowestoft)

7.3 pm

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): I would like, on behalf of my Waveney constituents, to present a petition calling on the Government to fund the construction of the third crossing of Lake Lothing in Lowestoft. A strong, compelling and evidence-based business case has been prepared, and it is vital that work starts on this much-needed bridge as soon as possible.

The petition, which has 10,049 signatures, states:

The petition of residents of Waveney,

Declares that the decision to build a new crossing over Lake Lothing in Lowestoft is agreed with all possible speed; further that there is significant local support for a new crossing; and further that the new crossing would positively impact upon the local economy in Lowestoft and the surrounding area.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to confirm funding for the project in order for construction to begin as soon as possible and be completed by 2020.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P001676]

Hinkley Point C Reactor

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Sarah Newton.*)

7.4 pm

George Kerevan (East Lothian) (SNP): We have just had a good debate on International Women's Day and we are about to discuss nuclear power, so I would like in one sentence to remember Marie Curie, who did all the basic work on radioactivity, Lise Meitner, who discovered uranium fission, and a lady who hon. Members probably have not heard of, Leona Woods Marshall Libby, who was the first person in charge of building a large-scale nuclear reactor. Unfortunately she had to wear baggy clothes to hide her pregnancy in case she got fired.

I am interested in the Hinkley Point C reactor partly because I have an EDF nuclear plant at Torness in my constituency, and nothing that I say tonight should be taken as anything other than deep respect on my part for the management and staff at that plant. I am also interested in this subject because I am a sometime energy economist. This debate is not about arguments for and against nuclear power; it is about the fact that the Government have been keeping Parliament in the dark—I use that word advisedly—on the crisis in the EDF board. I heard the Minister of State speaking on the radio this morning. She gave the usual line that it will be all right on the night, but it will not.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this important debate. Is he aware—perhaps he will refer to this—that the project and finance directors for the Hinkley Point C project have stood down in the last month, and one stood down earlier this week? There is no working model in western Europe for the Hinkley Point nuclear reactor.

George Kerevan: I am aware that two senior members of EDF have quit their jobs. More to the point, I have been in touch with members of the EDF board in France—I trust the Government have too—and as we speak, at least one third of that board are in favour of a moratorium on a decision to go ahead with the Hinkley Point C reactor until at least 2019.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): As my hon. Friend will know, part of the EDF board is made up from trade unions. It was pointed out to me earlier today at a lunch for stakeholders in the energy industry, that it is ironic that a UK Tory Government are being lectured by French trade unions on financial responsibility at Hinkley.

George Kerevan: If my hon. Friend has been reading the French media over the past few days he will know that it is not just the French unions. Practically the entire French media are now referring to Hinkley Point and the EPR reactor as the “English threat” to EDF.

Hinkley is the biggest power project we have ever seen, at £25 billion and rising. Under our current energy plan we are dependent on it to deliver 7% of the UK's generation capacity, at a moment when our capacity margins are close to zero. Having mortgaged the UK's energy future to Hinkley C, the Government have failed

[George Kerevan]

consistently to keep Parliament informed about the crisis on the EDF board, up to and including last weekend when the person in charge of the company's finances—the chief financial officer—was in effect forced to resign because of his resistance to going ahead with this project.

If a major UK engineering company had a contract with the Government, and its chief financial officer was opposed to that contract and was fired, imagine the scandal there would be. However, the Government are happy to stay quiet while the senior management of EDF are removed in order for the project to go ahead.

James Heapey (Wells) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman concede that the chief executive of EDF, both in the UK and France, has been consistently committed to the project, as indeed have the UK and French Governments? I am not quite sure what else it is we might like to know in this House, given that that commitment has been unanimous and unstinting.

George Kerevan: I am aware of that—that is the problem. Why is there a revolt on the board? It is not just the trade union members. It is true that a third of the EDF board is allocated to union members, union representatives and staff representatives. They are in favour of nuclear power, but they are worried about the impact on the company's future. Why is there a vote? Why was the chief financial officer against this? EDF has a negative cash flow. Its debts are twice its company valuation. Its share price has halved in the past 12 months. How is it paying its dividend? It is doing so by issuing more shares and giving them to the shareholders. Imagine how insane that is.

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): Every point the hon. Gentleman has made is right, but insofar as the company is underwritten by its main shareholder, the French Government, the issues he raises are peripheral.

George Kerevan: I think the hon. Gentleman has summed up the incredible state we have got ourselves into. Somehow, it will be all right on the night. Somehow, the French Government are going to bail out the United Kingdom's energy policy. I can assure Conservative Members that that is not going to happen. What is going to happen is the following: at some point, I suspect with pressure from the British Government, what is left of EDF's board and senior management will override the resistance of the minority on the board and green light construction. They will green light construction at a point where EDF cannot guarantee it has the funds to complete building the reactor. At some point, there will be a crisis and who is going to pick up the pieces? I can assure the House that it will be the United Kingdom taxpayer, not the French taxpayer.

Philip Boswell (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP): Having previously worked in the industry, like the hon. Member for Warrington South (David Mowat), in contracts management, I looked at Hinkley C online. While forms of agreement have been agreed as far back as October 2015, they are just a vehicle for project delivery. The design phase determines the project. As we appear to be about to enter the detailed design

phase, this stage gate requires a more robust estimate to assuage investor concerns. Clearly, that has not happened. Does my hon. Friend agree that, given the very public challenges the project faces if it ever starts, the forecast practical completion date of somewhere between 2023 and 2025 is highly unlikely?

George Kerevan: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. Originally, the two Hinkley C reactors were designed to be off-the-shelf copies of the reactor being built by EDF in Normandy. That has not happened. There have been significant changes. In fact, the way the EPR reactor has to be built—on site, piece by piece; it will be unique—leaves massive margins of error for cost overrun. Who is underwriting any cost overruns? The Chancellor of the Exchequer has given a partial capital guarantee that if there is any problem in the construction phase, the British taxpayer will start to pick up the bill.

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend accept that of EDF's two reactors under way in Europe, there have been huge cost overruns in Finland where the reactor is nine years late, while the one in Normandy is four years late?

George Kerevan: Yes, that is entirely true. That is the point. If we look at who is actually responsible for having got us into this financial hole, do I detect yet again that it is the Chancellor of the Exchequer? We are here not out of an energy policy issue, but because the Chancellor wanted to keep the construction costs of £25 billion and rising off the national book. He wanted to keep it off the debt. For the first time ever in the UK, we are trying to build a new reactor with a new reactor design by putting all the risk on to the private sector. This project is too large and the technology is too unproven for that to work. The Chancellor is digging himself a big hole to protect his rickety plan to keep down the deficit and pay down the national debt, but it will not work. At some point in the next 10 years, we will be back here discussing a bail-out.

That is what I am trying to get across. A significant number of EDF board members know that the project cannot be financed through private capital. Even if EDF could raise the £12 billion or £18 billion—its share for building the Hinkley C reactor—it would need four, five or six times that to complete its programme of reactor life extensions in France. The sum total is colossal for a company already dripping with debt. Unless the French taxpayer is prepared to underwrite all of that, which is highly unlikely, something will have to give, and let me assure the House that it will be not EDF's reactors in France but this project. It will disappear into the wide blue yonder.

The problem is that by 2025, when the two reactors are not on-stream, we will have closed down the 10 coal-fired stations that the Government announced would be closed last November, just before the Paris climate change conference, and suddenly we will have a huge gap in the 2020s—even worse than now—in our capacity to generate electricity. That will all be because we have mortgaged ourselves to an outdated approach to energy, which is to build gargantuan nuclear reactors that cost the earth—literally and financially—and which cannot be underwritten by the private sector because of the risk. The Government have manifestly been trying to

pretend otherwise, and that is ultimately why they are refusing to come back regularly to the House to explain what is going on. They are hoping for the best.

I want the Minister to tell us what discussions have been going on with the board, when we might see the decision to go ahead with construction and what will happen if we do not get a timely agreement to go ahead. What happens if the board delays and delays until 2019? Is there a plan B?

Philip Boswell: Will my hon. Friend also ask the Minister whether, given the current constraints and pressures in the industry, she foresees the current negotiated strike price of £92.50 being renegotiated—the only way being up?

George Kerevan: Of course, the strike price is subject to certain qualifications. Were EDF to build the reactors and make a vast profit—the strike price is more than twice the current cost of electricity and there is an increment for inflation—there would be a clawback. If it makes a profit beyond what was originally envisaged, some of the money would come back to the British taxpayer. The clawback was insisted upon and enlarged by the European Commission, so it was interesting listening to the Minister this morning on the radio, given her position on the UK leaving the EU. It was in fact the Commission that tried to stand up for the British consumer. That is one reason I will be voting to stay in the EU.

I have made the basic point, so I shall draw to a close.

David Mowat: The hon. Gentleman is making the case that the EDF board, which, with others, produces 70% of France's electricity from nuclear power, is incompetent. Is it his position that the board of Hitachi is equally incompetent, given that it is also planning to build nuclear power stations in Britain, or has it not got as far as the SNP in its analysis of the practicality of the whole thing?

George Kerevan: I cavil at the word “incompetent”. The board's decision has become politically charged. That is the point. The UK Government are desperate to continue with the project because everything is hitched to it and because it keeps the cost of building Hinkley C theoretically off the books—although it cannot remain so in the long run—and the French Government are committed to it because EDF is in a major financial crisis and they want to protect its reputation and give it a chance to grow out of its problems. If we make such decisions political, however, we make bad decisions—that is my point. It is strange that I have to lecture the Conservative Government on that.

Some of the senior management of EDF, knowing the difficulties, want to delay and want to get the funding in place. It was because the chief officer wanted the funding in place that they got rid of him. How can that be so? Aside from politics and differences on nuclear power, cannot the Government and the Department of Energy and Climate Change see the problems that they are getting themselves into? All they come back with is “It will be all right on the night”.

Ms Ritchie: What does the hon. Gentleman think of the fact that the French project in Flamanville and the Norwegian projects have hit construction problems?

George Kerevan: Both the Flamanville reactor and the reactor in Finland have run into trouble. The EPR reactor was designed to be super safe, but it involved loading technology on top of technology, with the result that it has to be built in situ. It cannot be built, as other reactor models can, in the factory with bits getting moved in. Building in situ means that each and every single EPR has been different and that the economies of scale that were meant to make the projects cost-effective have gone. That is why it is becoming very difficult for EDF to raise the money commercially to do the funding. The technology is questionable, the funding is questionable and there is Government interference.

All I am saying ultimately is that this Parliament needs regular updating in an honest and serious way so that we know where we are. We also need a plan B because this antediluvian and obsolete method of approaching how to fund large-scale and huge energy projects by putting all the eggs in one basket runs a risk. Perhaps because the Government are frightened to own up to that risk, they hide—and if they hide, it just means that the problem will be even greater in the future.

7.21 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Andrea Leadsom): In the same tone as the hon. Gentleman, I would like to draw attention on International Women's Day to the fact that Dame Sue Ion was on “Desert Island Discs” as the first woman to be awarded the very prestigious president's medal by the Royal Academy of Engineering and she is herself a nuclear expert. I am sure that all hon. Members will be delighted to hear that today of all days.

I thank the hon. Member for East Lothian (George Kerevan) for securing this debate, which gives me the opportunity to put forward the Government's vision for Hinkley Point C. HPC is a matter of national importance for our energy system, and it is only right that it should be discussed in this House. However, let me point out that we do not put all our eggs in one basket. Far from being the only game in town, as the hon. Gentleman suggested, it is part of a balanced mix of energy sources that includes renewables and fossil fuels. It is absolutely vital that we stick to our plan for energy security and decarbonising at the lowest price to consumers.

Returning to HPC, there are numerous approvals processes for a project like it, many of which have already been completed. These include state aid; the approval of a funded decommissioning programme to cover the costs of managing waste from HPC, which is included in the contract for difference; planning approval; and grid connection. Some other processes will continue up to signature of the documents. Looking ahead, HPC will need to comply with the UK's robust nuclear regulations—among the most stringent and safest in the world.

However, the key to this project is the funding package that has been negotiated with the developer. It is this, I think, that the hon. Gentleman had in mind when calling for this debate, and I intend to focus my remarks on it. The short answer to the question he raised is that the timing of Government's final approval of the deal is dependent on EDF being in a position to make a final investment decision. As he is aware, this is ultimately a commercial matter for EDF. In the UK, it is for developers

[*Andrea Leadsom*]

to fund, build and operate new nuclear power stations. I would like to take this opportunity to explain what this Government are doing to expedite the successful conclusion of this landmark deal.

Callum McCaig (Aberdeen South) (SNP) *rose*—

Andrea Leadsom: I shall not give way for a while; I am slightly short of time and I have important points to make. I will give way later if there is time.

Let me first remind the House of the reasons why the Government have supported the development of Hinkley Point C, and how we have ensured that this is a good deal for Britain. New nuclear is needed, alongside renewables and fossil fuels, because nuclear is the only non-renewable low-carbon technology that is currently proven and can be deployed on a large scale to provide continuous supply. Most existing nuclear plants, which currently meet about 16% of our energy needs, are due to close by the late 2020s. Without new nuclear build, the share of nuclear generation could dip to 3% in 2030. Britain is a world leader in civil nuclear, through our skills base, our infrastructure and our regulatory regime. Hinkley Point C will keep Britain at the forefront of nuclear development.

Government policy has determined that the new plant should be financed and built by the private sector. The Government have worked closely with new-build vendors and industry to develop a number of initiatives to maximise both the capability and the economic benefits to the UK. That goes far wider than Hinkley Point C—industry has set out proposals to develop 18 GW of new nuclear power in the UK—but the first step in this long-term plan is Hinkley, which will be the first new nuclear power plant to be built in the UK for 20 years, and which will blaze a trail for further nuclear development.

Once it is up and running in 2025, Hinkley will provide 3.2 GW of secure, base-load and low carbon electricity for at least 60 years, meeting 7% of the UK's energy needs. That is enough to power 6 million homes, twice as many as there are in the whole of London. Hinkley will give an enormous boost to both the local and the national economy, providing 25,000 jobs during construction, as well as 1,000 apprenticeships. The plant will provide employment for 900 permanent staff once it is up and running, contributing £40 million a year to the local economy.

Having visited Bridgwater recently, I can tell the House that there is a real sense of excitement about the project. EDF has not been complacent; it is digging away. It has back runs, and the whole site has been levelled. There is big investment in the local community, and local people are very supportive of the project.

EDF believes that at least 60% of the £18 billion value of construction work on Hinkley will go to UK-based businesses. Through our negotiations, we have ensured that consumers will not pay anything for the electricity until the plant is generating, so the risks of construction will be transferred to the developer. At the same time, we have ensured that mechanisms are in place to enable any construction underspends or profits above a certain level to be shared with consumers. If the project comes in under budget, savings will be shared with consumers, but if there are overspends, the developer will bear all the additional costs.

As I have said, we need new nuclear, and Hinkley Point C will pave the way for a new generation of nuclear plants in the UK in a cost-competitive way, thanks to the unique deal that we have negotiated.

Callum McCaig: In the context of that “unique deal”, may I ask the Minister, as the final decision approaches, for a cast-iron guarantee from the Government that the strike price of £92.50 will not be increased?

Andrea Leadsom: As I have explained, the strike price has been agreed, and we expect a final investment decision in the very near future.

The deal has already been through a number of rigorous approvals processes, both within the Government and within the European Union. In October 2013, the Department of Energy and Climate Change and EDF agreed the strike price for the electricity to be produced by Hinkley Point C. In October 2014, the European Commission approved the Hinkley Point C state aid case, following a lengthy and rigorous investigation by the Commission. Notwithstanding the ongoing opposition of a small minority of member states, we are confident that the decision is legally robust and will stand up to challenges.

In October 2015, EDF and its partner of 30 years, China General Nuclear, signed a strategic investment agreement in London. That commercial agreement set out the terms of EDF's partnership in the UK with CGN, starting with Hinkley Point C. EDF and CGN agreed to take a 66.5% stake and a 33.5% stake in Hinkley respectively. At that point, the final form of the contracts was agreed in substance. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made it clear at the time that she would make her final decision on Hinkley once EDF had reached its final investment decision.

The Government's position has remained unchanged while the final details of the contracts have been ironed out. In November, we set out that we expected to conclude the deal in the coming months, and the Secretary of State made it clear that she was minded to proceed with the contract for difference support package for the deal, subject to any change in circumstances. We remain confident that all parties are firmly behind Hinkley Point C and are working hard towards a final investment decision. We have received assurances from EDF and the French Government—EDF's largest shareholder—on this point. Hinkley is a large investment for EDF and CGN, so it is only right and proper that they take the necessary time now to ensure that everything is in order so that they can proceed smoothly once they have taken a positive final investment decision.

James Heapey: Does the Minister share our impatience, however, at the delay in the decision? Will she perhaps use this opportunity to encourage EDF to make all haste in arriving at that final investment decision?

Andrea Leadsom: I hear my hon. Friend, and I can tell him that we are ready and keen to proceed as soon as EDF announces its final investment decision. However, this is a commercial matter, and it is for EDF to finance Hinkley Point C and to deliver that final investment decision. We are aware of the financial issues it is dealing with, and we remain in regular contact with the corporate leadership of EDF and with the French

Government. We have been assured by both that they are taking the necessary steps to reach a final investment decision as soon as possible. We are confident that this is a matter of when, not if. Specifically, we have been reassured that the resignation of the EDF finance director will have no impact on the timing of EDF's final investment decision.

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): I just want to correct something that was said earlier. The finance director has always been opposed to this. This is not new or strange. I have spent nine years dealing with this as the MP for the area, and I can tell the House that this has come as no surprise at all. I just wanted to clarify that point for the Minister of State.

Andrea Leadsom: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that clarification.

Last Thursday, 3 March, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister met President Hollande at the UK-French summit in Amiens, France. The French Government gave a public commitment that EDF is currently working to take a final investment decision in the near future, with the full support of the French Government. We expect that a final investment decision can be achieved within a few weeks. Once EDF announces that it has taken a final investment decision, all parties will be in a position to sign the contracts and detailed investment documents within a matter of weeks. EDF's chief executive officer, Jean-Bernard Lévy, has also reassured us that EDF is still on track to pour the first concrete at the Hinkley site in 2019 and to start generating electricity in 2025.

Philip Boswell: The Minister spoke earlier about safety. At Sellafield, engineers estimate that it will cost about £50 billion over the next 100 years to clear up buildings B30 and B38. Will she tell us how much has been set aside for the decommissioning of the Hinkley Point C project, and where that money is going to come from?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman knows that that is a completely different matter. I see him nodding his head—he knows he is being mischievous. He also knows that the full cost of decommissioning Hinkley point C is included in the contract for difference—*[Interruption.]* It is included. It is a requirement of new nuclear to have a fully costed decommissioning programme included in that way.

The Government remain committed to conducting this deal in an open and transparent manner. We intend to honour the commitment made in this House by the previous Secretary of State to place the contracts—with only the most commercially sensitive data redacted—and the value for money assessment for Hinkley in the House of Commons Library once the documents have been entered into. This is a good deal for the British public, and it is one that the UK Government remain committed to. I thoroughly commend the project to all Members of this House.

Question put and agreed to.

7.33 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 8 March 2016

[SIR ROGER GALE *in the Chair*]

BACKBENCH BUSINESS

Welfare of Young Dogs Bred for Sale

9.30 am

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Looking at the number of colleagues present who wish to take part in the debate, I am minded to impose immediately a time limit of four minutes on speeches, other than that of the mover of the motion. That will allow 10 minutes for each of the three Front-Bench spokesmen, whom I shall call at 10.30 am, with a little injury time in the case of interventions. Once Dr Cameron has spoken, I will endeavour to be helpful to colleagues and give an indication of the order in which I wish to call them.

9.31 am

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the welfare of young dogs bred for sale.

I am delighted to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. It is a privilege to have secured this debate. This is an issue I feel very strongly about, having had rescue dogs in my family since childhood, and it is one on which there is overwhelming support from the public across the UK.

I would like initially to thank the organisations, many of which are represented here today, that work tirelessly on animal welfare and have supported this debate. They include the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the Dogs Trust, Marc the Vet, the Blue Cross, Pup Aid and the Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, to name but a few. There are three important strands to this debate that I will cover: the breeding, trafficking and sale of young dogs. I know that other Members are keen to contribute, and I will therefore aim to be concise.

In terms of what is most visible to the public—the sale of young dogs—there is a real issue with puppies being sold in pet shops on our high streets. That is a long-standing issue, which was debated in this House only last year. The sale of dogs in pet shops gives the impression that they are mere commodities and does not afford them their status as man's best friend.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing the debate. Can she inform the Chamber of the position relating to Scotland's powers on the breeding and sale of dogs? Have the Scottish National party Government looked at this issue and are they going to act?

Dr Cameron: I am pleased to inform the hon. Lady that the Scottish Government are currently looking at this issue. I will touch on that later in my speech.

The sale of dogs in pet shops badges them as commodities and does not give a clear message to the public that a dog is for life. Pet shop puppies are often removed from their mothers too early, separated after just four weeks. Many have been reared in puppy farms, which many notable recent reports have exposed as unacceptable in terms of their animal welfare conditions. Puppy farms do not foster good care, socialisation or attachment with mothers, and we know that those issues contribute to poor temperament in dogs and an increased likelihood of illness and disease. That is not good for puppies, and it is not good for the public.

The high street is not, in my view, the place to buy a puppy. Selling puppies on the high street fosters puppy farming and puppy trafficking. It also leads to impulse purchases, where the household may not be best suited to the dog, nor the dog to the household. That is a very poor start. I am not alone in my view: polling indicates that 90% of the public do not wish to buy a puppy that has been reared on a puppy farm. People are often doing so unknowingly when they buy on the high street.

Numerous recent reports on puppy farming indicate an overwhelming lack of care and concern for basic animal welfare. Mothers who are used excessively as breeding machines for profit purposes are then discarded or even killed when no longer of any use. They are kept for their whole lives in cramped, unhygienic and often horrendous conditions that make us weep.

Puppy farming and trafficking is, however, big business. Recent studies indicate that, in the European Union, trade in cats and dogs is worth £1.3 billion annually. In 2015, 93,424 dogs were imported into the UK from the EU. The RSPCA indicates that in the past year, 30,000 dogs were imported to the UK from illegal farms in Romania, Hungary, Poland and Lithuania, and 40,000 came from Ireland.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate. This is an animal welfare issue, but it is also linked to serious and organised crime. Does she agree that if we are to tackle it, we should do so from a welfare point of view, but also from a crime point of view?

Dr Cameron: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point. I feel extremely strongly about this. Having looked at the literature, it is clear to me that this is organised, professional and big business, and we must make concerted efforts to address it.

The RSPCA petition to scrap the puppy trade was signed by 50,000 UK citizens, with 82% of people surveyed indicating that they wanted the puppy trade scrapped. The petition highlighted the fact that a licence is needed to sell scrap metal, but not to sell man's best friend. Concerns have also been raised by ferry companies and port authorities in Stranraer in Scotland and beyond that puppies brought in from the EU under puppy passport schemes often have no microchip, health certificates or rabies vaccines. That goes beyond animal welfare; it is organised and surely poses a public health risk.

Legislation must be fit for modern day society, where many transactions, including the sale of dogs, take place via the internet. The Pet Advisory Action Group indicates that, in conjunction with the authorities, it has had to remove 130,000 inappropriate adverts regarding

[Dr Lisa Cameron]

animal sales. We must reform our system so that it is fit for purpose and so that welfare requirements are universal in our modern society.

We know that to develop into a healthy, well balanced dog, puppies must be reared in natural environments. It is recommended, including by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, that puppies remain with their mothers for a minimum of eight weeks after birth. That must be properly enacted and monitored to protect dogs, ensure puppy development, attachment and socialisation, and reduce the incidence of aggression, illness and premature death. All responsible breeders should abide by the best standards and take pride in doing so. The “Where’s Mum?” campaign, supported by the public, highlights those issues and argues that puppies should only be purchased from a breeder when the mum is present and standards are adhered to.

The journey of a puppy should also be tracked from birth by registration and microchipping. Disreputable breeders ignore guidelines but often go unpunished, which only reinforces their behaviour. Guidelines indicate that dogs should breed no more than six times in their lifetime, and the Kennel Club’s recommendation is no more than four times. The Kennel Club reports that one in five pups bought in pet shops needs veterinary care or dies before they are five months old. They become sick due to the sickness of our system.

We are aware that animal welfare legislation is a devolved issue but close collaboration is needed to ensure that we get this right across the board and across the nations of the UK. In Scotland and England, further consultations are under way. The Welsh Assembly introduced additional animal welfare legislation in 2014. I ask that all Governments across the UK view these issues with the gravity they deserve. Actions, not merely words, are required.

I request today that the Minister consider the following. We need a public awareness campaign, co-ordinated across the UK, outlining how to recognise best practice in dog breeding and providing the public with guidelines on how and where to buy puppies reputedly. We are looking for leadership on this issue directly from Government, and I would advocate that concerned citizens contact their MP or Member of the devolved Assemblies and ask them to champion that.

We need stipulations that those selling a puppy must have licences with adequate welfare conditions attached, and we must reduce the threshold for a breeding licence from four litters to two, as recommended. The construction and monitoring of a national database of puppy sellers is required to ensure the enforcement and checking of welfare conditions. The microchipping and recording of all puppies for sale is needed to ensure welfare and consumer confidence. Internet advertisers must also display the licence number of the puppy seller so that the puppy journey can be checked.

On welfare, the minimum age of selling a puppy at eight weeks should be not just recommended, but clarified and made mandatory. The principles of the assured breeders scheme must be enacted. Guidance under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 needs to be updated to prohibit the sale of puppies from pet shops or retail premises, and training and increased resource for local authorities

should be provided to ensure that regulations are randomly monitored and enforced. Reporting on the monitoring and conviction rates of rogue puppy dealers and traffickers is needed. The public require action.

We must tackle the sale and trafficking of illegally imported puppies. Key agencies require regular shared intelligence across the EU and a published strategy that is monitored, enforced and reviewed. Visual checks must be routine for dogs entering the UK. That is required not just on welfare grounds, but on public health grounds, as outlined.

Angela Smith: I have listened very carefully to what the hon. Lady has said. I am glad to hear of a consultation by the Scottish Government, but I do not see, in anything she has said a clear commitment from them to do all the things that she is demanding of the UK Government—the Government relating to England. Is she saying that the Scottish Government will do all the things that she is outlining today?

Dr Cameron: I am saying that these are the issues that I wish to be taken forward across the UK, so that there are commensurate animal welfare policies right across all the devolved Governments and in the UK Parliament. I would not seek to pre-empt the outcome of any consultations, but this is certainly an issue that I feel strongly about. It is an issue I have brought to the House and I hope that the Governments will take it on adequately, given what I believe to be the gravity of the situation.

In conclusion, there is cross-party support on this issue. More importantly, there is widespread public support. Fundamentally, we are here to represent our constituents, not to enable big businesses trading in puppy maltreatment. The public demand and deserve action—meaningful action—on the welfare of young dogs bred for sale. We claim to be a nation of animal lovers; it is time that we walked the walk, because at this moment—today and tomorrow—puppies are being maltreated in this country by rogue breeders, traffickers and traders. We must put a stop to it.

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): I said that I would try to indicate the order in which I will call Members to speak, so I shall do so now. In a moment I will call Sir David Amess and then, in the following order, Angela Smith, Jim Shannon, Drew Hendry, Jim Fitzpatrick, Margaret Ferrier, Liz Saville Roberts and Danny Kinahan. That should leave sufficient time for the Front Benchers to reply if everybody adheres to the four-minute time limit and does not take too many interventions.

9.44 am

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I congratulate the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) on her introduction to the debate; I wholeheartedly agree with everything she said. I hope she will not take offence, but as you and I know, Sir Roger, having debated this matter many times, unfortunately every time the House comes to an agreement on it, clever individuals try and get round the law. However, with our excellent Minister present today, I am sure that this will be a groundbreaking debate.

Puppies are cute, but they grow up and then perhaps they are not so cute. I utterly condemn unlicensed breeders, as articulated by the hon. Lady. I also want to step into more controversial areas: I am not very keen on what I call “designer puppies”. To me, that seems to have increasingly got out of hand, and of course there are health issues there.

The illegal practice of the puppy farm trade affects the whole of the United Kingdom. Unfortunately, in my county of Essex, an investigation was launched by the RSPCA last June into a puppy farm, as there were serious concerns about the owner selling underweight and ill dogs and not providing the right paperwork to buyers. Although the owner has insisted that no puppies are bred on the premises and the council has confirmed that the owner is covered under a pet shop licence, the grey areas surrounding the licensing laws make it very difficult to know whether these operations are legal or to check whether the welfare of the puppies is of a responsible standard.

The excellent RSPCA reported over 3,500 calls on puppy farms in 2015, which was a 122% increase on the last five years. Many of those calls included people complaining that their puppies had become ill after they had been bought, as the hon. Lady said. I absolutely agree with everything that she said about the number of litters that should be allowed and think that the number of ill puppies that are being sold is totally reprehensible.

I do not want to start a row about membership of the European Union, but the importing of puppies from Europe to the UK has soared in recent years, due to the change in EU law in 2013 to allow the free movement of people’s pets—perhaps that is another reason to leave the EU. According to the RSPCA, the British puppy market has changed in the past three years, with the number of imported puppies increasing to over 60,000 puppies a year, coming from places such as Ireland, Lithuania and Hungary. That leads to puppies not being vaccinated against diseases and showing behavioural problems due to the transit conditions from the continent to the United Kingdom. EU regulation No. 576/2013, which intended to strike a balance between allowing the free movement of people’s pets for holidays or dog shows and ensuring that diseases such as rabies are contained, has simply not worked.

In conclusion, what can be done to tighten the rules and regulations of the puppy trade in the UK? I welcome the review by DEFRA of animal licensing, which recommends changing the legal framework, which, in some parts, is outdated and preceded the internet age. Furthermore, compulsory licensing ought to be implemented for anyone selling a puppy—including commercial breeders who breed two or more litters a year—setting out clear requirements for the vendor, such as clearer sales information on any online puppy adverts, and more transparency for consumers on the puppies they buy online. That could be achieved by having model licensing conditions for puppy breeding and selling to provide better harmonisation between local authorities. To mitigate the illegal trade in puppies from the continent, surveillance at ports to catch and prosecute puppy dealers should be intensified to ensure that puppy dealers are not evading import controls. Most importantly, there should be a revision of the current European Union regulation on the free movement of pets.

9.48 am

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger, especially on a subject on which you have so much expertise. It is a pleasure, too, to follow the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess), who is absolutely right to say that we have debated this issue many times, including in the main Chamber, where we had an excellent debate on it only two years ago.

I want to restrict my comments to illegal importation. The pet travel scheme—otherwise known as PETS—was set up to allow companion animals to enter the UK without the need for quarantine, as long as the owner complies with the rules of travel and the animal involved has a valid pet passport. I think we would all agree that since the scheme’s introduction, it has allowed many owners to take their pets away on holiday and helped reduce the need for pets to be placed in quarantine for many weeks, reducing stress both for pets and owners.

Unfortunately, however, the scheme is open to abuse, the level of which is now causing significant concern. There is clear evidence that the illegal importation of puppies into the UK is a major problem, especially when one considers that the practice is often coupled with the sale of puppies online through classified websites. The need to reform the scheme has been recognised, and I want to acknowledge that on the record. I welcome the recent changes that have seen the introduction of measures to improve security and traceability of passports, and a new minimum age of 12 weeks for rabies vaccination. However, I contend that more needs to be done.

In its second investigation into abuses of the scheme by commercial smugglers, Dogs Trust found yet again that dealers in Lithuania are regularly importing puppies illegally. It has also been found that there is a problem with Romania and Hungary, where vets and unscrupulous breeders are regularly exploiting loopholes in the scheme to import puppies illegally into the UK.

Adequate enforcement of PETS is part of the problem. It is left to carriers, ferry companies and Eurotunnel to enforce it. A Dogs Trust investigation reveals the inadequacy of the checks that are carried out or example, there is no obligation for carriers to do even a sight check of the animals being imported. In fact, there are various problems, one being that the owner can scan a chip that may not belong to the dog, and may not be embedded in the animal.

Not only are buyers here in the UK being duped into buying puppies that they are told are UK bred, but they often spend considerable sums on these animals. Tragically and most importantly, these puppies often suffer serious stress and illness because of the way in which they have been bred in those countries and conveyed into this country. Welfare standards are just not being met.

What do we need to do about this? I am pleased that the Minister has started a broad consultation on the breeding and sale of dogs and that that includes online sales, which are a huge part of the problem. Illegal importation is not good for anyone. It is not good for pet owners, it is not good for legitimate puppy breeders who work to high standards and most of all it is not good for the puppies. I hope that the Minister will come up with a meaningful response today, especially on illegal importation. We need visual checks of all dogs entering the UK and more rigorous enforcement and

[Angela Smith]

penalties, such as fixed penalty notices or on-the-spot fines, to make sure the problem is tackled effectively before more dogs suffer and more owners are duped into buying dogs that are supposedly UK bred.

9.52 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) on securing this debate on this important issue. It is always good to come to this Chamber and say what we have done as a devolved Administration. The Minister will be aware of that because I am sure that he will have done his homework before coming here, as will the shadow Minister. The Northern Ireland Assembly has introduced legislation to make wonderful and important changes to animal welfare rules. My party is committed to that, has shown great concern about it, and has championed legislation and activism.

My hon. Friend the Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) launched our party's animal welfare policy about a year ago and we have taken steps to make Northern Ireland a zero tolerance country for those who seek to abuse animals. With great respect, Sir Roger, as so often happens, Northern Ireland leads the way legislatively and sets standards for other parts of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to follow.

In addition to introducing legislation, we have created public awareness campaigns throughout the Province to highlight the issues, making those who wish to report abuse aware of how and where to do so, and those who abuse animals aware that their time is up. The Democratic Unionist party supports the creation of a centrally compiled banned offenders register, which I think we should share across all the regions of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland, one of our neighbouring countries. The hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow also referred to the movement of animals, so let us have a relationship and an offenders list that take in the Republic of Ireland.

Just last month, our plans were put into action with an amendment to Stormont's Justice (No.2) Bill. Under the amendment, the maximum sentence that can be handed down in the Crown court for animal cruelty crimes will increase from two years to five, sending a clear message to those who abuse animals. As the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) said, much more needs to be done. There is evidence to show that removing puppies from their mothers through sale or theft has a detrimental impact on the welfare and wellbeing of the puppies. How that affects pups is important.

There is an issue when selling puppies because of the inherently negative impact on their health, welfare and behaviour. Infection and disease in puppies removed from their mothers before weaning is commonplace. These puppies have underdeveloped immune systems and are often sold to the public with infections such as, Parvovirus, Campylobacter, Giardia, kennel cough and hip dysplasia. Those are just some of the problems animals may have. Just last week, I was made aware that

puppies can be bought on Google and eBay with absolutely no control. Again, I would like to hear what the Minister has to say about that.

Inbreeding and lack of health testing leaves puppies prone to painful hereditary conditions that may be life limiting, and when someone buys a puppy, they want to know that it is healthy and well. On lack of socialisation, it is important to have interaction and communication between human and animal so that behavioural issues can be addressed. Transportation of puppies, which the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow mentioned, from breeding establishments to licensed pet shops, poses an immense health and welfare risk. Again, enforcement must be part of the process. Acclimatisation of puppies to new premises before they are sold is necessary, otherwise they are exposed to the risk of disease. That must be addressed.

I have spoken about retail outlets. Poor health and behavioural issues also result in dogs being relinquished to the rescue system and possible euthanasia by owners who are unable to cope.

In conclusion, what we have done in Northern Ireland sets a pattern for the rest of the United Kingdom. I hope that the shadow Minister and the Minister will respond to that positively. Animal cruelty and theft have no place in a civilised society. Although it seems to be only now that real and coherent action is being taken, it is encouraging to see the successes I have mentioned. We look forward to more of that.

I apologise to the shadow Minister and the Minister for having to leave to go to the Defence Committee.

9.56 am

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) on securing this important debate. As I have indicated, unfortunately I will have to leave before the end of the summing up due to a ministerial meeting, but I would like to underline and back up the comments so far about this trade.

It is impossible not to have an emotional reaction when seeing a puppy. They give us a warm feeling and we are automatically attracted to them so they are easy to sell. It is also easy to blind others with barriers against how they have come to be available for sale. One has only to look on the internet to see the booming business of so-called designer puppies and young dogs. It has never been easier to buy a puppy.

Despite that, puppy farming has been illegal in the UK since the 1970s. Scotland has taken additional steps through our Licensing of Animal Dealers (Young Cats and Young Dogs) (Scotland) Regulations 2009 to restrict further the sale of young cats and dogs and to ensure the welfare of any puppies that pass through a dealer. From 6 April this year, it will be compulsory for all dog owners in Scotland to microchip their dogs.

I agree with the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) about designer dogs, which is a growing issue. Dogs should be bred for the benefit of dogs, not for fashion. Mixed breeds, such as Jack Russell terriers crossed with pugs, which are called "Jugs", may

sound attractive, but are not necessarily a good thing. The consequences of mixing different genes will come through in time, perhaps with serious health problems and defects resulting in high vet bills, which owners may struggle to meet, not to mention the long-term suffering the dog might endure. I disagree with the hon. Gentleman about the benefits of being in the European Union, because last month it introduced new resolutions to end the illegal trafficking of pets. That is a direct benefit us being in the EU.

The RSPCA received over 3,500 calls about puppy farms in 2015, which is a 122% increase from five years ago. Many were from people complaining that their puppies had become ill after they had been bought. The RSPCA claims that criminal gangs can earn £2 million annually from the puppy trade. That is also a cost to the taxpayer. A puppy farmer's main objective is profit. As we have been told, to maximise their profit, they typically separate puppies from their mothers too early, and keep the dogs and puppies they breed in insanitary conditions.

Mr Kevan Jones: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we also need to target some of the big breeders? As he rightly said, this issue is not just about welfare, but about organised crime. A targeted approach by DEFRA and other agencies, targeting some of the big breeders, would make big inroads into the issue.

Drew Hendry: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I agree that there should be some targeting and, if it is not possible to get these people on other things, perhaps the Al Capone principle should come into effect and we should catch them for tax evasion.

As I was saying, the breeders breed the puppies in insanitary conditions and fail to follow breed-specific health schemes or to apply basic, routine health measures such as immunisation and worming. As a result, puppies bred by puppy farmers are more likely to suffer common, preventable infectious diseases, painful or chronic inherited conditions, behavioural issues because of poor early socialisation, and shorter life spans. According to Battersea dogs home, fewer than 12% of puppies born in Great Britain every year are bred by licensed breeders; 88% of puppies born in the UK are born to unlicensed breeders.

Angela Smith: The Kennel Club has asked the Scottish Government to endorse its assured breeders scheme and to prohibit the sale of puppies in pet shops. Can the hon. Gentleman give us a view on what the Scottish Government will do to respond to that?

Drew Hendry: I would have to look in detail at that, but I can say that pet shops do have to be licensed and they now account for fewer than 5% of puppies sold. I am sure that, as part of the consultation, further measures will be taken. It is important to say that there is a common purpose here across the piece. We do not necessarily need to make this a party political issue. There are issues on which we agree about the welfare of puppies and other young animals and about the long-term welfare of the families who are looking after them as well. We can come together across the political divide on this issue, and I am sure that there will be a warm reception for any suggestions that can improve our ability to clamp down on this illegal trade.

Puppy farms are places where dogs are often bred in filthy conditions and, as I said, with very little human contact. Female dogs, or dams, are often discarded when they are unfit to breed anymore. As we have heard, a dam may be forced to have litter after litter of puppies, even though the recommendation is for only two to four. That can be quite a traumatic experience for the animals involved.

There needs to be a focus on Government help to fund rehoming centres, such as Dogs Trust and Battersea, which are actively working to end illegal breeding. It should be illegal for a puppy to be taken from its mother before the age of eight weeks. There should be stricter licensing by local authorities. Online adverts absolutely should carry the details of the licence, and we must continue to inform and educate people that puppy farms and the illegal importation of puppies will result in a generation of pets that are likely to have health problems and to suffer in the long term.

10.3 am

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Sir Roger. I congratulate the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) on securing this important debate. I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry). I thank colleagues at Dogs Trust and Battersea dogs and cats home for their briefings and, like my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith), who is also my colleague on the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, I want to concentrate on the trust's briefing on the illegal importation of puppies into the UK under the pet travel scheme.

Since the introduction of the scheme, Dogs Trust has found that it is being used as a cover for the illegal importation of puppies for commercial sale. In 2014, the trust's undercover investigation, "The Puppy Smuggling Scandal", found evidence of puppies being brought into the UK for sale via PETS from both Lithuania and Hungary. Despite changes to the scheme in December 2014, including the requirement for member states to carry out non-discriminatory checks, the problem continues, with the second investigation in 2015, "Puppy Smuggling: The Scandal Continues", identifying that the changes have not been the deterrent that they were intended to be, with the trade continuing from Lithuania and Romania.

Dogs Trust tells me that it is conducting a pilot scheme with Kent trading standards to pay for the quarantine costs of any puppies that they seize at the border, in the hope that that will disrupt the trade. Last year, more than 3,000 dogs were imported into the UK from Hungary under PETS. From Lithuania, 2,000-plus dogs were imported, and more than 2,000 were also imported from Romania. However, those figures represent only the dogs that have been declared. The trust cautions that many more undeclared dogs are entering from those countries and others.

Despite the trust's work to raise awareness of this illegal trade, it is concerned that little progress is being made in tackling the problem. This is a very important point, to which I would like the Minister to respond: during the pilot, it has not received any details about the puppies that are handed over to it and, as a result, it

[*Jim Fitzpatrick*]

does not know whether the pilot is disrupting the trade because it is unsure where the puppies have come from and how they have been found. Dogs Trust would like to know, first, what assessments the Government have made of the Dogs Trust pilot quarantine scheme and, secondly, how effective the Government believe that that scheme has been at disrupting the illegal importation of puppies under PETS.

Dogs Trust makes four recommendations. First, if there is to be real progress in tackling the ever growing problem of illegally imported puppies, the UK's key agencies need to share intelligence. Secondly, visual checks, as raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge and others, of all dogs entering Britain will help to ensure that they are healthy, not underage and match the information given in their passport. Thirdly—this was also raised by colleagues previously—there should be immediate sanctions such as fixed penalty notices or on-the-spot fines that are large enough to act as a deterrent for those found to be illegally importing puppies. Fourthly, there should be a crackdown on vets who supply fake pet passports, through work with the veterinary regulatory authorities in the countries that import puppies into the UK.

Battersea raises a number of points, mostly on domestic matters. It welcomes the consultation launched in December 2015 by DEFRA and the progress that has been made, but it raises a number of issues and statistical anomalies to which I hope the Minister might be able to refer. The Minister is held in high regard—he knows that—and we would be very grateful for his responses. We look forward to his comments and those of other Front Benchers.

10.6 am

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I might “litter” my speech with a few dog puns, but if you think any of them are a bit “ruff”, I will understand if you have to “paws” the proceedings to “collar” me.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) for securing this important debate. It is often said that the UK is a nation of dog lovers, although the pedant in me would point out that we are four nations. That is salient, as it is important to bear it in mind that these animal welfare matters are devolved. Although my speech today is made in London, the points that I raise are just as pertinent in Edinburgh, Cardiff or Belfast.

I think that the scale of the problems associated with the breeding and trade of young puppies would shock most people. The RSPCA estimates that anywhere between 700,000 and 1.9 million puppies are sold each year in the UK. About 60,000 puppies are imported, as we have heard, from other European countries. Only 70,000 puppies are born to licensed British breeders. That massive shift in how the industry operates has it operating much more like an industry, and anyone who has ever taken on the responsibility of raising a pup will understand why that is so damaging.

In the first eight weeks of life, a pup needs to be mentored by its mother and, in playing with littermates, will learn important lessons in behaviour and interaction.

Those few formative weeks are crucial for a pup to grow up balanced, confident and healthy. Unfortunately, many of the puppies mass-bred and reared purely for profit are denied that, and disease is an inevitable consequence. There are major issues, too, with the import of puppies, as we have heard. However, not all people who sell puppies are irresponsible. I acknowledge that there are many very capable, principled and accountable sellers and breeders.

There are simple things that prospective puppy purchasers can do to ensure that they are not, as it were, being sold a pup. They should always see a pup with its mother. They should ensure that it is not being sold when it is younger than eight weeks old, and it is important that they understand what they are letting themselves in for and educate themselves about the animal's welfare needs. Most important, they should not buy a pet on impulse; it is a serious commitment.

I know that the UK Government are consulting at the moment. I hope to see serious consideration given to restrictions and regulations to address the issues discussed today, and I hope to see similar action from the devolved Administrations. There is a great need for the nations to work together to tackle the trade and to ensure that rogue dealers are not able to evade the law by crossing a border. I would like the Minister and the responsible Ministers in the devolved Administrations to give serious consideration to measures that could ensure that puppy welfare improves across the UK.

The licensing of puppy sellers and breeders needs to be looked into closely and there needs to be greater surveillance at ports to catch and prosecute puppy smugglers. Many measures can be taken, and a far-reaching consultation involving key animal rights and welfare charities will highlight many others. I thank hon. Members for taking the time to listen to my contribution. If they will permit one last dog pun, I will tail off my speech now.

10.10 am

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Diolch yn fawr, Gadeirydd. I thank the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) for securing the debate.

It is worth remembering that it is now 15 years since the foot and mouth outbreak, so we should be alert to animal welfare and health. Unlike foot and mouth disease, a number of particularly unpleasant and possibly fatal diseases are transferrable between animals and people. Some are passed directly from dogs and other mammals to people, and others involve parasites.

One disease that causes concern to vets and doctors alike is echinococcosis, which is transmitted by a type of tapeworm. The disease causes cysts in people's livers and lungs that may require surgery to remove. It presently affects 1 million people worldwide and the particular species of tapeworm is increasing in range and numbers across the continent. It is worth mentioning that the UK chief veterinary officer has expressed concern about the disease.

Another serious risk is rabies. The rabies virus attacks the brain and, unless treated during the incubation period, it is fatal. The World Health Organisation estimates that someone dies every 15 minutes from rabies and that 40% of victims are children. Some 99% of cases in

humans are caused by dog bites. However, the rabies risk must be considered proportionately because the disease is completely preventable if dogs are vaccinated against the virus. Vaccination against rabies is therefore a critical requirement of the pet travel scheme.

In December 2014, changes were brought in that stated that puppies must be at least 12 weeks of age before they could be vaccinated against rabies. The vaccination requires three weeks to take effect, which means that no puppies under the age of 15 weeks should be entering the UK. Surely that needs to be clarified in Government advice about pet travel and, more importantly, must be enforced properly. No dog with any risk of carrying rabies should be allowed to enter the UK, which would mean extending the waiting period for travel from three weeks to three months.

Sir David Amess: I understand that the problem of puppy farming is a very serious issue in Wales. Would the hon. Lady advise the House whether the Welsh Administration have debated the subject in the past year?

Liz Saville Roberts: I have to answer completely honestly: I do not know. However, issues regarding dogs, including their welfare and how they are treated with electric collars, have been taken very seriously. I will find out and come back to the hon. Gentleman.

Dogs Trust has been supporting overwhelmed trading standards officers and port authority staff in Kent by stepping in to care for illegally imported puppies that are seized by funding their veterinary treatment and quarantine fees. The pilot scheme has been in operation for only three months, yet it has had to deal with 100 illegally imported puppies, and the charity believes that that figure is just the tip of the iceberg.

Although some puppies were so ill that they did not survive, many have been saved, socialised and found loving homes at great cost to the charity, with one puppy requiring veterinary care costing in the region of £5,000. The sickly puppy was destined to be sold online and its new owner would have been dumped with that hefty bill had the charity not stepped in. The scheme receives no Government funding at present and is due to be reviewed in May.

Consider what is likely to happen if Dogs Trust were to cease funding the care of those puppies. What incentive is there for local authorities and port authorities to prioritise issues such as dog smuggling at a time of ongoing budget cuts and concerns over the movement of people? How are they expected to identify a 15-week-old puppy? What incentive is there to seize puppies when it will only result in extra costs?

I have been very kindly informed that the subject was last debated in the Welsh Parliament in December 2014. I am most grateful to the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) for informing me of that, as hon. Members will appreciate that I have been concentrating on the topic of rabies.

If traffickers are caught, they can abandon puppies at the border. Regardless of the fact that dogs are living creatures, in law they are simply property. Surely, many traffickers are making regular journeys through the Eurotunnel. Could agencies not share information such

as car registrations? Such cars must be going back and forth, and must be seen regularly. Surely that information could be used and we could make better use of it.

I call on the Government to respond to Dogs Trust's proposed actions regarding the pet travel scheme; to share intelligence about those caught illegally importing puppies across agencies; to ensure that proper visual checks on dogs entering the UK are undertaken; and to ensure that key staff to have the expertise to assess the health and age of dogs. That last point is an important one. Vets may not be at hand, and the critical point is to know the age of the dogs—staff must be able to age them.

Dogs Trust also proposes that the waiting period for a rabies vaccination is extended to six months to safeguard against the disease's incubation period—we should at least have a full discussion about that—and that sanctions such as fixed-penalty notices are imposed to deter the dog smuggling trade.

10.15 am

Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) on securing this debate, in which I am pleased to speak. I did not want to have any puns in my speech but then realised that I wanted to say, "It's quite nice to be tail-end Charlie", which is one of the better speaking positions.

I thank all the people who work so hard on animal welfare in the devolved Administrations and here. In particular, I thank Dogs Trust for bringing the issue to my attention. I am deeply ashamed when I hear that 40,000 dogs—various numbers are mentioned—come from Ireland, through Northern Ireland, into Scotland and into the trade here. My main drive today is to call for us all to work together and to set up some mechanisms to make it possible for us to stop the trade.

I asked a written question on the pet travel scheme in January. The answer I received stated that 184,000 dogs came here under the scheme in 2012, and that the figure went up to 267,000 dogs in 2015. However, the number of quality assurance checks decreased from 6,070 in 2012 to 4,863 in 2015. Over those years, we did fewer checks although more animals came in.

The numbers we hear about differ between speakers. We are told that there are 9 million dogs in the UK and that some 900,000 puppies may be needed each year. That is why we have to deal with 70,000 coming in illegally. I ask that all the devolved countries work together.

As the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) mentioned, legislation was introduced in Northern Ireland in 2013 that works on breeding establishments based on three breeding bitches having three or more litters a year. That is the way we have been dealing with the issue, but that is different from the recommendations we heard earlier. We must adopt something that works. There are nine councils and there is one council inspector in each whose job it is to check, so we do not even cover it. In Northern Ireland, crime is still linked to the troubles of the past. There is not just puppy farming, but fuel laundering and cigarette trading. A whole mass of things are going on and puppy trading is part of the criminal world.

[*Danny Kinahan*]

Coming back to my main point, we must start working together, and sharing information and data. That includes working with the Irish, who work phenomenally well with us on other major crimes. We must learn from the issue and look at how we deal with advertising, including on Gumtree and Google, which just makes dog trading look easy. We do not know where those dogs have come from, what diseases they are carrying and how they are looked after. Think of the poor things travelling long distances.

While I am here, I will keep banging on about the need for the Union to work together. It is not just about little Northern Ireland. It is about Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and all the parts of England working well and ensuring that we deal with things together. We need a Committee or a group that meets at least twice a year so that we can work together, share information and deal with the matter.

Everyone adores their animals. Dogs, particularly, are a great love. Every year our little Mid Antrim Animal Sanctuary in my patch does a draw. Hon. Members might expect that small numbers of tickets are sold, but 8,500 are sold every year. The sanctuary does a wonderful job. However, going around knocking on doors, we can see how many dogs are probably illegal. We need to deal with the problem together.

10.19 am

Graham Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): I will be brief, as I have just an odd few comments. I congratulate the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) on securing this important debate. Pets are an emotive issue. They have affection, they develop relationships and they understand torment and mistreatment. However, the purchase of dogs seems all too easy, particularly from overseas breeders but also from domestic breeders. There is a real issue here.

The 2013-14 figures, the most recent available, in my Hyndburn constituency were drawn to my attention under freedom of information. Seventy-one dangerous dogs had to be put to sleep—rescued from their owners but then destroyed—and 525 had to be kennelled. Those figures are absolutely appalling, and a lot of those dogs are pit bull types, and so on. They are trophy dogs that are bought from breeders, both domestically and internationally. That ease of access between breeders and disgraceful, poor owners is causing the problem we need to address. Breeders should not be easily able to supply dogs to people who are clearly inadequate in looking after such pets. The Government should look at that. Something should be done, because to see so many pets put down is disgraceful, to be honest.

Not enough information is provided to some dog owners. Besides tougher regulation, we need to do something about some of the breeders. I have a Sealyham terrier. He is a small dog, but he is difficult to breed. Sealyham terriers have an eye disease, and if they are not cared for, and if the eye disease is bred and re-bred through generations, further dogs bred from the parent suffer, too, and are imported. There is not enough regulation of dogs and the diseases that they carry, such as through dog passports and checks on breeders to ensure that their dogs are healthy before they breed and

before they put them on Gumtree or wherever for sale into the United Kingdom. There is an issue with disease and the breeding of disease into breeds. Pet owners in the United Kingdom buy such dogs in all good faith, only to find when they take their dog to the vet, that there is a serious issue.

Many issues in this industry need to be considered, and I am deeply concerned that we do not seem to be a nation of pet lovers any more. I see so many dogs being destroyed in my constituency alone, and I hate to think what the figures are for the United Kingdom. I will draw my comments to an end on that sad note.

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): Members have been extremely prudent in their time conservation, so if the Front Benchers act in similar vein, Dr Cameron should have a few minutes at the end to wind up the debate.

10.23 am

Dr Paul Monaghan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (SNP): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) on securing this debate. She has raised an issue that touches the hearts and minds of many people living in Scotland and, indeed, the rest of the UK. We have heard powerful arguments that have attempted to give voice to the plight of young dogs that have been bred in appalling conditions, removed from their mothers early and exported, sometimes thousands of miles, to be sold as pets to unwitting owners who are ignorant of the suffering and torment that the new member of their family has experienced.

The Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, of which I am a member, recently reported on greyhound welfare. While conducting that inquiry, my colleagues and I encountered many accounts of dogs being bred in poor conditions and smuggled across borders for sale as puppies, whereas other animals, having been deemed unfit or too old to race, were transported abroad for breeding or other activities so horrific that I can scarcely begin to imagine their torment. We live in a cruel world.

I know that the Minister takes a keen interest in animal welfare. Backstreet breeding is the unregistered, unauthorised and unlicensed breeding of dogs, and it has much in common with puppy farming. Unseen, but commonplace across the UK and elsewhere, mothers live miserable lives in sometimes squalid conditions and are forced to produce litters repeatedly without respite, so that their puppies can be sold for easy money. Exhausted and under-socialised, such dogs are all too often thrown on to the streets once they have served their purpose.

My hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) noted that puppy farming has been illegal in the UK since the 1970s. Anyone involved in the large-scale production of puppies without being licensed, or without fulfilling licence conditions, can already be prosecuted under existing UK legislation. Scotland, as we have heard, has taken additional steps through our Licensing of Animal Dealers (Young Cats and Young Dogs) (Scotland) Regulations 2009 to further restrict the sale of young dogs and to ensure the welfare of any puppies that may pass through a dealer or pet shop.

The Battersea report on breeding licensing exposes the ineffectiveness of the current system. The law states that a licence is required if more than five litters are produced in a year and/or if dogs are sold commercially. The report notes that there are only 895 licensed dog breeders in the UK, and 40% of those breeders are located in just 6% of local authority areas. A third of local authorities do not have any licensed breeders. Some 90% of licence applications each year are renewals, rather than first-time applications. Licence fees vary greatly, from £23 in Glasgow to £741 in Lambeth. Only 12 licensed breeders are registered in London, a city of more than 8 million people, of whom on average a quarter, or 2 million, are dog owners. Less than 12% of puppies born in the UK each year are bred by licensed breeders, who produce an estimated 67,000 puppies each year. Those facts prompt the question as to what the current system is for, given that it is clearly not achieving what is expected. Nevertheless, it has been identified that the trade in puppies within England and Scotland has significantly increased over the past 10 years. The main areas of increase relate to the importation of pups into Scotland from eastern Europe and Eire.

The Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals advises me that pups from eastern Europe are predominantly high-value breeds such as British bulldogs, pugs and French bulldogs. Those points have also been made by the hon. Members for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) and for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick). The countries involved include Romania, Hungary and Lithuania. The average price of a pup imported from eastern Europe is between £1,000 and £1,500.

The increase in imported dogs from Eire is most notable in new crossbreeds such as labradoodles. Research shows that a large number of dog breeders have been established throughout the Republic. Premises are both licensed and unlicensed for the purpose of breeding, and some are known to have more than 1,000 breeding bitches—this is dog breeding on an industrial scale. Evidence obtained by the SSPCA reveals that pups are being transported from the Republic through the north of Ireland and into Scotland via ferries at Cairnryan, a point made by the hon. Member for South Antrim (Danny Kinahan). From there, the pups are transported throughout the UK, with little consideration given to welfare by dealers intent on making a profit. Pups can quickly become ill, often with fatal consequences, among a group of animals with already compromised health due to breeding conditions, lack of vaccination and stress, having been removed from their mothers at an early age—a point eloquently made by the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts).

Enforcement by the SSPCA has evidenced efforts by breeders to maximise the value of their pups by subverting attempts to trace dogs back to the Republic. For example, pups are not being microchipped, which is a legal requirement in the Republic, and they are not being vaccinated. Unvaccinated pups, as we have heard, are at risk of developing diseases, most commonly canine Parvovirus. Risks also increase where pups are held in poor conditions, such as in the boot of a car, or become stressed through transportation or changes in circumstance and/or diet. Pups are being sold in Scotland to consumers who are told that they have been bred in Scotland or England. To promote that, bitches—often not the parent

bitch—are transported with pups by breeders. Once the pups are sold, the bitches are returned to the breeder to enable further breeding. Within the illicit trade, these bitches are referred to as “show bitches”.

The motive, of course, is money. Pups are believed to be purchased in Eire, for example, for as little as €50 and sold in the UK for up to £700. Pups originating in eastern Europe are also believed to be purchased for as little as €50 and sold in the UK for up to £1,500. As we have heard, a recent investigation by Dogs Trust showed that vets in Lithuania and Hungary freely admit falsifying information on pet passports, such as vaccinations, and that breeders and dealers regularly transport under-age puppies to the UK, as the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) noted.

Dogs Trust also found that vets issue passports for puppies that they have not seen, that puppies’ ages are changed to evade the pet travel scheme, that dogs banned under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 are being brought into the country and that false vaccination stamps are added to indicate that puppies have been given rabies vaccinations when they have not. That point was made eloquently by the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd.

Worryingly, the scale of profit and the rapid turnover mean that organised crime groups become involved in the puppy trade to exploit the potential for making profit from offences with relatively low risk and penalties, and for laundering the proceeds of other crimes, as the hon. Member for South Antrim pointed out. Eurogroup for Animals suggests that puppies are the third most valuable illegally traded commodity in the EU, after narcotics and arms. The hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) rightly highlighted the importance that we should place on tackling organised crime.

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals estimates that between 700,000 and 1.9 million puppies are sold in the UK each year from all sources. The RSPCA also claims that criminal gangs can earn more than £2 million annually from the puppy trade, costing the Treasury millions in unpaid tax and the animals concerned significantly greater hardship—as was pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier), who also noted that animal welfare is devolved to Scotland and that the Scottish Government have used their powers to good effect, initiating a review of existing companion animal welfare legislation, including legislation on the breeding and sale of dogs. The Scottish Government are developing long-term options for further work in that area. My colleagues in Scotland are at the forefront of animal rights. From 6 April this year, it will be compulsory for all dogs in Scotland to be microchipped.

Last month the European Parliament introduced new resolutions to end the illegal trafficking of pets. The regulations will ensure that microchipping of pets across EU member states is more harmonised, so that pet microchips can be more easily compared and more compatible databases are produced. A range of additional measures are being considered to enhance the powers of local authorities and to make breeders identifiable and accountable.

Scotland’s voluntary sector is not being found wanting either. The Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals’ special investigations unit has been collating intelligence and targeting offenders in an attempt to disrupt and reduce the illicit trade in dogs bred for sale.

[*Dr Paul Monaghan*]

Importantly, it has been working with the devolved Assembly in Northern Ireland, as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) noted.

Nevertheless, the ease and popularity of the internet has meant that the impulse buying of pets has in many ways become an even more pressing issue. As we have heard, online sellers have little accountability, and web adverts are often a front for puppy farms with highly questionable welfare standards. The problem is exacerbated by the ease of acquiring pet shop licences, which are often used by puppy dealers to distribute animals for sale rather than regulated traditional high street pet shops.

How can we effect change in the UK context? First, as we heard, principally from the hon. Member for Strangford, a public awareness campaign is needed. We have also heard that an outright ban on the sale of puppies through licensed pet shops might be the simplest, cheapest, most effective and most easily enforceable means of making a significant and swift improvement to the welfare of thousands of dogs and puppies. My hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow noted that a ban on the sale of puppies under eight weeks old would also help, and the hon. Member for Southend West suggested the introduction of a required breeding licence for any household producing two or more litters per year.

A system involving a single animal establishment licence should be introduced and applied equally to online and offline sellers of dogs. The list of registered and licenced sellers should be publicly accessible and, ideally, centralised, so that potential buyers can check breeders' credentials. Website sellers could be required to enter their licence number as a mandatory field on adverts, so that each potential buyer can see it. We also need revisions to the pet travel scheme, as we have heard. All those measures would be consistent with the proposals outlined in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' consultation on the breeding and sale of dogs, issued at the end of December 2015.

However, the key message remains simple. Anyone considering buying a puppy should do so only if they can see it feeding with its mother at the breeder's premises. The importance of visual checks cannot be overestimated. That simple demand minimises the risk of buying an illegally imported puppy or one that has been bred in unsuitable conditions, and it should form the basis of any consideration undertaken by any individual or family seeking to purchase a dog.

10.35 am

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I congratulate the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) on securing this important debate. She and others have put a powerful argument about the need for change. Although we know that activities in this area are currently subject to consultation, I hope to hear at least some encouraging noises from the Minister in answering the debate to show that he recognises that need.

Animal welfare issues always attract a great deal of support among the people we are here to represent. We have heard about the problems of unregistered,

unauthorised and unlicensed dog breeding. Colleagues from across the House have put forward many excellent points that are worth emphasising. The hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) referred to our many past debates, but was sure that this one would be groundbreaking. I leave him to judge that, but he demonstrated great confidence that the Minister would put an end to what he called the dodges used by the unscrupulous to get around the law. We will hear later what the Minister has to say.

My hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) reminded the House of the need for action across the UK, and rightly placed the challenge at the door of the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow and the Scottish Government to use their powers in that area. Others referred to other delegated responsibilities. The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) took the opportunity to promote the benefits of EU membership and outlined how European legislation protects animals. Perhaps the Minister, who I believe is in favour of leaving, will tell us what work he is doing to ensure that animal welfare will retain those rigorous controls if we leave the EU.

The hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) littered her speech with puns—I will just leave that there. My hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Graham Jones) questioned whether we are still a nation of dog lovers, but also made the point that there is insufficient information for buyers out there in the marketplace. I hope the Minister will comment on that.

I was stunned by the size of the trade that we are discussing and horrified by the content of some of the briefings from animal welfare organisations. The hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow rightly paid tribute to such organisations. The briefings outline how some dogs are effectively bred to death, resulting in the birth of weak dogs, themselves likely to face suffering and even abandonment.

The RSPCA tells us that as many as 1.9 million puppies are traded in the UK each year. That number is driven by factors including fashion, family and friends. I am sure that hon. Members across the House will have had substantial numbers of contacts from constituents angry about what is happening. I agree that it is appalling that the latest fashion can drive overbreeding and suffering for dogs, or any other animal for that matter. Steep demand creates a market for puppies that often focuses on small numbers of popular breeds, such as Shih Tzus, labradoodles or pugs. As demand increases, prices rise and the unscrupulous enter the market on a huge scale. The puppies to satisfy that demand come from a vast array of sources both within the UK and further afield. Breeding practices and welfare standards vary enormously during the rearing, transport and sale of such animals.

Sadly, one upshot of this situation is that thousands of animals end up being mistreated, with many developing health problems and being abandoned each year. Institutions such as Battersea Dogs & Cats Home, along with the rescue centres run by organisations such as Dogs Trust, see the sorry results of this growing problem on a daily basis. They are being left to care for the dogs, to rehome them or to take the decision to end their lives.

One issue of particular concern is the ease with which breeders, dealers and traders can advertise and sell puppies, not to mention an array of other animals, online. We do not have to look very hard to unearth some shocking examples of animals being purchased over the internet that have been cruelly mistreated after being acquired by abusive owners. The RSPCA tells me that it has received over 3,500 calls about puppy farms in the last year—a 122% increase on just five years ago. Many were from people complaining that their puppies had developed illnesses after they had been bought, and of those calls where the point of sale was noted, almost nine out of 10 of them involved an internet advert. That is backed up by data from the Kennel Club suggesting that as many as 20% of puppies bought from pet shops or directly over the internet, where many so-called farmed puppies are sold, will suffer from parvovirus and other potentially fatal diseases, which can cost up to £4,000 to treat. That represents an incidence rate roughly four times higher than among puppies from other breeders.

That leads me to an issue that has been touched upon briefly this morning already, but is worth mentioning again—the suspected illegal puppy trade from Ireland and continental Europe that supplements the legal movement of puppies. Estimates of the number of puppies born to licensed British breeders stand at just 70,000, with the Kennel Club registering around 250,000 puppies each year and rescue organisations rehoming roughly the same number, so there remains a significant shortfall to meet the demand. Inevitably, the remainder are imported or come from unlicensed breeders. Dogs Trust has noted a huge increase in the number of puppies being brought into the UK for sale, particularly from eastern Europe. Other hon. Members have already mentioned this in some detail, but Dogs Trust also says that it has identified a 61% increase in the number of dogs entering Britain in the 12 months after the introduction of the pet travel scheme in 2012, with the number arriving from Lithuania and Hungary between 2011 and 2013 rising by 780% and 633% respectively, and those figures only account for the dogs that were actually declared.

Although some unlicensed British breeders, including many of those registered by the Kennel Club, will sell only one litter a year, other litters will doubtless come from large-scale commercial breeders for whom animal welfare is often only of secondary consideration, if it is considered at all. As we have already heard, this backstreet breeding has much in common with puppy farming. As the RSPCA has highlighted, these practices, although frequently hidden behind closed doors, are alarmingly commonplace across the UK. The mothers often live miserable lives in sometimes squalid conditions and are forced to produce litter after litter so that their puppies can be sold for easy money. Exhausted and under-socialised, these dogs are abandoned once they have served their purpose.

Although it is not our primary concern here today, it is none the less important to recognise that such trade, based on cash transactions, could be costing the UK millions of pounds each year in undeclared income. A recent European study found that the trade in cats and dogs was worth €1.3 billion annually in the EU, with 10% of the trade coming from breeders who each breed more than 200 dogs annually. A ring of puppy dealers

in Manchester who were uncovered by RSPCA investigations were found to be earning £35,000 a week—more than £1.8 million of undeclared income annually. A separate investigation estimated that a different dealer was earning £200,000 a year importing puppies from Ireland into Scotland.

It is to be welcomed that the Government are working with the Pet Advertising Advisory Group, which, in co-operation with several internet sites, has agreed a set of minimum standards for animals sold online. Indeed, I understand that as many as 130,000 inappropriate adverts have been removed as a result of this code, which is undoubtedly good news for animal welfare. However, the practices of puppy farming and backstreet breeding still exist, along with the various welfare problems with which they are inherently associated. I would therefore be interested to hear what actions the Minister is considering taking to widen the uptake of the PAAG's code of conduct and what measures are being examined to further strengthen these minimum welfare standards. At the same time, I would also like to hear what steps are being considered to better enforce higher welfare standards and to better target enforcement actions across the board.

As many Members present this morning will be aware, the Government are currently reviewing animal licensing schemes, including for the sale of pet animals, with a consultation running until the end of this week. A couple of months ago, we had a debate in Westminster Hall about the trade in exotic pets—pets sold to people who were ill-equipped to care for them. The Minister was clear in his resolve on that occasion to take action on that particular issue. I recognise that today the Minister may not be able to pre-empt the responses to the consultation exercise and that it would be unwise for him to commit to decisions without a thorough consultation and an evidence base in place. Nevertheless, I would like to hear his current thinking on the steps that could be taken to drive up standards and drive out unregulated breeders and dealers, in order to improve and safeguard animal welfare. I challenge him to tighten licensing requirements to achieve those goals.

10.45 am

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger, especially since you yourself have done so much on the issue of animal welfare over the years.

I congratulate the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) on securing this debate, which is undoubtedly an important one on an issue that many Members have strong views about. Indeed, when I was a Back Bencher and a member of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, I spent a number of years pressing for change, and it has been a pleasure to be a Minister responsible for this area.

I start by saying that we have made some progress over the years. First, there had been concern for many years that local authorities were taking an interpretation that said that, if someone was breeding fewer than five litters of puppies per year, they did not need a licence. It took me some time in the Department to get to the bottom of why that was the case—the figure used to be

[George Eustice]

two litters per year. The law had been changed in 1999 because in one debate in Parliament, the view was expressed that the authorities should focus more on large puppy farms and not on smaller breeders. Although the law as drafted means that anyone who is in the business of buying and selling puppies requires a licence, an idea had taken hold—encouraged by a Home Office circular sent at the time in 1999—that five litters per year was the correct threshold to go by. In 2014, therefore, we clarified things. We wrote to all local authorities and made it clear that anyone in the business of breeding and selling puppies, irrespective of the number of litters per year, must have a licence.

The second area where we have made progress is microchipping. I hope hon. Members have seen the attempts in the last few days to raise awareness about the new provisions that will commence from next month. They require all dogs to have a microchip and will make it easier to reunite stray dogs with their owners, to tackle the problem of dog theft and to track down irresponsible dog owners.

The third area where we have undoubtedly made good progress is, as a number of hon. Members have already alluded to, through the Pet Advertising Advisory Group. I pay tribute to those online advertisers who have participated in that group. Some real progress has been made. In total, 130,000 inappropriate adverts have been taken down. We have had volunteers from a number of the animal welfare charities assisting in moderation to do that.

However, when I talk to companies such as Gumtree—I regularly attend the PAAG meetings on these issues—they say that, in the last three years, they have seen an 80% reduction in the number of pets being advertised on their websites. It is a real credit to them that they have engaged in a responsible code of practice that has seen such a drop in the number of pets being advertised online. For instance, if any of those companies see high-velocity sales—that is, if anyone advertises a pet on their website more than three times in a year—they immediately block that individual or firm from being able to advertise again, and they report that to animal welfare charities. If someone has a licence, it must be displayed in any advert on a website, and they have to show a photo.

PAAG also looks for keywords. One of the saddest, most tragic things is when pets are being sold online for use in baiting or dog-fighting. There are certain keywords—code words—that people who are involved in that dreadful and appalling activity understand, and PAAG is now picking up on them.

Angela Smith: I am greatly enjoying the Minister's response to the debate. I acknowledge absolutely the work that charities, online sellers and websites, and indeed the Government, have done on this issue—I will be absolutely honest about that. However, does he not acknowledge in return that there has been a shift from registered sites to unregistered sites, and that more needs to be done?

George Eustice: Yes, and I was going to come on to that point.

Finally, Gumtree, Preloved, Friday-Ad, Pets4Homes, Epupz and Vivastreet have already signed up to be members of PAAG, and some of them are now starting to send guidance on buying a puppy and caring for it to anyone who expresses an interest in buying a puppy or searches for puppies online. Again, that is quite a big step forward.

I agree about getting others to sign up. Some of the classified ads are registered and based overseas, and it is harder for us to track them down. Just a few weeks ago I had a meeting with Facebook, to encourage it to participate. It obviously has a slightly different model and it is harder to search for puppies in the same way as on the internet in general. Nevertheless, it has given an undertaking to go away and think about whether there is something it could do.

I also accept that there is more to do, and that is why we are doing more. First and foremost is the consultation, which a number of hon. Members have mentioned, that is reviewing the licensing of animal establishments. The consultation closes at the end of the week, and I encourage anyone watching the debate who has ideas to make a contribution. We are looking at a number of key areas, including in relation to puppies.

First, we are reviewing the Pet Animals Act 1951. The Act makes it clear that, if someone is in the business of selling pets online, they require a licence. Not everyone understands that, so we are looking to tighten the provisions to put it beyond doubt that, if someone is internet trading, they require a pet shop licence, whether or not they have a shop in the high street.

The second area we are looking at, and which a number of people have raised with me, is that of selling puppies that are under eight weeks old. Under the new microchipping regulations, it is illegal to microchip or transfer ownership of a dog until it is eight weeks old, but when it comes to pet shops, there is a quirk that allows such practices to continue. We propose to tighten the provision and ban the sale of puppies that are under eight weeks old.

Sir David Amess: Does my hon. Friend think it sensible for puppies to be sold in pet shops?

George Eustice: Only about 70 pet shops in the whole country still sell puppies. There is a danger that we get distracted by what is a small part of the overall sales when, to me, we should focus our efforts on the much bigger problem of people who are totally unlicensed, not inspected by local authorities, off everyone's radar and trading on the internet. That is my priority.

Thirdly, on the number of litters, we are adding a condition that puts it beyond doubt that, if someone breeds more than three litters a year, they must have a licence, whether they are in the business of trading puppies or not—it is a backstop. That would bring us into line with countries such as Wales.

We are also looking at the issue of giving information on the sale of a pet, which is particularly important for exotic pets. The matter was considered in the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and we are now considering adding it as a legal requirement.

Graham Jones: Will the Minister give way?

George Eustice: I am going to make some progress—I am conscious of the time.

On enforcement, it is all very well having a licensing system for the breeding of puppies, but it is a big problem if local authorities do not enforce it. The statistics for most local authorities are in single figures. We are considering introducing a system that is accredited by the United Kingdom Accreditation Service under which responsible puppy breeders, who sign up, for instance, to the Kennel Club accreditation scheme for rearing puppies, can be exempt from the licence requirement. Local authority resources could be freed up to go after those who are off the system altogether. In doing that, we borrow an idea that the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) pioneered in the field of greyhound racing. There is a UKAS-accredited system for most tracks and a backstop local authority licensing system for those outside that system. People have their own views about greyhound racing, but that hybrid system has been successful and we want to learn from it.

A number of hon. Members have raised the issue of enforcement. I accept, particularly when it comes to the importing of puppies, that we can do more. In 2015, the border police, trading standards and the Animal and Plant Health Agency worked together on Operation Bloodhound and brought a number of prosecutions. At the end of last year, I met with our chief veterinary officer to ask what more can be done. Some veterinary practices, particularly in Lithuania, Hungary and Romania, have been fraudulently signing off paperwork for pet passports, and the chief veterinary officer has written to the authorities in those countries to raise his concerns. Investigations have taken place and, in some instances, veterinary licences have been suspended, so we have taken action on that front.

We are also working with the Dogs Trust initiative. The trust has made available some quarantine premises, which is helpful to the work of the Animal and Plant Health Agency. Since 2 December, when the operation, led by APHA and local trading standards and supported by Dogs Trust, began, 108 puppies have been licensed into quarantine. The principal reason is that the puppies were under age when inspected by a veterinary officer, either because they had not been left for three weeks

after receiving their rabies jab or because they were given the jab prematurely. That is a matter of serious concern and APHA will follow it up, learn lessons from it and raise concerns where necessary with any other European authorities. In one case, there was a deliberate attempt to deceive, with microchips being hidden in the collars of five puppies. The puppies appeared to have valid pet passports but these did not correspond to those particular dogs.

We are doing a lot of work on enforcement but there is more to do. I have considered whether we can do many more random inspections, for instance tracking vehicles that are associated with the trade, working more closely with the border police and making use of thermal imaging. I asked our veterinary experts to give consideration to that. It is not easy. It is a complex area, but we are redoubling our efforts to tackle the terrible trade of illegally imported puppies.

10.56 am

Dr Cameron: I thank all the gracious and hon. Members for their contributions. It is clear that we are all equally keen that best practice is realised right across the UK. Constructive dialogue and policy formation is required to ensure best practice across and between devolved Administrations. I particularly thank the Minister for his detailed response, and for his reassurances regarding both the progress that has been made in some areas and the action that will be required as a result of the consultation.

No one wants to return to the debate in a year's time to reiterate the same grave concerns. I am sorry that there was regression in 1999, because I feel that this is an area in which we always need to show progress. I am heartened, however, as it is clear that the issue is not a party political one but one of animal welfare, dear to the public and dear to all.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the welfare of young dogs bred for sale.

Autism Diagnosis Waiting Times

10.58 am

Jo Cox (Batley and Spen) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered autism diagnosis waiting times.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger, and to lead this important debate.

As hon. Members will know, autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with, and relates to, other people. It is a spectrum condition, which affects different people in different ways. Some people with autism are able to lead a substantially or even completely independent life, while others may need a lifetime of specialist, complex support.

Diagnosis, which is what we are here to discuss, is a critical milestone for people on the spectrum. It helps individuals to take control of their lives and can unlock access to essential support and services. Diagnosis is important not only for those who are on the spectrum. It can be just as important for their parents, friends and loved ones, enabling them to better understand their child, friend or partner.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend may know that I have an autistic child in my family and that I chair the newly formed commission on autism. Would she agree that it is absolutely about the family support that would come from early diagnosis? At the moment, so few people get it.

Jo Cox: Absolutely. I bow to my hon. Friend's experience, expertise and doughty campaigning on this issue, and I could not agree with him more. Tragically, as we know, many thousands of people up and down the country, including children, wait far too long for a diagnosis. For children, on average the current wait is now more than three and a half years.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on obtaining this debate, which is very important to a large number of people beyond this Chamber. As she knows, I hold the honour of being the elected chair of the all-party group on autism, which has been going for many years now. Diagnosis waiting times are a very important issue for Members of Parliament involved in this area. Does she also hope that we will hear in the Minister's reply about the importance of NHS England's collecting and monitoring those diagnosis times for each clinical commissioning group in England? That is important and will mean that we have the data.

Jo Cox: I agree entirely. Let us hope that we have an answer on exactly that point from the Minister. I applaud and bow to the right hon. Lady's commitment and experience on this issue.

While the average waiting time for children is more than three and a half years, many adults receive a diagnosis only five years after concerns first emerge and often two years after seeking professional help. Some 61% of people who responded to a National Autistic Society survey said that they felt relieved to get a diagnosis when it finally came, and more than half—58%—said that it led to their getting new or additional

much-needed support. It is of particular concern that children are having to wait so long for a diagnosis. Not only does that place tremendous strain on their whole family, but it means that many children do not receive the early intervention that could have a big impact on their formative years. Indeed, in many cases, children are being locked out of the services available to them, and that support can be life-changing.

Snowflakes is a nursery for children with an autism diagnosis or who are awaiting an autism diagnostic observation schedule assessment. The nursery is run by my sister-in-law, Stacia. One of its children was lucky and got an early diagnosis aged three. He joined Snowflakes and the team worked with him and his family for two years. The dedicated staff managed to help him into a mainstream primary school with support, and he is still in that school and is thriving. Another child came to Snowflakes because her mainstream nursery was unable to cope with her challenging behaviour. She is now on an 18-month waiting list for a diagnosis, but is due to start primary school in just six months' time. She is making good progress within the specialised setting and is now a role model for other children. Her parents want her to move on to a primary autism resource, but to get a place she needs a diagnosis.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I thank the hon. Lady for securing this important debate, which I feel strongly about. In my constituency, I have had contact with families experiencing exactly the issues that she is raising. Is it not important that more clinicians are trained to diagnose and that teachers are able to pick up very early signs of autistic spectrum disorder?

Jo Cox: I thank the hon. Lady for that helpful intervention. I agree with her, and let us hope that the Minister addresses that point in his comments.

To return to the example of a little girl who faces a choice. Without a diagnosis she will be forced to accept a place in a mainstream primary school that will not be able to meet her needs. With a diagnosis, however, she would go to a primary autism resource using the specialised teaching methods she knows and trusts. She would be able to continue her education and in turn increase her life chances.

Many parents tell the National Autistic Society that delays in getting diagnoses have also led to the development of serious mental health problems, both for the individual and for the family. For example, having presented himself to GPs for 20 years, Chris was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome in 2007 after finally deciding to go private. Without a diagnosis, appropriate support or an understanding of his needs, he experienced mental health conditions for most of his life, including depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder and mild Tourette's. He was hospitalised when he was 15 and later became suicidal when his needs were not met.

We now know the value and importance of early and fast diagnosis, yet our system continues to fail so many children and adults. Members present will have heard stories from their constituents or family members and will have no doubt been deeply affected by them, as I have. One has to meet only a handful of parents to realise the unbelievable pressures that the waiting times put them under.

I could tell a number of stories from my own constituency—members of some of the families affected are here today—but I want to tell the story of a young man from Batley. He is one of the lucky ones: he now has his diagnosis of Asperger’s syndrome. His mum wrote to me and told me what a blessing the diagnosis has been. It did not just provide access to support and services, but it helped everyone, including him, to understand why he felt and behaved the way he did. He said he wished he had been diagnosed earlier because:

“I always knew I was different, now I know why.”

He is one of the lucky ones, because his parents had the ability to pay for a private diagnosis. They raised £2,500 to fast-track the process, but they should not have had to do that. What about the great many of my constituents who do not have the means to afford a private diagnosis? Another of my constituents, who is also from Batley, has had to give up his job to accompany his son to school every day. Without a diagnosis, the school is not able to fund the additional staff it needs to take care of his complex needs. It is a problem not only in my constituency, but throughout the country.

Mr Sheerman: My hon. Friend is being generous in giving way. Is it not also disappointing for constituents and for people we know in the autism field—some very experienced people have intervened on her on that count—when someone goes into a health diagnosis and the health people say, “We can give you the diagnosis, but you will not get any help because the local authority does not have the capacity or the trained people to provide that help”?

Jo Cox: Absolutely. My hon. Friend again raises a very valid point. We are talking specifically about diagnosis delays, but once someone has a diagnosis, that opens up a whole range of issues that I hope the Minister will address.

Mrs Gillan: Further to the intervention by the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), one of the key things that the all-party group has been pushing for is better data collection in local areas so that we can more effectively plan and commission services. Nationally, it would mean that we could then ensure that each area is meeting the needs of its local population. Does the hon. Lady agree that it will be interesting to see whether the Minister can tell us what discussions he has had on that and how he intends to take the subject forward appropriately and properly with NHS England?

Jo Cox: I agree entirely, and one of the worrying things that became apparent to me in my research for this speech is the growing regional disparity in autism diagnosis waiting times, as well as in the service someone gets once they have a diagnosis. Let us hope that the Minister addresses that point.

My constituent from Batley has given up his job so that his son can attend school every day. As I have said, the problem exists not just in my constituency, but up and down the country, and stories from the NAS highlight that. There is Mel from Watford, whose son waited nine years. Noah, who is four, waited two years for his diagnosis—that is half his life. Meanwhile, data from Public Health England from the latest adult autism strategy show huge regional variation in adult services,

with waiting times between referral and first appointment—not even the whole diagnosis journey—in the south-west reaching 95 weeks. In my region of Yorkshire and the Humber, it is 84 weeks. The NICE quality standard on autism is clear: once referred, people should wait no longer than three months before having their first diagnostic appointment. For this to happen, the Government, local authorities and NHS England need to act.

In my own local authority, Kirklees, despite strong leadership and a clear commitment to protect and safeguard vulnerable children and adults, there is an acknowledged crisis in children’s mental health and autism services. Some families have been waiting more than two years for a diagnosis, often longer. I have been encouraging Kirklees and its clinical commissioning groups to clear the backlog and redesign their services, and I am pleased to announce that, starting last Friday, a plan to clear the backlog within 12 months is now being rolled out regionally. This will quadruple the number of diagnoses that can take place in my constituency.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate. Autism diagnosis across the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is a big issue. In Northern Ireland, some 2,000 young people are waiting for a diagnosis, although the Minister has set some money aside. There is a need not only for early diagnosis, but for further stages of the education programme as well. Does the hon. Lady agree that the Minister should consider what has been done regionally—in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales—because there are lessons to be learnt that would benefit all of us?

Jo Cox: I agree entirely. It is time for the Government to bring a wider discussion about autism services to the Floor of the House.

My local authority’s announcement last Friday now means that we will quadruple the number of diagnoses that can take place in my constituency. It still needs to redesign the service in a way that prevents future backlogs, but this is good news for Batley and Spennings and for people across Kirklees. However, it should not go unacknowledged that local authorities such as mine are working hard to reform services in an environment of severe and disproportionate budget constraint, imposed on them by Government. Of course, this is just one local authority; what about the hundreds of others and the desperate families in their care?

We also now have to accept that this failure to diagnose autism early ends up costing taxpayers much more. When developing its guidance for health services, NICE stated:

“Investment in local autism services also contributes to: a reduction in GP appointments, fewer emergency admissions and less use of mental health services in times of crisis, including the use of inpatient psychiatric services.”

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): The hon. Lady speaks with great power and passion. I support her absolutely and thank her for securing this debate. In my own constituency, the Grange Park School, which I have often visited, specialises in autism care. The school’s view is that proper care and diagnosis relieves the burden on the police, who are often called in to deal with situations that are not policing matters and

[Tom Tugendhat]

not for the judicial system, but for the mental care system, and, if handled properly, for the education system.

Jo Cox: The hon. Gentleman makes a fascinating and pertinent point, particularly as we heard about a case this morning that was very tragic and relates to some of the themes he has raised. I know he is personally committed to this issue, and it would be good to have a response from the Minister on his point.

The National Autistic Society tells us that by investing in autism diagnosis, the NHS could save the enormous amounts of money currently spent on mental health services that result from autistic people not getting the support that they need, as they have not got a diagnosis. As well as having negative consequences for someone's life, acute services are also very expensive, with in-patient mental health care costing between £200 and £300 a day. In other words, the annual cost of supporting two people with autism in a mental health ward would fund a specialist autism team serving an entire borough for a whole year.

Furthermore, identifying and supporting someone on the autism spectrum can save money in the wider public sector. According to the National Audit Office, an 8% identification rate would save £67 million a year. Over the five years to 2020, that is a potential saving to the public purse of £337 million.

Tom Tugendhat: We rightly look at pounds, shillings and pence when we talk about the public purse, but does the hon. Lady recognise that identifying and supporting autism saves families from failing? The saving to the public purse is significantly greater than the figure she has given, because it relieves the burden on many other branches of public services that would otherwise have to support a failing family.

Jo Cox: I entirely agree. The hon. Gentleman makes a very valid point.

Crises in autism services are a decade or more in the making. The blame cannot and should not be pinned on one party or one Parliament, but now that we are more aware of the problem and the scale of it, this Government should be judged on how they fix it.

I urge the Minister, who I know is personally committed to this issue, to agree to implement in full the National Autistic Society's key recommendations to help tackle the crisis: first, a new requirement on NHS England to collect, publish and monitor data on diagnosis waiting times, including data on how many people are known to their GP to have autism. Secondly, NHS England should ensure that standard waiting times on mental health reflect the NICE national guidance that no one will wait longer than three months between referral and being seen for diagnosis. Finally, the Government must share in this commitment, ensuring that NHS England now meets the three-month target. To help fulfil that aim, access to an autism diagnosis should be clearly written into the Department of Health's mandate to NHS England, which means that it will be held to account on this target and it becomes a priority to get it right.

Before I finish, I have three additional questions that I hope the Minister will address directly. What steps has his Department taken to ensure that the work done by NHS England's information board will improve the collection and recording of data on autism in primary and secondary care? Will the Minister ensure that the recommendations in the King's Fund's recent report relating to autism diagnosis waiting times are taken forward? Finally, what assessment has the Minister made of the costs to the NHS of failing to diagnose people with autism in a timely manner?

The fundamental question facing us is this: the crisis is now so acute that some desperate parents and individuals are paying for help that by right they should be able to access on the NHS, but what about those without the resources to pay? They are currently left in a distressing and damaging limbo, often for years. I hope for their sake that when the Minister responds we will hear clear, time-bound commitments and actions, rather than vague assurances. I also hope, along with other Members, that he will commit to more time on the Floor of the House to discuss the many challenges facing individuals and families even after they have received a diagnosis.

I pay enormous tribute to the National Autistic Society, whose relentless campaigning continues to raise awareness and continues to press for action on this critical issue. I also pay tribute to all the parents, carers and professionals who support and love people living with autism.

11.18 am

The Minister for Community and Social Care (Alistair Burt): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I congratulate the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Jo Cox) on securing the debate and on how she has represented her constituents' particular interests and also the wider interests of those with autism. I thank colleagues for their interventions. The hon. Lady is right: there are a number of colleagues in this room with considerable experience in autism. Before I get into specifics, let me say that I will not have time to answer all her questions, but I will write to her on those that I cannot answer.

The debate raises once again one of those issues that in the course of my parliamentary lifetime has changed markedly. Only a generation ago, recognition and understanding of autism was extremely vague, but now it is very different. Recognition of the need to treat and to understand the families involved is beyond where it was, but that creates pressures in the system.

I want to say a little bit about what is happening locally. What the hon. Lady has described is a good example of how things can be recognised over a period of time. As she said, it is not the responsibility of one particular Government, but the responsibilities have grown over time, and what has been done about them might be a pattern for others. I will also say something about what we are trying to do nationally. I also want to recognise the work done not only by parents and those who are intimately involved, but by the National Autistic Society and the Autism Alliance—organisations that have done much work to represent those involved and will continue to do so.

Before I forget, I should respond to the hon. Lady's last question: I would be very happy to spend more time discussing autism in the House. We ought to have a

three-hour debate, or longer, and I would be very happy to respond to that. There are a number of questions out there about autism, not only in the House but in other places, and I would be happy to try to answer them, although I would have to deal with the general rather than the specific.

Mrs Gillan: As chair of the all-party group on autism, I am hoping to apply for a three-hour debate so that we can celebrate national autism week. I hope that the Backbench Business Committee will look on my application favourably, and I am sure that several colleagues present would not mind signing up to it as well.

Alistair Burt: I am sure it is of little interest to the Backbench Business Committee whether or not a Minister welcomes a debate, but if it is in any way helpful, colleagues can be sure that I would indeed welcome such a debate.

Before addressing the national picture, I shall discuss briefly the situation in Batley and Spenningsdale. Why has it taken so long to resolve the issues there? The list built up over a period of time because of pressures on both autism services and child and adolescent mental health services, and because of how services were commissioned. The number of referrals has increased to a level greater than one would expect based on national prevalence, so the clinical commissioning groups involved—North Kirklees and Greater Huddersfield—had to identify a service that had the right capacity and expertise to meet requirements. Colleagues who made points about training and the need to ensure that professionals are in place were absolutely right.

The CCGs have been working on the service for some time. As the hon. Member for Batley and Spenningsdale said, the issue has been identified and they are investing £340,000 over the next 12 months to bring down the backlog, including agreed funding for additional diagnostic capacity. The CCGs recently appointed Socrates Clinical Psychology, an independent sector organisation, to deliver extra assessments over a 12-month period, and they are about to begin writing to parents and guardians to inform them of developments. Appointments will be prioritised based on the length of time patients have been waiting for an assessment. As the hon. Lady said, the extra capacity will see the number of assessments rise from four a month to around 16.

The CCGs are currently in the process of redesigning adult social care services to meet national guidelines, to provide a greater number of assessments and to avoid the development of long waiting lists in future. A draft service specification and business case, which includes several options, will be discussed by the CCGs in the coming months, and the new service is to be in place by, at the latest, March 2017, when the existing contract comes to an end. Their response in recognition of the pressures that have built up is to be commended.

It is important to understand what is happening nationally as well as locally. We are all agreed on the importance of the timely diagnosis of autism. Although diagnosing someone with autism can be complex and involve a number of different professionals and agencies, it is clear that some children and adults can wait too long. Getting an autism diagnosis can be particularly important for families who are worrying about their

children or for adults who did not have their condition recognised when younger and who need support to live their lives.

Yes of course early diagnosis saves money, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) said, it is not simply a question of saving money later in the system: early recognition makes such a difference for the families involved, as well as the individual. That is taken as read, which is why there is now much more concentration on early diagnosis than there used to be.

Young people with autism face challenges to their education and wellbeing in all areas of their lives, and that can have an impact on their academic attainment and their ability to make the transition to independent adulthood. For adults who have not been diagnosed, their life to date may have been affected by a sense of not fitting in and not understanding the way they respond to situations or why they find social settings difficult.

Let me outline the framework that is in place to improve the lives of adults with autism. The 2010 cross-Government autism strategy, which came out of the Autism Act 2009, was updated in 2014 as “Think Autism”. New statutory guidance was issued in March 2015 which set out what people seeking an autism diagnosis can expect from local authorities and NHS bodies. The aim of the adult strategy is to improve the care and support that local authorities and NHS organisations provide for people with autism.

Nevertheless, we know that there is more to do to ensure that all those with autism get the help and support they need. In January, the Government published a progress report to further challenge partners across Government in areas such as education, employment and the criminal justice system—the latter was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling. The reforms to the special educational needs and disabilities system that came into effect in September 2014 represent the biggest change to that system in a generation. They are transforming the support available to children and young people, including those with autism, by joining up services across education, health and social care to identify and meet their needs.

The Department of Health’s mandate to NHS England for 2016-17 sets the priorities for the NHS and signals what the Department will hold the NHS accountable for. It includes an important call on the NHS to reduce health inequality for autistic people. Waiting too long for a diagnosis can be one of the health inequalities that autistic people face. Local authorities and the NHS should work in collaboration so that there is a clear pathway to diagnosis that is aligned with care and support assessments. Commissioning decisions need to be based on knowledge and awareness of autism and the needs of the local population, and, importantly, informed by people with autism and their families.

We know that in some parts of the country more needs to be done on developing diagnostic assessments. The hon. Member for Batley and Spenningsdale referred to the bane of the NHS system: local variability and the fact that things are not always done in the same way in the same place. I absolutely support the call by the National Autistic Society to ensure that good practice is shared

[*Alistair Burt*]

across all areas. It is essential that the practice of the best becomes the practice of all, and I know that right hon. and hon. Members support that.

To help to standardise and improve the care and management of autism, particularly around diagnosis, and to enable health and social care services to support people with autism more effectively, NICE has published three clinical guidelines on autism and a quality standard. It recommends that there should be a maximum of three months between a referral and a first appointment for an autism assessment, and the NHS should follow that recommendation. Local areas will continue to be asked to assess their progress on implementing the adult autism strategy through Public Health England's informal local area self-assessment exercise.

Let me address the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan), as well as by the hon. Member for Batley and Spen. The Department of Health has discussed with NHS England the difficulties that can arise in getting a diagnosis. As a first step, NHS England, with support from the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, is currently undertaking visits to CCGs and local authorities with the specific purpose of developing an understanding of the existing diagnostic process for children and adults, including engaging with people who have had experience of accessing the process, and their families. The focus is on identifying local barriers and how they can be overcome; how local areas measure quality and outcomes; the alignment with care assessments; and the identification of positive approaches that can inform learning for other areas. NHS England will issue an initial report in April, once the visits are complete.

To help with local planning, NHS England has also made a new commitment to collect data on the number of people in touch with learning disability and mental health services who have a diagnosis of autism. It is not for me as a Minister to task NHS England formally with monitoring waiting times; it is for NHS England to determine how it holds commissioners to account.

Nevertheless, it will have to demonstrate effectiveness to me in meeting its mandate requirement. It is essential that waiting times are monitored locally by commissioners and included in their oversight of provision. I am interested to see the information that will be collected on the commissioning exercise that was mentioned. That information must be made public and will help with the provision of much-needed extra data about this subject. I hope that will help the new commission, the all-party group and others.

It is important to note that there are others involved. I draw particular attention to the service provided by our hard-pressed and excellent GPs. They are, of course, usually the gatekeepers to diagnostic services, and need to have a good understanding of the autistic spectrum and the diagnostic pathway that has been developed in their area. To build knowledge and expertise among health professionals, the Department has provided financial support to the Royal College of General Practitioners' clinical priorities programme on autism, which is undertaking practical work on autism awareness and training for GPs. That will enable people who may have autism to be supported more effectively from the start of the assessment process.

In recent years there has been considerable progress on how effectively we identify and support the needs of people of all ages on the autistic spectrum. I do not deny that the complexity of autism and the multifaceted nature of the needs of those on the spectrum pose particular challenges to professionals and commissioners. CCGs locally and NHS England at a national level are working to bring down the waits in line with NICE guidelines, working with many different agencies, along with service users and their families, to create a more responsive environment of diagnosis and support. I know that the House will welcome that, although there is more to do.

Question put and agreed to.

11.30 am

Sitting suspended.

Swansea Tidal Lagoon

[MR GRAHAM BRADY *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Mr Graham Brady (in the Chair): Many colleagues have indicated that they would like to speak in this debate, so it might help if I point out that we anticipate Divisions in the Chamber at 3.50 pm. It is entirely up to hon. Members whether they wish to continue the debate after 3.50 pm. If so, we will have to come back after a suspension.

Simon Hart (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the potential economic benefits of the Swansea Tidal Lagoon.

The 2015 Welsh Conservative manifesto said:

“We know how important Wales is to the UK’s energy security... We’re entering into the first phase of negotiations on a Contract for Difference for Swansea Tidal Lagoon to recognise Wales’ potential to become a major hub for tidal and wave power. This project will create thousands of jobs and attract millions of pounds worth of investment into Wales. We will continue to support strategic energy projects in Wales to boost the Welsh economy and help secure Wales’ energy future.”

So far so good. It is unusual in this day and age for a manifesto commitment to have the widespread support of quite so many interested groups. They include the UK Government, all parties in this House, the Welsh Government, all parties in that Assembly and local government in areas where the lagoon might be constructed and other areas in Wales that will reap the benefits of it. Environmentalists by and large see it as a clean form of renewable energy; economists across the UK and further afield recognise the long-term value of the project; and, almost without exception, the local communities affected directly or indirectly support the proposal. I can remember few, if any, commitments from any party’s manifesto that have such widespread and cross-party support.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman did not mention the Scottish National party—perhaps for understandable reasons—so may I say, as an SNP Member, that I am very supportive of it as well?

Simon Hart: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. The only reason I did not mention the SNP is that I forgot. I hope he does not take that to heart.

The Swansea bay tidal lagoon project ticks a lot of boxes—to use that rather awful expression. If I make only one point this afternoon, it is this: it must not be seen as a one-off project or a stand-alone proposal. It is part of a four-part proposal for the Severn estuary. It will lead to other projects around the UK coast, and after that—who knows?—perhaps across the rest of the globe. We have a chance to be a global leader in this technology; to start it down with us in the Swansea bay. It is equally important that the Government look at it not as a stand-alone project, but in the context of the proposals for Cardiff and Newport. This is not about just Swansea, Wales or the UK; nor is it about just renewable energy, which has been debated so often here.

I have four issues that I will deal with as quickly as I can, given your steer, Mr Brady: the current situation; employment opportunities; the questions about costs, which have been reported in the press; and other benefits, which sadly do not seem to have been reported at all. On the current situation, this is about a long-term plan for the UK and beyond. Over the next 10 years, the UK will lose 11 of its coal-fired power stations, followed by our ageing nuclear capability. In technical terms, that is the same as a 25 GW reduction out of a total capacity of 85 GW across the UK. As yet, nobody has made it entirely clear how we will fill that void. Hinkley Point is 10 years off, and today further questions were raised about the speed and certainty of that project. No new gas-fired power stations are under construction in the UK.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): I congratulate my constituency neighbour on securing this debate and on his opening remarks, many of which I agree with. The big issue with Hinkley C is the strike price. The problem with the tidal lagoon is that the financing model that is envisaged for it is the contract for difference. Does he agree that we should perhaps look at other models, such as direct public investment? If we go for a CfD, the cost ends up with the consumer. If we go for direct investment, it ends up with the public, but it is far cheaper than a CfD.

Simon Hart: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point. I will come to that issue later in my speech. That is an important message to the Government. I entirely agree that using a model for this form of energy infrastructure simply because it is used for other forms, such as offshore or onshore wind, is potentially a mistake. There is an opportunity, especially with the Government review, to look at other models to see whether we can make it work over a longer period using different technology.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): My hon. Friend is being very kind in giving way. He is making a series of very good points. Does he agree that time is of the essence not just for the company and its employees, but for investors, for the communities that he mentioned and for our ability to show technological leadership, which could lead to a great export business?

Simon Hart: My hon. Friend is spot on. Many people are watching the Government’s approach to this—not only investors, but people who question whether we have the technical capability and the political will to proceed with this type of project. He is absolutely right that, as long as the Government do not prevaricate about the outcome of the review, they have the chance to put right the concerns that he raises.

Craig Williams (Cardiff North) (Con): I apologise for turning up late because of the vote in the Chamber. I commend my hon. Friend for securing this debate. Is not the issue that we are at the proof of concept stage? The review is very welcome. I know that we need time on our side, but proof of concept is a difficult stage for any project. Although we wholly support it, we need to review it and look at the financing.

Simon Hart: I think I understand my hon. Friend’s comment. I should have said earlier that we are not unique in using tidal power. This technology has, in

[Simon Hart]

various forms, been tried and tested in other parts of the world, so there are not significant doubts about its workability. We should look elsewhere to ensure that the lessons learned from projects in other parts of the world are applied here.

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Simon Hart: I will. The chances of us finishing at 3.50 pm are getting slimmer by the moment, but we will do our best.

Huw Irranca-Davies: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate and on his opening remarks. This project is as significant as the previous investment in the offshore wind industry in the east of England, which included £60 million of pump-priming for port infrastructure and so on. This project is as significant, not only because it will have an immense impact on the region, but because it will make us a global leader. The hon. Gentleman is right that there are those looking to take it elsewhere if we do not get on with it.

Simon Hart: I will devote a section of my speech to concerns about the cost, which are raised in the media. I want to address those points, because at the moment we are looking at added value or some of the other elements that move this project from being simply a good idea to being an irresistible one. However, I will hopefully deal with the hon. Gentleman's point properly in a moment.

Before I took those interventions, I was talking about the uncertainty about Hinkley Point. Until literally the last few days it was seen as the saving grace of UK energy production, but suddenly we discover that we are back in the land of the unknown. An important message for the Government is that an energy void needs to be filled, about which we know very little. I do not want to sound too melodramatic, but there will be a lights-off moment in about a decade's time unless the Government—I would say this to any Government—take it seriously. They must act with haste, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) said, to ensure that no uncertainty creeps into the proposals.

It is also reasonable to say that everyone who supports the proposal understands that it is not a silver bullet. Our energy demands will be met by a range of different options, of which this happens to be one, but it is an important one. Tidal lagoons can provide—there is no doubt about the statistical back-up for this—8% to 10% of the UK's total requirements. That is an extraordinarily tempting prospect. To quote, or possibly misquote, the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, it is home-grown, reliable, affordable, sustainable and clean, and I am not aware of any other current proposed energy projects that can boast such descriptions.

The second thing that I want to cover is the added value, which has not been discussed in great detail in this House or in the wider media. It is important to point out that the Swansea bay tidal lagoon will employ nearly 2,000 people at its peak construction period. The programme over the whole of Wales—including Cardiff, Newport and Colwyn Bay—if it goes ahead, will consist of a £20 billion investment, which will need an average of 12,000 jobs for 12 years and result in more than

2,000 full-time positions. That does not even begin to touch on some of the supply chain, tourism and leisure benefits associated with the proposal.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): The statistics for the steel required for the project include 8,000 tonnes in the mechanicals package, 60,000 tonnes of rebar and 3,000 tonnes of structural steel. Furthermore, Sheffield Forgemasters and DavyMarkham, another world-class manufacturer in Sheffield, are both well placed to work on several of the core turbine and generator components, remembering that the project includes 16 turbines. On that basis, it would be good just to get on with this—UK steel would be helped enormously to get over its difficult period if the project were given the go-ahead as soon as possible.

Simon Hart: The hon. Lady makes a good point, although of course I want all the construction work, including the steel, to be in Wales and, preferably, with bits of it in Pembrokeshire. However, I recognise with a heavy heart and rather grudgingly that we may have to extend our reach to Sheffield—

Angela Smith: This is a UK debate, but nevertheless DavyMarkham has said that it will invest in Wales as a result of the project, so I think we are all friends on this.

Simon Hart: I accept the hon. Lady's polite reprimand in the spirit in which it is intended. According to my figures—I will come on to steel in a moment—we are talking about 370,000 tonnes of steel for the Swansea project alone, and double that as we scale up to include Newport and Cardiff. As that figure goes up, it brings a whole range of other possibilities for UK steel, which, given the state of the industry at the moment, can only be welcome. I take her point.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): To keep the Yorkshire theme going, one of the chief advisers for the Swansea tidal lagoon project is my constituent Bernard Ainsworth, who has also managed construction of the Shard and the millennium dome. Does my hon. Friend agree that this project, as the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) just said, is not only about boosting the economy and confidence of Wales, but about benefiting all of us across the whole of the United Kingdom?

Simon Hart: My hon. Friend is of course absolutely right. At least 50% of the £20 billion investment to which I referred is to be in Wales, so by definition the other half is not. My very next comment was to be that more than 1,000 companies have already expressed interest in this project, or these projects. I have seen a rough outline map, and the whole of the UK is covered. The line-up is impressive, and includes companies such as General Electric, Andritz Hydro, components suppliers, construction companies and a whole range of small and medium-sized enterprises from sandwich makers to pretty much every area of SME activity in Wales and beyond. Everyone in the Chamber will have a bite of the cherry, in terms of constituency interest, as might plenty of those who are not present and do not yet realise it. Our job is to remind them of that.

My third point is about cost, which has been cited regularly as a major obstacle to progress on the project, despite its being a manifesto commitment and Government

having trawled the numbers for a long time. It cannot come as a particular surprise that the costs are what they are. However, over 90 years—this is key—the Swansea bay tidal lagoon needs a contract for difference, or CfD, of £118 per MWh, which is the same as for offshore wind projects that already have consent. So Government have already taken a favourable view of projects at that cost, admittedly possibly over a different timescale. None the less, the revised figures show a more attractive number as far as value for money for the British taxpayer is concerned and, once we add in Newport and Cardiff, the cost actually falls to £68.3 per MWh, which really gets it into the realms of acceptability in anyone's language—even that of the Treasury during these difficult times.

That means that if the Swansea project alone were to be built at the current cost, arguably 10p per annum would be added to energy bills throughout the UK. If we add Newport and Cardiff into the scheme, let alone all the other places that we are talking about, annual bills would be reduced by between £8 and £12. So Swansea alone will add 10p per household bill per year, but Swansea with Cardiff and Newport will start to make significant reductions to householders' energy bills.

That leads me to my fourth and final point, which is the other benefits. We have not learned much about them so far. Starting with leisure and tourism, the comparable Rance project in France attracts between 70,000 and 100,000 people a year, and there is no reason to believe that the same level of attraction cannot be generated for Swansea and the other tidal lagoons. There is already interest in individual sporting events around the lagoon constructions, which could attract up to 8,000 people a year. Plans are afoot for an offshore visitor centre, sailing and boating centres, and a hatchery. Local and national sporting groups have put in for a sailing triathlon, and there are rowing, canoeing, open-water swimming and sea angling ideas and concepts. There is no shortage of significant extra activity around the lagoon constructions, which can only be good for the tourism offer and employment in Wales.

The great unknown is the export of technology. The lagoon products will be at the cutting edge of global technology, so we have the possibility of creating and growing our own experts in the field, with our own concepts, ideas and plans, which could be exported to 30 or 40 countries, all of which have potential capacity for tidal lagoon generation.

That leads me to steel. I have had various conversations with interested parties, and the fairly modest figure for the steel requirement on the Swansea bay project alone is 370,000 tonnes. Anyone who has been following the plight of the steel industry in Wales and beyond will prick their ears up at that potential for rescue and sustainability. In passing, one potential investor in the project is Liberty Steel, which has already stated that it would move its operation to Wales in the event of the go-ahead from the UK Government, because it sees the opportunity for a UK recycled steel project. At the moment, recyclable steel is exported, recycled and then reimported for use in the UK, which is a crazy situation in anyone's language. Now we have investors thinking that the scale of the tidal lagoon projects is sufficient to enable them to set up shop properly in the UK, thereby forgoing the need to export 5 million tonnes of recyclable

steel. We could do it all here, with significant benefits for the country that are not only to do with tidal lagoons.

Guto Bebb (Aberconwy) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a strong case for looking at the development in the round. Is it not also the case that a tidal lagoon in north Wales would not only be an energy and tourism-generating opportunity, but play a significant part in flood defences? That is another issue that should be brought into the equation.

Simon Hart: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Many people have raised issues with me in support of tidal lagoon technology but I had not heard that one. It is useful to use occasions such as this in Westminster Hall to bring to the Minister's attention the added benefits that somehow never seem to get into the Treasury calculations as prominently as they might.

Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for calling for the debate and for his reference to north Wales. It is important to protect national infrastructure such as the A55 and the north Wales branch of the west coast main line. In fact, tidal lagoons on the north Wales coast offer an opportunity for that as well as for development in areas currently categorised as flood risk zones.

Simon Hart: My hon. Friend reinforces the earlier intervention. It would be helpful to hear from the Minister on that.

We have a Minister representing the Department of Energy and Climate Change here, which is welcome, but I hope that she will share her thoughts with the Treasury, because it is as much a decision maker in the process as her Department. I know that she takes our manifesto commitment seriously and recognises that the project comes with almost unique widespread support, and I hope that she recognises the huge economic, social and practical benefits that this and other projects will bring, should they be rolled out. Her Department is aware of the safe and clean nature of the proposal and the longevity it offers the country in an uncertain time.

Back-Bench Members welcome the Government's review, but we have all been down the review road before on various issues and so often we have come away disappointed that instead of "review" we could have said "delay". I have no doubt that the review is genuine, but that needs to be demonstrated—the Minister has an opportunity to do that—because as colleagues have mentioned, investors and interested parties do not want prevarication, delay and doubt; they want us to honour our commitment, stick to our word and see the project through under the new, revised terms. DECC has already been involved in negotiations on this project and others for five years, so it has got a lot of the information it needs and it has already granted the development consent order, so it is not as if the project is coming out of the sun without having been seen before. A lot is known about it, so there is no reason to delay matters beyond the lifespan of the review.

I hope that the Minister will address the issues that colleagues have raised and that above all she will recognise and confirm that Swansea on its own is not the entire picture. We are looking at a range of projects of which that is just one, but it is important because it is the first one. I hope that she recognises that, for Wales and the

[Simon Hart]

wider UK, there is nothing but upsides from the project and that, as a result, the Government will give it the go-ahead at the earliest opportunity.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Graham Brady (in the Chair): Order. Before I call Mr Flynn, it may be helpful to say that, because a large number of hon. Members have indicated their desire to speak, I propose a five-minute limit for Back-Bench contributions in the debate.

2.53 pm

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): I am filled with optimism, because the hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart), who called for this debate, recently had a debate about S4C and, lo and behold, the Government miraculously found some funding for it. Therefore, this debate might well presage good news about investment in the tides.

This is an ancient dream. There is a nineteenth-century painting of a Severn barrage—somebody foresaw it in Newport—and an inquiry in 1980 looked at it in great detail. I wrote an article for the *Western Mail* in which I foresaw a series of barrages that would make use of the tides all around the Welsh coast—different pulses of electricity come at different tides—which, to ensure that the project was demand-responsive, were locked into pumped storage schemes in the valleys of south Wales. When the high tide came in at about 3 o'clock in the morning, the water would be pumped up the hills in the valleys and then it would be let down. Dinorwig has proved to be a battery for all of Britain.

When I dug out that article, which I wrote 40 years ago, I was struck by the fact that in all that time we have ignored what is the great source of untapped power, certainly of Wales, but of all the British Isles: the great cliffs of water that surge around our coasts twice a day. Immense amounts of untapped power are wasted. As the hon. Gentleman said, such power is clean, green and, unlike most other renewables, it is entirely predictable. We know exactly when it will happen and it will last as long as the human race inhabits the planet. What are we doing with it? Very little. The great example is in Brittany, where a barrage was opened across the Rance river and now, 50 years later, the turbines are in pristine condition and, without carbon or pollution, it produces the cheapest electricity in Europe. Of course, we should go ahead.

There is now another reason why we need to invest in the project: what I believe is the collapse of the Hinkley Point C project. All that is left promoting it is the stubbornness of the French and UK Governments and the reluctance to accept the mountain of evidence that says that the project cannot work. It has not worked in the past, it is not working now and it will not work in the future. Even today, in *The Times*, following similar articles in the *Financial Times* and many other papers in the last seven days, I note the realisation—it was in the main headline—that £17 billion could be saved if we abandon Hinkley Point. There is no rational case left for European pressurised reactor projects. Have they worked anywhere? Three are being built in the world but none is working. The one in Finland, due to cost €6.4 billion, should have been generating electricity in 2009.

Richard Graham: You will have to rule as to whether this is the right place for an anti-nuclear campaign, Mr Brady. May I gently suggest that many of us here believe that we need more energy full stop, from nuclear and from tidal lagoons?

Paul Flynn: Yes. At the moment the Government are approaching an impasse, because Hinkley Point is doomed, and that is crucial to where else they can go. They must go somewhere else to create energy for the future, so it is crucial to the debate that we understand what the entire scientific establishment and the two chiefs of EDF have recognised: it cannot go ahead. EDF is €37 billion in debt—if it were anything other than a nationalised company, it would be bankrupt and out of business. Its share price has collapsed by 10% in the past 24 hours.

EPR electricity has not worked anywhere. The other great EPR project is in Flamanville, where there is a serious problem with the roof of the reactor vessel, which means it may never be completed—it will certainly be delayed for years. Again, that project is billions over budget. How on earth can anyone rely on that?

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that the difference between nuclear power projects such as Hinkley—which he is dilating on at the moment—and the proposed technology at Swansea bay and around the Welsh coast is that in lifespan, while nuclear projects are finite and have potential unforeseen consequences in terms of disposal of waste, tidal lagoons provide a clean source of power that, built on a Victorian scale, will last for many decades if not centuries?

Mr Graham Brady (in the Chair): Order. Mr Flynn, before you respond, I hope you will use your last two minutes to focus more on the tidal lagoon side than the nuclear side.

Paul Flynn: Of course. The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right about every comparison we make on what tidal has to offer. It has cleanliness as a source of power, it is ours—it is British—and it is eternal. It does not have to come from anywhere else. There is a simplicity in taking moving water, getting it to turn a turbine and then generating electricity.

It is time now for this dream to come true. The Government are into investing in huge projects. They have spent £1.2 billion on their railway project, but they have not built an inch of track yet. Those projects they have taken on are long term, and some of them have failure written into them, but this project has success written into it. Tidal power has simplicity and works in several other ways, whether it is through a lagoon or some other project.

We should look at the serious objections there have been in the past 40 years to building a barrage, particularly from those in the natural world who say that building a brick wall across the Severn will have all kinds of repercussions for the natural world. That is not a problem that occurs with lagoons. In order to provide electricity for the future that is green, non-carbon, eternal and everlasting, it must be tidal power.

3.1 pm

Byron Davies (Gower) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) on securing this important

debate. It is a pleasure to represent my constituency of Gower, part of which this tidal lagoon falls into, in the Mumbles area.

The lagoon is the result of five years of hard work on the part of the developers, and we have now arrived at the point of the strike price. The pilot scheme at Swansea may, as has been said, move forward to bigger projects at Cardiff, Newport and elsewhere in Wales and, indeed, the UK. The lagoon has the potential to produce energy that is cheaper than even nuclear and gas. The potential future investment in Wales alone is more than £10 billion, and more than 3,500 jobs will be generated over a decade in Wales, with many more generated in the supply chain across the UK. That is a particularly important point.

Mr MacNeil: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point about the economic benefits of the project. The Chancellor has talked about a northern powerhouse; this would strike me as being a western powerhouse. At a time when borrowing costs are low and there is a need for demand in the economy—Martin Wolf is even talking in the *Financial Times* about helicopter drops—this lagoon would add to our energy security and strengthen the economy in Wales, which needs to happen. Wider interconnectivity would benefit not only Wales but Europe, and that is another reason the project should be supported.

Byron Davies: I totally agree with the hon. Gentleman; I could not have put it better myself.

More than 1,000 companies in the supply chain across the UK have registered their interest in these projects. The scope for further investment in other lagoons and in the export market will eventually give rise to a contribution to the UK balance of payments of tens of billions of pounds.

Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) for securing this debate. I want to add to the comments being made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Byron Davies) by saying that the whole community of Britain will benefit from this project. I represent one of the largest landlocked constituencies in England and Wales, so Members are probably wondering why I am praising a tidal lagoon that is many miles away from Brecon and Radnorshire, but it really will benefit our people. We will have a lot of people travelling down to work there. Businesses will benefit on a daily basis from the tidal lagoon, and the people of Brecon and Radnorshire are very keen that it goes ahead.

Byron Davies: Indeed; I totally agree with my hon. Friend, who makes a valid point.

A study by the Centre for Economics and Business Research has found that a national fleet of six tidal lagoons would contribute something in the region of £27 billion to UK GDP during construction, as well as creating or sustaining 35,000 jobs on average and roughly 70,000 jobs at its peak. When operating, the fleet would contribute just more than £3 billion per annum to UK GDP.

I am sure Members will be aware that Gower was the first area of outstanding natural beauty in the UK. It is a great tourist attraction, and I am sure that the development

of the tidal lagoon will add to that. Swansea bay tidal lagoon would be the birth of a new industry based in Wales, and it now needs our support to get it into construction. Where that project leads, others will follow.

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, since the mention of a tidal lagoon being in Swansea, his constituency, my constituency and the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) have seen a great increase in the feel good factor and a driving of the agenda to take forward other projects that would be less exciting without a tidal lagoon?

Byron Davies: The hon. Lady makes a good point. The tidal lagoon has great benefits, including from a health point of view.

Tidal Lagoon Power started work on Swansea bay in 2011 and has spent more than £30 million on the project to date. The company has been wholly privately financed by a number of private individuals, and more recently by a small number of institutional investors. The enterprise is therefore a purely UK-led initiative in the area of tidal power.

In February, the Department of Energy and Climate Change announced an independent review of tidal lagoon energy, which I support and believe is the right decision. Swansea bay tidal lagoon has development consent, while the other projects do not. This has to be looked at in the round, and DECC is making the right decision in considering it properly. Tidal Lagoon Power has welcomed the review as a clear signal that tidal lagoons are being taken seriously and are no longer simply a footnote to UK energy policy. With negotiations on Swansea bay progressing in parallel, it should be possible to sustain investor confidence and ensure that this first-of-its-kind project at Swansea bay is ready to go, should the review conclude that the UK needs tidal lagoons.

In conclusion, I am concerned that the project has been used as a bit of a political football locally. We need to come together on a cross-party basis to provide the project with the support it needs. I know there is support in the Swansea area from other politicians. We all want to see the project develop for the benefit of our communities and the Welsh economy, so we need to lay aside political differences and have a serious and sensible dialogue, as we are today, on the way forward for the lagoon.

3.7 pm

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Brady. I congratulate the hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) on securing this debate. The presence of so many hon. Members here today shows why the project is of such importance. I rise today to urge the Government to give this vital project the go-ahead soon.

I believe that the tidal lagoon should be approved for the following reasons. First, it offers Wales, and the Swansea bay region in particular, an unrivalled opportunity to place itself at the forefront of what this year's World Economic Forum in Davos called the "fourth industrial revolution"—an industrial revolution that will be characterised by new forms of renewable energy and by the exponential outward expansion of technological

[Stephen Kinnock]

innovation. We can be at the vanguard of that revolution, and the Swansea bay tidal lagoon could be a catalyst for it.

To have the first project of this type in Wales—not only in Wales, but in my constituency of Aberavon and, I hasten to add, that of my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris)—would be a source of tremendous national and local pride. The project would also provide a significant alternative to carbon-intensive industry.

This is a chance to harness the natural environment and the unique nature of Swansea bay to our advantage. It is an opportunity to use the environment to protect the environment, power the local community and local homes and to save money—because, secondly, the tidal lagoon will help not only to tackle climate change, but to save money in the long run. The lagoon requires a strike price of £96 per MWh. That is 16% below the cost of any offshore wind farm ever granted a contract.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): I am interested in that strike price. Will the hon. Gentleman explain what period that is over? My understanding is that it is over a period of 90 years, rather than the 35 years that would apply, for example, in a wind farm contract.

Stephen Kinnock: The hon. Lady is correct. My argument is still that that strike price, as a unit price, is very attractive, particularly when we consider the economies of scale that would come from the construction of further tidal lagoons. We will see a downward trend in that strike price, which is a very convincing economic argument.

Huw Irranca-Davies *rose*—

Mr MacNeil *rose*—

Stephen Kinnock: Two Members rose at the same time. I will, in a very biased way, give way to my hon. Friend.

Huw Irranca-Davies: I understand that the Government want to get the financial details right and the best value for money for the taxpayer and bill payer, but on the basis of such unanimous cross-party support throughout Wales—at Assembly, ministerial and MP level, as well as right across society; there are no dissenting voices—should it not be the case that at the end of the consultation we have the deal on the table and we go ahead?

Stephen Kinnock: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend and also with the hon. Member for Gower. There is a cross-party consensus and what seems to be a rare outbreak of unanimity. Let us take that opportunity to move forward.

Mr MacNeil: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who is losing time because of interventions; he is very kind. To put the matter into some context, the strike price for nuclear will be for 35 years, but we must remember that nuclear has been on the go for 60 years in the UK. So 60 years after it first came along, it is still getting support for a further 35 years—95 years in total—and the strike price being talked about for the

barrier is for only 90 years. I do not want to get into a debate about tidal versus nuclear, but that is interesting for context and background.

Stephen Kinnock: I agree with the hon. Gentleman, and I would add that we have seen a disastrous overrun in the cost and timing in Flamanville and in Finland, so let us give the tidal lagoon a chance, because in the long run it looks like a very good investment.

Over the project's lifespan, it will deliver cheaper-than-wholesale electricity. The combination of the Swansea and Cardiff tidal lagoon projects, the first two of their kind in the world, would, over the course of their lifetimes, deliver the cheapest form of electrical generation on the UK grid. Thirdly, the project will create thousands of highly skilled, well paid jobs locally, supporting hundreds of local businesses. Indeed, it is already having a positive impact in the local area, as my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East mentioned, giving rise to plans for many small businesses in the city bay region and feeding into the strategy for the Swansea bay city deal. This is exactly the kind of project that must go ahead if we are to see the rebalancing of the economy that this Government are so keen to talk about, but are apparently not always so keen to act upon. Well, here is the chance: approve the tidal lagoon and create jobs; support small business in the area; help to rebalance the economy and produce green energy.

Finally, as hon. and right hon. Members will be aware, the Welsh steel industry is going through testing times. Nowhere is that more acutely felt than in my constituency, where we are recovering from the devastating news two months ago of 750 job losses at the Tata steelworks in Port Talbot. With the Swansea bay tidal lagoon, there is a real opportunity to support not only the local community, but the local steel industry. The turbines and generator package are worth around £300 million, and Tidal Lagoon Power has committed to sourcing all the major components from the UK.

The company has detailed plans in place for a turbine manufacturing plant in Swansea docks and heavy fabrication in Pembroke, and the generators are to be manufactured in Newport and Rugby. This is all welcome, but I want to see the Government go further when approving the project, and show real leadership by committing to help to source all or as much of the steel for the turbines from the British steel industry. Not only would that help to create jobs across the Swansea bay area, helping some of those highly trained and skilled men and women who were made redundant at Port Talbot in January; it would also help to support local jobs at the Port Talbot steelworks, supporting local jobs and Welsh steel.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way so near to his closing remarks. I want to reiterate that we in Newport also urge the Government to get on with the Swansea bay lagoon. We can also see the benefits further down the line in terms of procurement—my hon. Friend mentioned the steel industry—and in terms of investment, construction and long-term jobs.

Stephen Kinnock: My hon. Friend and I stand shoulder to shoulder on this issue.

A positive decision on the lagoon would put a much needed tick in the Government's green credentials and deliver a massive boost to the local economy and steel industry. This project needs and deserves rapid advance. The Government need to get off the fence and fast, because each day of delay is costing months or years of progress. The recently announced review cannot be another airport-style case of kicking things into the long grass. While welcoming the review, the chief executive of Tidal Lagoon Power, Mark Shorrocks, stated:

"A welcome review should not be a substitute for action."

He made it clear that unless work starts on the lagoon now, and unless structuring and commercial negotiations are concluded in the next six weeks,

"the opportunity will be lost and the review will be all for nothing."

That was almost a month ago to the day. That gives the Government just two weeks if the project is to go ahead on schedule. The clock is ticking. If the Government want to know what the time is, it is time to act now.

3.14 pm

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) for securing this debate. I sat on the Environment and Sustainability Committee in the Assembly for a year and we did an inquiry into energy in Wales. I know very well the potential for tidal power in Wales, but I would like to sound a small note of caution. My hon. Friend made a very good speech that highlighted the sunny uplands, which will no doubt be reflected in the beauty of his constituency. However, on the plains of Cheshire, the concerns of my constituents are about the cost of electricity. I think this project is fantastic, but not at any price.

I currently sit on the Energy and Climate Change Committee, and I have real and substantive concerns about the reported strike price.

Simon Hart: My speech was not an entirely optimistic picture of energy production in the UK; I hope my hon. Friend accepts that. My point is that her constituents will not have any electricity at all, expensive or cheap, unless we fill the void that will be staring us in the face in about a decade's time.

Antoinette Sandbach: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention. He will know about the excellent progress being made by the Horizon project and the Wylfa nuclear power station in north Wales, which will provide a large amount of generation. I am delighted because that is a very good project that will proceed at an even lower strike price than Hinkley Point's, which is £92.50 per MWh. That is my real concern around this.

Carolyn Harris: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Antoinette Sandbach: I will just finish making this point. Citizens Advice has issued a report that highlights that, per unit of output, this would be the most expensive significant renewable energy project in Britain, with an impact on those who can least afford to pay the bills because, as was pointed out earlier, the project would be funded by a contract for difference, which gets added on to consumer bills. That means that the poorest and least able to pay would have the levy on their bills to

pay for the project. I therefore welcome the review that the Government have announced, because there are other tidal projects and other forms of tidal energy and research coming forward.

Value for the taxpayer is absolutely key. As has been pointed out, the technology in itself is not new and would not attract a patent that could then be sold around the world. It may lead to some experts who could go and deliver that expertise elsewhere, but in terms of the unique deliverability of the technology, the project is using already established technology. There are no doubt potential benefits in relation to coastal protection.

Carolyn Harris: To go back to the hon. Lady's comments on Wylfa and nuclear, does she not agree that the decommissioning costs of any nuclear project far outweigh any benefit that there would be in the on-costs to begin with?

Antoinette Sandbach: The hon. Lady will know that the strike price that has been agreed includes the decommissioning costs, and that Wylfa is a project that is very much welcomed in north Wales. Voters on the Isle of Anglesey are extremely supportive of the Horizon project going forward.

Citizens Advice said there was a danger that the project would repeat the mistakes that were made at Hinkley. It highlights an

"opaque negotiating process, lack of scrutiny of cost effectiveness and excessive politicisation of the decision".

I am aware, as is every Member in the Chamber, that Assembly elections will take place in May. No doubt the project is being used to sell the dream. On behalf of my constituents, and particularly those who have difficulty in paying their bills, I welcome the review and urge an element of caution before we commit ourselves to a hugely expensive project. If it can deliver, and at the right price, it clearly needs to go ahead, because of the many advantages that have been and no doubt will be outlined in the debate. However, I want to say to the Minister that it should not be at any cost—only at a cost that is reasonable for the taxpayer. The clear, substantive advantages can be argued for, but I have concerns about the project.

Jonathan Edwards: The hon. Lady is making her point clear. Is she ideologically opposed to direct public investment, if she is opposed to the contracts for difference model?

Antoinette Sandbach: My understanding is that the rate of return to the investors in the project is 12% to 15%, which is very high. It is a very high cost to taxpayers and I query where else in the market anyone could get that kind of return. When we are talking about payments over 90 years, I urge caution. I do not say "Don't go ahead": I say that the review is appropriate. There could be clear advantages, and the boost that would be given to the steel industry and, no doubt, the domestic supply chain would be welcome. There are positives to be expressed, but there are also concerns, and it is right that if we are debating the project in the House we need to know some of the risks as well as potential rewards.

3.21 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Brady. I congratulate the hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) on obtaining the debate. The issue is close to my heart, and the heart of my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock).

We have heard that Tidal Lagoon Power is entirely privately owned, so when in February the Department of Energy and Climate Change announced an independent review of the tidal lagoon project I was shocked and disappointed, because the Government have been in talks with the company for more than a year. What stone has been left unturned? Surely we must all acknowledge that the tidal lagoon is a new approach, which will bring considerable environmental and social advantages to every region in the United Kingdom. There are plans for future lagoons. Tidal Lagoon Power is developing five full-scale tidal lagoons to employ the blueprint that needs to be established in Swansea bay. Between them, those projects would represent more than 15 GW of installed capacity, 8% of the UK's total electricity requirement, and more than £40 billion of capital expenditure. Each project would secure a home-grown power supply for 120 years. Those are phenomenal figures.

The economic case is astounding. Six tidal lagoons would contribute £27 billion to UK GDP during construction, creating nearly 36,000 jobs on average, and 71,000 at the peak. Once in operation, the fleet would contribute £3.1 billion per year to UK GDP and sustain or create as many as 6,500 jobs. What region can afford not to welcome that? What Government can afford to risk that potential? As to the UK supply chain, Tidal Lagoon has set a target to achieve 65% of project spend in Swansea bay on UK content; with 50% of that staying in Wales. Wales cannot afford to miss this opportunity. There are phenomenal financial implications, with turbines, generators and turbine houses to be manufactured locally in Pembroke, Llanelli and Swansea. Detailed plans are in place for a turbine manufacturing plant in Swansea docks—a part of the city that has been left for a considerable time, since the decline of the dock—heavy fabrication in Pembroke and generator manufacture in Rugby and Newport. The turbines and generation package for Swansea bay are worth £300 million with almost all the parts to be UK-sourced.

As for employment, up to 1,900 full-time equivalent jobs will be created and supported during construction, and up to 180 will be created and supported through the operational life of the lagoon. There will be up to £316 million of gross value added during construction. So it goes on; the figures just keep coming. The project is a win-win all round, for Swansea East, Aberavon, the Gower, Wales and the UK—we all gain from every aspect of the project. The region needs the project, and so does my city—and the UK. It is an opportunity for us to become global leaders in a new and exciting technology; let us not let anything stop that.

Mr Graham Brady (in the Chair): I propose to take the winding-up speeches at 3.30.

3.25 pm

Mr Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Brady. I will be very quick. I congratulate the hon. Member for Carmarthen

West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) on securing the debate. He alluded to the consensus, and I feel like a bit of an interloper in the debate, following the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), who has done so much in her constituency to champion the cause. I speak as a Welsh Member, to reiterate the point made by the hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire about the consensus on the issue between all the political parties. The hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) got a few of us to sign an important letter to the *South Wales Argus* last year, to reiterate the case, and on 2 December our colleagues in the National Assembly unanimously voted to urge the UK Government to take action.

I suppose if I were to characterise the debate as encompassing the caution of the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) and the enthusiasm of the hon. Member for Swansea East I would on this occasion side with Swansea East. Although the review has been acknowledged by Members all around the Chamber—with some more enthusiastic about it than others—the key point is that if it is happening, to quote the chief executive of the lagoon project, it is not “a substitute for action”. The debate is about timing.

Glyn Davies (Montgomeryshire) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Williams: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me I will not take an intervention, because we want to hear the winding-up speeches.

There is a question of timing. We have a consensus, and the hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire talked about the need not to prevaricate. If concern is felt in some quarters that the project is being put into some kind of grass—long or otherwise—I hope that the Minister will dispel that.

We have heard all the evidence. The Swansea bay tidal lagoon project is critical for Swansea and the adjacent areas. It is critical for Wales and the UK, not just as a means of reducing our reliance on fossil fuels, but also to increase the important renewables sector and for the Welsh economy. The technology is not new. Some of us have been on the Welsh Affairs Committee for quite a long time. The right hon. Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones) is nodding. I remember a trip in a rubber dinghy in the Bristol channel with the predecessor of the hon. Member for Swansea East and the present shadow Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith). It was an intriguing experience bobbing around in the Bristol channel with my colleagues; but we were there because, even 10 years ago, we were looking at the potential for such approaches. I cannot go back quite as far as the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) did in his speech, but we were talking about it 10 years ago.

Although it is not new technology, we need to look at other precedents around the world in France, Canada, Korea and elsewhere. We have the opportunity to be at the forefront of the technology. The lagoon could be the first of many such projects around the UK and elsewhere, if it is shown to be a success, bringing down the price of technology substantially and allowing us in Wales to export that technology around the world. I will repeat the figures: the Centre for Economics and Business Research has estimated that a UK tidal lagoon industry

could increase our exports by £3.7 billion a year—for Swansea and the south-west of Wales. There would probably not be many jobs in Ceredigion; maybe a few. Setting the industry up would provide about 2,000 jobs, and much-needed high-skilled work in areas where that has sometimes been lacking. There would be several hundred ongoing jobs when the project was completed. We have heard about the tourist potential. In the years since I used to go there on holiday as a child, a huge amount of regeneration has happened in Swansea. We could build on that massively if this project moved ahead speedily.

If we are to meet our climate targets, it is vital that we invest up front for these kinds of projects and do not allow short-term thinking to scupper the long-term ambitions for our environment and economy. We need to ensure that we are at the forefront of encouraging the development of green technologies at a time when, if I am allowed briefly to be slightly party political in the last 30 seconds, there have been concerns about the direction of travel of the Department of Energy and Climate Change since the general election—but I say that only in passing.

The message of this debate is that politicians from all political parties—from direct engagement in Aberavon, the Gower and the city of Swansea, and from those of us from further afield—are urging the Government to get on with it. Have the review, but at the end of it, have some outcomes from which this project can grow and the communities we have heard about can prosper.

3.30 pm

Philip Boswell (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Brady. I thank the hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart)—a quite beautiful part of the country—for bringing this key debate to the House and all the Members who have taken part. I feel that all the speakers today have contributed significantly and that many excellent points have been made.

A comprehensive and concise case was made by the hon. Gentleman, much assisted by contributions from Members across all parties. He reminded us of the Conservative manifesto and made key points about how with the STL we could, and should, be a global leader. That sounds very much like the positive argument for carbon capture and storage, and we all hope that, unlike with CCS, the Government will look to the longer term in this case and push forward. He spoke of a lights-off moment and the problems that would create in respect of black start, and the many benefits of added value, which I will come to later and which have been commented on by many Members. Critically, he corrected the common misconceptions about pricing, which were also covered by other Members.

The economic benefits that the project would bring to south Wales were particularly well covered by the hon. Members for Ceredigion (Mr Williams), for Newport West (Paul Flynn), for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) and for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris). The point was well made that the Swansea tidal lagoon will bring fantastic economic benefits to the local area, creating thousands of jobs and permanent roles in tourism-related industries for Wales and beyond. Over 2,800 construction jobs will be created, as well as up to 40 permanent roles

in tourism industries. The Centre for Economics and Business Research, which was well quoted by Members, has estimated that the tidal lagoon could result in an annual boost to Welsh gross value added of 0.14% and would create direct and indirect jobs for the Welsh economy.

It is vital not only that Wales benefits as much as possible from this huge and exciting project, but that local communities benefit from energy developments. The community share offer made by STL will give the local community a direct stake in the project's success, which will of course increase public support. It is also important that Tidal Lagoon Power works with the region's universities and colleges to ensure that young people are encouraged into the green energy sector and that apprenticeship schemes are made available at the site. North Wales is also home to world-class marine science and energy research departments, which should work in tandem with the project. This should not just be Wales-wide; we should expect it to go beyond that and be UK-wide.

A positive point about UK fabrication, particularly in relation to steel tonnages, was made by the hon. Members for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) and for Aberavon. We must not forget the cautionary note that the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) sounded about the strike price or the points made about the politicisation of this project in the upcoming elections.

Contributions were made by many about the role of Wales and how it is well placed to take advantage of the increased demand for renewable energy, with its vast coastlines making it a fantastic place to harness tidal energy. Wales is home to the second highest tidal range in the world, in the Severn estuary, and has 1,200 kilometres of coastline—however, as yet none of it is being utilised.

Plaid Cymru is committed to making Wales self-sufficient in renewable electricity by 2035, and tidal power is a crucial part of that plan. Wales is already an energy-rich nation. It produces almost twice as much electricity as it uses, but at the moment only 10% of that is generated from renewables, compared with 32% in Scotland and 14% across the UK. This project will help Wales on its way to achieving the 2035 renewable electricity goal and will hopefully create a template for the proposed Cardiff tidal lagoon, which would generate enough electricity to power the whole of Wales. This is a long-term investment in the future of Wales. It is hoped that the success of the project would make the cost of any future projects based on it cheaper, through lessons learned, the evolution of design and technology, and so on.

A point was made about the potential flood defence benefits, which is another dimension of the project that will doubtless be investigated. STL is just the start. The hon. Member for Newport West spoke about the future of the project technology as a veritable eternal dream come true. The hon. Member for Aberavon spoke of the fourth technology revolution.

The UK Government have demonstrated that they are not fully committed to investing in renewable energy and meeting targets. Points on that were well made by the hon. Member for Newport West, who predicted potential miraculous funding, and we hope that comes to fruition. In February this year, the Government were

[Philip Boswell]

criticised by the European Commission for failing to make sufficient progress towards Europe-wide renewable energy targets.

3.35 pm

Sitting suspended for Divisions in the House.

4.3 pm

On resuming—

[MR PHILIP HOLLOBONE *in the Chair*]

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Sorry for the delay. The debate will finish at 4.28 pm. Mr Boswell is halfway through his remarks, so he has another five minutes. There will be 10 minutes for the Opposition and Government Front Benchers, and then we have the delight of Mr Hart having two minutes to sum up the entire debate.

Philip Boswell: In February 2016, the UK Government were criticised by the European Commission for failing to make sufficient progress towards Europe-wide renewable energy targets. The Government's recent record of industry disappointment in constant policy changes is well discussed and recorded, particularly in respect of the early closure of the renewables obligation for onshore wind, solar energy subsidy cuts, privatisation of the green investment bank, carbon capture and storage and the legislative changes on oil and gas. Do not let the Swansea tidal lagoon project be the next renewable energy disappointment in that growing and far from comprehensive list of UK Government fails. Is it any wonder that the energy industry has somewhat lost faith in the Government? The continual moving of the legislative goalposts has seriously damaged market confidence.

There is an opportunity in Swansea for the UK Government to get back on track not only in respect of Britain's commitment to green energy targets, but in reinstating investor confidence to some degree by delivering a best-value strike price for the people of south Wales and Britain as a whole. The anticipated and very real delay failures of Hinkley Point C have been well covered by hon. Members. Those extensive, real concerns should be a catalyst for moving forward with the Swansea tidal lagoon project.

In summary, tidal energy as a real contributor to our UK-wide climate change targets must be taken seriously. This project in south Wales is perfectly placed to take advantage of that need and must therefore be enabled to play its part in our collective success. Like, I am sure, the rest of the hon. Members present, I have been struck throughout this debate by the high level of cross-party support for STL. The fantastic ambition and progress made by the devolved nations on renewable energy cannot be held back by the regressive energy policies of this Government. I urge the Minister to get off the fence—as urged by the hon. Member for Aberavon, who is no longer in his place—and do everything in her power to ensure that the project goes ahead. It is about time this country had a good news story on renewables, or no one will take us seriously in our attempts to hit climate change targets and to keep the lights on.

4.5 pm

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. It is also a pleasure to debate opposite the Minister for the first time. It is fitting that two ladies are representing the Government and the Opposition on International Women's Day. I congratulate the hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) on securing this debate. In his opening remarks he eloquently explained why the Swansea bay tidal lagoon is a particularly exciting subject.

The construction of a tidal low-carbon power plant represents a real opportunity for the UK to be at the forefront of renewable technology innovation. That fundamental point has been echoed by other hon. Members today. I do not intend to go over those remarks, as the hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Philip Boswell) has already done so rather articulately.

This debate has been a fantastic opportunity to highlight the potentially huge economic benefits of encouraging tidal lagoon power. Of course, we have also heard the hopes of hon. Members on both sides of the House that the Government will come to an agreement on the level of state support required to get this project off the ground. Indeed, the Conservative party's manifesto contained a commitment to the Swansea tidal lagoon as a source of

“secure, affordable and low-carbon energy”.

However, there is a fear in many quarters that, since then, the Government appear to have kicked the project into the long grass. I hope that this debate will help to remind the Government of their commitment and that we will see some movement towards meeting it.

As we have heard, the proposed Swansea bay tidal lagoon has clear environmental benefits, as it harnesses a sustainable source of energy to generate a significant amount of carbon-free electricity over a long lifespan. Tidal Lagoon Power, the company that will construct, own and operate the plant, has suggested that it will generate enough electricity to power 90% of homes in Swansea bay over a 120-year lifespan. Indeed, as the generation of power relies only on the tide, it is an entirely predictable source of renewable energy.

Given the Government's cuts to other renewables, we hope that tidal lagoon technology will not be the next to suffer, particularly because the economic case, as we have heard today, is as strong as the environmental case. For instance, a key benefit of developing the Swansea bay tidal lagoon is the number of jobs that it will create and support during its construction and lifetime. Tidal Lagoon Power estimates that the project will support 1,900 jobs during construction and 181 jobs during each year of operation. That is supported by research by the Welsh economy research unit at Cardiff University, which estimates that 1,850 full-time equivalent jobs will be supported across the region for the three-year construction period.

Such employment opportunities will be incredibly beneficial to the Swansea bay area of Wales, which has a somewhat high rate of economic inactivity and has recently been dealt a blow with the loss of jobs in the steel industry—another sector that, frankly, the Government should be doing much more to support. In fact, today we heard that an estimated 370,000 tonnes of steel are required for this project alone.

The Swansea bay tidal lagoon presents a real opportunity to rejuvenate the area, offering employment in a new, growing industry. As the Cardiff University research unit explains,

“integrating construction demand with local manufacturing inputs and new industry will be an important means of strengthening prospects in these important parts of the regional economy.”

Similarly, trade unions have added their voice to business leaders and academic experts. Unite Wales, for example, hailed the project as

“both superb and significant in terms of the vision, energy and employment potential it could bring to Wales.”

Furthermore, the local community will benefit greatly from the plans for the lagoon area itself. We have heard today that Tidal Lagoon Power has outlined its ambition

“for the lagoon to become a major attraction and recreational amenity...showcasing tidal range technology and providing a unique venue for opportunities in the arts, culture”.

Jonathan Edwards: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way and for confirming from the Front Bench that the Labour party is fully behind the project. The key question for her as someone who aspires to be in the Minister’s seat is this: how would a future Labour Government pay for the project if they were in charge of it? Would they use a strike price model via a contract for difference, or does she agree that we should consider direct public investment as a far cheaper way for the public to finance the scheme?

Rebecca Long Bailey: The hon. Gentleman raises some interesting and pertinent points. I hope that the Minister has considered them, and that the Government will address many of those issues in the review currently being undertaken. We as a party will comment on them when the facts and information become available in due course.

Glyn Davies: It is clear from the debate that everybody, across parties, thinks that this is a wonderful scheme and would like it to go ahead, but we know from experience that such schemes go ahead only if a satisfactory economic case is made. Does the hon. Lady welcome the review and the work going forward? The Government will be in a position to recognise the benefits, and it will confirm that the scheme is based on value for money as well as ticking every other box.

Rebecca Long Bailey: Yes. I welcome the hon. Gentleman’s comments and those made earlier by the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach). The scheme needs to represent value for money, but that must be assessed in the context of the whole economy, not just the specific project. As we heard earlier, it is not just a stand-alone project and should not be treated as such. If we consider it in a national context along with the other projects in the offing, I think that we will see throughout the review—I hope that the facts are presented as I have been told they will—that it will represent more value for money than a single project in Swansea alone.

The Cardiff University research unit also considered community benefits. Tidal Lagoon Power has suggested that the lagoon could become a foundation venue for local and national sports use, as the lagoon wall would

provide a track for cycling, walking, angling and running and the lagoon itself could be perfect for swimming, rowing and sailing.

Not only will the project be a fantastic source of job creation and regeneration for the Swansea bay area, but it is expected to have a huge impact on the Welsh economy in general. A 2014 report by the Centre for Economics and Business Research estimated that the impact on Welsh gross value added could amount to approximately £76 million a year, in 2014 prices, over its 120-year lifespan. The development of such a new and exciting industry could also provide a much-needed boost to UK exports. Tidal Lagoon Power estimates that the potential to export UK content to a new global tidal lagoon market has been valued at £70 billion. The review should refer to the wider global impact.

Tidal power is an easily replicable new industry. The UK could be a world leader in exporting the technology and manufacturing across the globe. I am sure that the Minister will agree that at a time when the balance of payments leaves much to be desired, the development of a new exportable industry would be highly beneficial to the country. In short, investment in renewable energy technologies is a long-term win for everyone, saving jobs, money and the environment.

The Opposition understand that the Government are not set against this or other tidal lagoon energy projects in principle but have announced a six-month independent review, delaying any decision until autumn. However, Tidal Lagoon Power has said that it will need a decision on a much faster timetable. I welcome any reassurance that the Minister can give us that the project will not be allowed to fail simply due to the timescale of decision making. In conclusion, it is clear that the potential economic and environmental benefits of developing the Swansea bay tidal lagoon are huge. I hope that the Minister can assure me that the Government are doing all that they can to agree a level of state support to make the project viable.

4.14 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Andrea Leadsom): Mr Hollobone, it is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I congratulate all hon. Members on this interesting debate—I mean that sincerely—in which some good points have been made. I welcome the hon. Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey) to her place on the Front Bench. It is a pleasure to speak with her for the first time in this debate. Interestingly, we both have landlocked constituencies, yet we share a keen interest in this project.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) on securing this debate. His chosen topic is of great interest to the Government, and I sincerely welcome this opportunity for an exchange of views. He, like others from the south Wales region and beyond, is keen to understand better how the proposed Swansea bay tidal lagoon project, if it goes ahead, would benefit the local economy.

I want to clarify one important thing: my hon. Friend is absolutely right to mention that the Swansea bay project was in our manifesto. The Government absolutely recognise its potential to deliver low-carbon, secure energy for the future. However, as I am sure he will

[*Andrea Leadsom*]

accept, it was not a commitment to deliver a contract for difference. This Government are absolutely determined to prioritise keeping costs down, to be on the consumer's side and to decarbonise at the lowest price while keeping the lights on. Although the project is of huge interest to us, I am sure that he will appreciate that we must keep a close eye on the cost.

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): The Bristol channel has the second highest tidal rise and fall in the world. We must harness it. We look to the Minister to find a way to fund that over a long period, because I think it has a timescale of more than 120 years. Once the lagoon is built, if the banks and turbines can be repaired, it will have an infinite life. If we can get the funding right, the power will be right, because the tide will be there, hopefully. As long as the moon is there and the earth revolves around the sun, we will have a tide.

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I agree completely. As I said, we are keen on the project, but not at any price.

Since the Government entered bilateral negotiation with Tidal Lagoon Power Ltd on a possible contract for difference for the project, my officials have been undertaking due diligence to establish a better understanding of the project, including detailed scrutiny of its costs, timescales and potential benefits. I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) that the bilateral negotiation process is set out in a stakeholder engagement document that my Department published in January 2015, so it is not an opaque process. I urge hon. Members to read it.

Let me be clear that this Government continue to recognise the potential for the deployment of tidal lagoons in the UK. The scalability of the technology is of genuine interest to us. We are attracted to the proposed Swansea bay tidal lagoon because of its potential to unlock larger, more cost-effective developments elsewhere in the UK.

Jonathan Edwards: Will the Minister give way?

Andrea Leadsom: I will answer the hon. Gentleman's point, which I know he has made twice already. I will come to it in a moment.

There is speculation, following recent announcements, that this Government have kicked the project into the long grass. The simple truth is that the developer's current proposal for a 35-year contract is too expensive for consumers to support, and the deliverability of the wider lagoon programme is too uncertain at this point. The developer is seeking a very significant amount of financial support for the project from consumers, and its most recent proposals for a longer contract would be a significant deviation from where Government policy is just now.

For that reason, it is only right that we take more time to consider the proposals. As I have said, the Government cannot support the technology at whatever cost to the consumer. It must represent good value for money and be affordable. We have told the developer that Department of Energy and Climate Change and Treasury officials stand ready to continue discussions.

In parallel, there will be an independent review to assess the strategic case for tidal lagoons and whether they could represent good value for consumers.

The independent strategic review was mentioned by my hon. Friends the Members for Gower (Byron Davies), for Eddisbury and for Montgomeryshire (Glyn Davies), as well as the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr Williams). It will consider a number of issues, including the potential scale of the opportunity in the UK and internationally, including, importantly, supply chain opportunities.

Shortly, we will set out more details about the review, including the name of the person who will lead it. I hope that it will be possible to complete the review by the autumn. It will help us to consider further what role tidal lagoons could have as part of our plans to secure clean and affordable energy for families and businesses across the country.

Carolyn Harris: Can the Minister confirm that there will be somebody from Wales on that committee?

Andrea Leadsom: As I say, the make-up of the committee is being discussed right now, and I will certainly take that point away. I am quite sure that there will be someone from Wales on it, but I cannot say for certain because we have not got the names of individual members yet. I am grateful to the hon. Lady for making that point. As I was saying, we will not be able to make a decision about whether to award a CfD to Swansea bay until the review has been completed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire suggested an intergenerational CfD for up to 90 years, as did the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock). We will consider this and other means of financing this type of project as part of the review. However, hon. Members will appreciate that a 90-year CfD, or a CfD for even longer, is a very, very long-term intergenerational funding commitment that is not something that the Government have looked at so far. It requires further review; it is not something that we can simply pick up.

One of the very important reasons for the widespread interest in the proposed Swansea bay tidal lagoon and of course the wider lagoon programme is the potential for significant economic growth and job creation. We are taking this opportunity very seriously. If a decision is taken to award a CfD to this project, the Government will look to maximise the potential economic benefits as far as humanly possible. I can tell hon. Members that consideration of the supply chain is always a key part of a CfD negotiation, and the Government have already requested a supply chain plan and map from the developer. We are very pleased that the UK content of the project is likely to be up to 65% and that the Welsh content is likely to be about 50%.

That is good news, but hon. Members—in particular, my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire, and the hon. Members for Aberavon, for Salford and Eccles and for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), and my hon. Friend the Member for Gower—asked, “What do we get from this, especially for the steel industry and so on?” I can tell all hon. Members that in the context of offshore wind, where there is a very clear commitment to further growth, I am pushing extremely hard to maximise the opportunity for the UK supply

chain, and if this tidal project goes ahead I will be like a Rottweiler and absolutely fighting for as much UK content as possible. That is a very important point to make to all hon. Members.

Mr David Jones: My hon. Friend has mentioned offshore wind. Is it not the case that the strike price proposed for the Swansea lagoon is comparable to that for offshore wind? Does not the lagoon have the substantive advantage of not being intermittent, unlike offshore wind?

Andrea Leadsom: My right hon. Friend is exactly right that the advantage of this project is that it is despatchable and not intermittent, which is the problem with offshore wind. However, I am afraid that he is not right that the cost of this project is comparable to the cost of offshore wind, because the timescale for this project is vastly different. If we compare like with like, we find that this project is much more expensive.

Once again, I congratulate hon. Members; this has been a very constructive debate and I have taken away a number of points from it. I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn), who has expressed his very long-term vision, which is far beyond the pedigree of most of us here, if not all of us here. He has been promoting the possibilities for tidal and he is absolutely right to do so. However, I can assure him that Hinkley Point is not comparable. We are very confident that the Hinkley Point project will get built and I will make the specific point that, as he will know, the decommissioning costs are taken into the CfD price, and so there is not a further cost of decommissioning, as some Members suggested.

Paul Flynn: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her remarks. If the Hinkley Point European pressurised reactor suffers the same fate as all other reactors—delays of six or seven years—what is the Government's plan B to fill the energy gap?

Andrea Leadsom: As the hon. Gentleman will know, the Government are not dependent on any one technology. The important thing is a mixture of technologies and we are confident in our strategy for ensuring reliable and affordable supplies of energy.

It is entirely understandable that people are getting behind this proposed tidal project. It has the potential to be a very exciting development for Swansea, south Wales and the UK. If the project goes ahead, it should have a positive impact on the local economy, and if a positive decision is taken, we will look to maximise the opportunity and the effect as far as possible. However, we have a duty to ensure that the decisions we take are

in the best interest of consumers across the UK, both today and in the future. So while we will continue to discuss the project with the developer and carefully scrutinise its most recent proposals, we will await the outcome of the independent review before taking any decisions on the Swansea bay proposal.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): I call Simon Hart for his second innings.

4.25 pm

Simon Hart: Thank you very much, Mr Hollobone, for calling me again.

I thank the Minister, the shadow Minister, the Scottish National party representative, the hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Philip Boswell), and many colleagues for their contributions today.

This has been an interesting debate, summed up by three words beginning with u: unity, which is good and somewhat unusual—to give a fourth word beginning with u; uncertainty, which is bad, and I hope that has been taken on board; and unique, because this proposal has a unique nature. There have been some erroneous comparisons with other projects. This project is not the same as other projects and therein lies its strength. I hope that the Minister will agree.

I hope that the Minister will not mind my saying this, but as far as manifesto commitments are concerned, nothing annoys me—and I suspect voters—more than something that gives a very clear impression in the written word in a manifesto that is followed up a few weeks or months later with, “Oh, we didn't mean it quite like that.” The manifesto was really pretty clear about this project; there was no indication anywhere that this project might run into the long grass at a later stage.

Also, when the Minister talks about “not at any price”—I accept that, because nobody is going to do anything at unlimited price—I hope that she will stipulate at some stage in the future what the acceptable price is. It is all very easy going round and saying, “Not at any price”, but we need a slightly clearer indication of what we are talking about.

On behalf of many colleagues, I will say that this has been a healthy kick-around of this subject, and I hope that the decision makers in this process realise that there is some momentum behind this proposal and that, as far as we are concerned, it would have nothing but positive benefits for the Welsh economy and the wider UK economy.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the potential economic benefits of the Swansea Tidal Lagoon.

Bowel Cancer Screening Age

4.27 pm

Caroline Ansell (Eastbourne) (Con): I beg to move, That this House has considered bowel cancer screening age.

Bowel cancer is second only to lung cancer for the number of lives it takes. Across the country, 165,457 people have signed a petition to bring down the bowel cancer screening age in the UK in a bid to hit this devastating disease.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): It is extremely unfortunate that bowel cancer—screening is available only in England, Wales and Northern Ireland from the age of 60. Would the hon. Lady's welcome the Scottish Government's approach of screening people from the age of 50 being taken up across the rest of the UK? That would surely give many individuals an early diagnosis and a higher chance of survival.

Caroline Ansell: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. I recognise that earlier screening in Scotland and would certainly welcome it.

The petition that I mentioned has been well supported; in fact, it has had 500 new signatories this very day. The originator of the petition, Lauren Backler, has travelled from Eastbourne to be with us today in Westminster. May I at this point pay tribute to her courage and endeavour? For anyone hearing the news that they or a loved one have been diagnosed with bowel cancer, it will be simply earth-shattering, as Lauren knows. She writes:

“On 2nd December 2014, my Mum Fiona Backler was diagnosed with bowel cancer, at Eastbourne DGH's—

Eastbourne District General Hospital's—

“Accident and Emergency and was told a few days later that the cancer was terminal. She started palliative chemotherapy within a week, but despite us being told that potentially she could have up to 2 years to live, she passed away on 28th March 2015, just under 4 months after diagnosis and a week after her 56th birthday. Before she was diagnosed, she had been back and forth to her GP with vague symptoms, and had even had an endoscopy about a year and a half beforehand, which she had been told was all clear. When she was diagnosed, her consultant told us that the cancer had possibly been missed at that stage.

Bowel cancer screening can often pick up abnormalities in people who have no symptoms at all, and so I believe that if the screening age was lowered to 50 it would give thousands of people a fighting chance of beating the disease.”

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): My hon. Friend knows that I have come to the debate for personal reasons. My husband was diagnosed with bowel cancer in December 2014, when we were right in the middle of fighting the campaign, and it was I who spotted the unusual signs and dragged him to the GP, where, like many men, he would never have gone, or at least not for a very long time. Ironically, he received a letter some months later saying, “Come for the screening,” when he would have been 55. Had he had that letter at 50, the polyps would have been recognised and removed and they would, potentially, not have turned into cancer. As it was, he did have cancer, and we had to go through that earth-shattering experience that the poor lady whom my hon. Friend talks about has also been through. I sympathise with her, and I urge support for my hon. Friend's motion. We need to continue to explain why the matter is so important.

Caroline Ansell: I thank my hon. Friend for her moving contribution. Personal testimony highlights just why earlier intervention is vital—it can be life-saving.

Glyn Davies (Montgomeryshire) (Con): My hon. Friend makes reference to personal experience. I would not be here today without an early diagnosis of the bowel cancer I suffered. I had an operation that left me with a stoma, and I am living proof that someone can make a 100% recovery and even become a Member of Parliament, if they work hard.

I hope my hon. Friend agrees that one of the big benefits of screening is not only the identification of blood as a possible sign of bowel cancer, but the raising of awareness. The truth is that it came as a huge shock to me, and I imagine that it comes as a huge shock to people who think they are invulnerable and do not believe that they could possibly be suffering from bowel cancer.

Caroline Ansell: My hon. Friend makes an apposite point, and I hope that, in a small way, this debate, underpinned as it is by personal testimony, plays a part in raising awareness. As I said at the beginning of my speech, the disease takes the second highest number of lives of all cancers.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. As someone who lost both of his grandfathers to bowel cancer, I think that early diagnosis is absolutely key. However, it is not just a case of screening at a specific age; it is about spotting the signs. I have friends who have developed this dreadful disease in their 30s. It is all about spotting the key signs. One of those friends went on, after recovery, to carry the Olympic torch and is now a champion for young people with bowel cancer. Will my hon. Friend go on to talk about spotting the signs and not just about screening?

Caroline Ansell: My hon. Friend makes a very worthy point. He brings glad tidings, too, that bowel cancer can be beaten and that those who have suffered from this terrible condition can go on to lead rich and fulfilling lives—which, in some cases, bring them to Parliament.

Mr Andrew Smith (Oxford East) (Lab): The hon. Lady is being very generous in giving way. I commend her excellent speech, the petitioners and her remarks about her brave constituent. With the national rate of screening at 58%—it is only slightly higher in Oxfordshire—does she agree that, as well as raising awareness and pushing for an earlier age of screening, which I fully endorse, still more needs to be done to increase take-up, notwithstanding the adverts and the reminder letters that are already sent?

Caroline Ansell: The right hon. Gentleman is right in identifying that as a key way to move forward. In fact, screening uptake has not really moved in more than a decade, so we do need to be in the business of raising awareness of the condition, its symptoms and the opportunities for screening, at whatever age it is set.

Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): While we are on the personal stories, cancer—bowel cancer in particular—touches all families. I sadly lost my sister

this time last year through it and my father is in a hospice at the moment for that exact reason. I am someone who is going through the investigative treatment, just as the husband of my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) did, and everything is fine so far. As uncomfortable as it is, it is particularly difficult for men to be brave enough to go out and have the investigative actions take place. I am 48, so reducing the age would not necessarily have covered me. My sister, sadly, was 50 when she passed away. But bringing the age down will certainly give other people a chance, and that is the most important thing. I congratulate my hon. Friend on bringing the debate forward.

Caroline Ansell: I thank my hon. Friend for his contribution.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I welcome the fact that my hon. Friend has secured this debate. My mother was diagnosed with bowel cancer at 56 and, ironically, my father, who was 60 at the time, had received the screening kit five months previously. Does my hon. Friend agree that that shows the need to review the age at which people are screened?

Caroline Ansell: I agree, and I hope we can put that need forward today. I know that the Minister and her Department are working hard in this area and that they are all the time seeking to secure better outcomes. I hope that they might just revisit the screening age as part of that.

It has been really moving to hear from right hon. and hon. Members about their own experiences and about the losses they have suffered. Lauren is here today, having lost her mum. What a terrible tragedy that is. It feels especially poignant that we are here so soon after celebrating mother's day.

With today's advances in life expectancy, 56—the age at which Lauren's mother died—is incredibly young, yet if Lauren's mother had lived in Scotland, she would have been screened three times before the age at which she was diagnosed, increasing the chances of early detection and therefore survival. Learning that must have been a bitter blow. England has, however, led in this area. In 2006, we became the first home nation and one of the first countries in the world to offer routine screening for bowel cancer, with the faecal occult blood test, or FOBT, being sent every two years to those aged 60 to 69—later extended to 74. However, a year later Scotland implemented the same screening, with the crucial difference that it would begin from the age of 50.

The national screening committee, which ran FOBT pilots in the early 2000s, felt that 50 was the right age at which to begin to screen. It noted a lower take-up of the test in 50 to 60-year-olds compared with those over the age of 60, but recommended that the Government take measures to address that. However, when deciding on final implementation it was recognised that, due to a shortage of endoscopy equipment and with substantially higher incidence rates over the age of 60, screening would begin with that age group. It is conceded that more than 80% of those diagnosed with bowel cancer are over the age of 60.

A University of Sheffield study recommended that offering both bowel scope screening and the FOBT from the age of 60 would maximise survival rates and have the important trade-off of being cost-effective.

Yet the same study also found that the FOBT would substantially lower the number of deaths by as much as 23% if it was run for 50 to 69-year-olds, whereas running it from the age of 60 only would reduce the number of deaths by only 14%. It is hard to talk about percentages but, just to bring the debate back to the personal level, that significant 9% would have included Lauren's mum, and perhaps other people we know.

We know that there is a clear upward incidence of bowel cancer over the age of 50. The rate of bowel cancer roughly triples between one's 40s and one's 50s, before doubling again in one's 60s. We all should be aware of the signs and take precautions in our diet and lifestyle to prevent and detect bowel cancer—and, yes, perhaps we ought to shed the very British attitude that we must keep calm and carry on, and seek out our GP. More must be done to improve screening uptake rates. Bowel cancer screening rates remain disappointingly low nationwide, having barely moved above those achieved in the pilot 16 years ago.

Rebecca Pow: Spotting the signs is absolutely crucial, and we have had some great receptions in Parliament about just that point with the bowel cancer organisations, but I want to put a positive spin on things. Let us not be negative. If we spot bowel cancer early, which is exactly what my hon. Friend is talking about, it is fully possible to recover. It is one of the ones that has a positive outcome. We have got some great medical teams in this country, and I think we should praise them. In particular, I praise the team at Musgrove Park hospital. It has one of the best support teams in this area. I know Lauren has had a terrible time, but for other people there is an awful lot of positivity, which is why my hon. Friend secured the debate.

Caroline Ansell: Indeed, there is a lot of positivity. Lauren brings that positivity: she wants not only to reduce the screening ages, but to advance awareness of bowel cancer across the piece. I know that she is particularly concerned about those who are at risk and are already carrying the condition in their 20s and their 30s. So much more needs to be done, and that includes us talking about our symptoms and taking that forward. As we have heard, there is a good prognosis if we can strike out for that early intervention.

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): On that positive note, my mother had a scare at 90. She ended up with a colostomy and she is shortly to be 104. There are good outcomes. Does my hon. Friend share my disappointment that the national average for take-up is 58%? In Southend, it is 52%. Our excellent Minister will be keen to ensure that there is a much higher take-up rate.

Caroline Ansell: Indeed. I am looking forward to hearing more from the Minister about the excellent work the Government are doing. I know that they have plans and prospects for hitting that low take-up. I fear that that low take-up might be a very British sort of thing, and we need to break through that if we are to strive to see the same survival rates as some of our European counterparts.

On early diagnosis, those diagnosed with stage 1 bowel cancer have a 97% chance of survival, which is hugely positive. That compares with a chance of survival of just 7% when the cancer is more advanced.

[Caroline Ansell]

Early diagnosis not only provides patients with a much better chance of survival, but would cost the NHS far less, saving an estimated £34 million according to the charity Beating Bowel Cancer. That is because treatment for the earlier stages of cancer is often less intensive and invasive than treatment for more advanced diseases.

Sadly we also know that we are lagging behind other countries on survival rates. A 2013 study for the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, which was part-funded by the European Commission, found that in Britain we diagnose bowel cancer later than other countries, while our survival rate overall for bowel cancer was only 51.8%. That is lower than the European average of 57% and lower than Germany's survival rate of 62%. That is not where we want to be. I am looking forward to hearing from the Minister about her Department's sterling work, but my question today is: could the age of screening be revisited? Is there scope to further personalise and target testing in those younger years?

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): For the Minister's benefit, the debate will conclude at 4.57 pm.

4.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jane Ellison): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. The quite extraordinary level of participation in this half-hour debate speaks volumes about the level of interest in and engagement with this issue from parliamentarians. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Caroline Ansell) on securing the debate. I am grateful that I had the opportunity to speak to Lauren at the Beating Bowel Cancer reception here in the House in January and to have heard her story in person. My officials and I enjoyed that conversation. As my hon. Friend said, she is a remarkable young woman.

Bowel cancer is one of the most common types of cancer. The statistics around the number of people who die from it each year have been eloquently explained. We accept that we as a country want to do better. That is why, looking at cancer in the round, NHS England set up the independent cancer taskforce, which produced the new strategy "Achieving world-class cancer outcomes". That was widely welcomed when it was published last July. The Government are committed to implementing the recommendations of the taskforce, and that will see improvements right across the cancer pathway, including in screening. The strategy sets a clear ambition for a further improvement in survival rates. They have improved, as my hon. Friend said, but we want to go further.

Today's focus is very much on screening, which is a crucial part of diagnosing bowel cancer early. We know that outcomes are significantly better for people diagnosed at stages 1 and 2 as compared with stages 3 and 4. When deciding whether to undertake bowel cancer screening, we have to remember that it is a choice for each individual, so it is important that people are provided with the information they need to make an informed decision. I will go on to talk a little about how many people either decide not to do it or do not get round to doing it. Screening is a significant challenge, and I welcome attention being given to it.

On the advice of the UK National Screening Committee, the expert body that advises Ministers and the NHS in the four UK countries about all aspects of screening policy, bowel cancer screening using the faecal occult blood self-sampling test is offered in England. The bowel cancer screening programme offers screening using the kits every two years to men and women aged 60 to 74 who are registered with a GP. Men and women aged over 74 can self-refer for screening every two years if they wish. People eligible for screening receive an invitation letter explaining the programme, along with an information leaflet explaining the benefits and risks of bowel cancer screening. By the end of January 2016, nearly 29 million men and women in England had been sent a home testing kit and more than 17.5 million had returned a kit and been screened. More than 24,000 cancers have been detected, and nearly 70,000 patients have been managed for high or intermediate-risk adenomas, or polyps, including polyp removal.

The age issue has been the focus of much of the comment today. The NHS bowel cancer screening programme began in 2006, with full roll-out completed in 2010. The programme initially offered screening to men and women aged 60 to 69 because the risk of bowel cancer increases with age. More than 80% of bowel cancers are diagnosed in people aged 60 or over. In the pilot, which was conducted in Coventry and Warwickshire and in Scotland in the late 1990s and early 2000s, more than three times as many cancers were detected in people aged over 60 than in those aged under 60, and people in their 60s were most likely to use a testing kit. Only 47% of men aged 50 to 54 completed a kit, compared with 57% of men aged 60 to 64.

There are also issues of capacity, particularly for endoscopy services, as has been mentioned. The roll-out of screening required that the NHS bowel cancer screening programme take into account and help balance the increasing workloads and pressures placed upon services providing diagnosis and treatment to all people with bowel cancer, not just those found through the screening programme. I emphasise that point to the House, because it is important. The latest routes to diagnosis figures from Public Health England show that in 2013, only 9% of bowel cancers were diagnosed through screening. That 9% is important, but it compares with the more than 50% of bowel cancers that were diagnosed following a GP referral. Sadly, 25% were diagnosed via emergency routes, and those have very poor survival rates because the cancers tend to be at a later stage. The programme has to be able to respond. The skills and the clinicians we need to respond to those GP referrals have to be available, so there is always a difficult balance in terms of the resource we need.

The programme was also required to consider possible changes to it. One such change—this is an important point that has not quite come out in the debate so far—is bowel scope screening, also known as flexible sigmoidoscopy, for people in their 50s. It is a one-off examination that is an alternative and complementary bowel screening methodology to the self-testing kit. It aims to find polyps before they turn into cancer, so it actually prevents cancer ever developing. Evidence has shown that men and women aged 55 to 64 attending a one-off bowel scope screening test could reduce their individual mortality from the disease by 43% and their individual incidence of bowel cancer by 33%.

In 2011, the UK National Screening Committee recommended offering bowel scope screening for bowel cancer. The NHS bowel cancer screening programme is currently rolling it out to men and women around their 55th birthday. They will be invited to take part in the self-testing part of the programme from age 60. Although Scotland is piloting bowel scope screening for some people in its programme, England is the only UK country committed to a full roll-out. Some 77% of bowel scope screening centres in England are currently operational. The Secretary of State is committed to rolling out bowel scope screening to all screening centres in England by the end of 2016, and we are on track to deliver that commitment.

As of the end of January, more than 230,000 invitations had been issued and more than 85,000 bowel scope screening procedures performed. Although that is very good, Members who can do the maths quickly will realise that uptake is currently running at 44%, compared with nearly 60% for the self-sampling part of the programme. If, on the back of this debate, Members can do anything to raise awareness in their constituencies and to empower men and women to make informed decisions about taking up these free tests, I encourage them to do so.

Margaret Ferrier: Will the Minister give way?

Jane Ellison: I am afraid that I cannot take any interventions because there were so many in the opening speech. I do apologise, but I really want to get through my response.

So far, nearly 3,500 people have attended colonoscopy following bowel scope screening, with 125 cancers detected, and 1,688 people with high or intermediate-risk polyps and 1,270 people with low-risk polyps have had them detected and managed or removed.

Delivering the bowel scope screening programme will obviously place huge demands on endoscopy services, but it can be safely delivered by members of the hospital team other than trained doctors, such as nurses. That is why we announced in September last year that Health Education England is developing a new national training programme for an additional 200 non-medical staff to get the skills and expertise to carry out endoscopies by 2018. The first cohort began training at the end of January. In addition, NHS England's sustainable improvement team is working intensively with trusts that have significant endoscopy waiting lists, in order to improve performance. That learning will then be shared widely. NHS England is also exploring ways to improve endoscopy performance through pricing changes.

I have already mentioned low uptake rates. We know uptake is lower in more disadvantaged groups, in men—as has been referred to—and in some black and minority ethnic groups. Public Health England is providing support and technical advice to its partners in the NHS on reducing the variation in coverage and uptake. Local screening providers are working with commissioners to address that, which is really important, because some of the variation in these important programmes is astonishing. Again, if any Member can do anything to reduce the variation, it would be greatly appreciated.

The Independent Cancer Taskforce has also recommended an ambition for 75% of people to participate in bowel screening by 2020. To facilitate that change,

it recommended a change to a new test, the faecal immunochemical test—FIT—which is more accurate and easier to use than the current FOB test and also improves uptake. I encourage Members with an interest to compare the two tests and try to understand how different they are and why they are likely to have such different effects.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne will be aware that in November last year the UK National Screening Committee recommended that the FIT test should be used as the primary test for bowel cancer screening instead of FOB. We are currently considering that important recommendation. If it is accepted, it is worth remembering that it will be a major change to a programme that saves hundreds of lives, so we will have to ensure that it is rolled out in a safe and sustainable way, which will include the procurement of cost-effective kits and IT systems.

In any debate about cancer screening it is important to underline the difference between population screening programmes and people going to see their GP with the symptoms of cancer. Information for the public on the signs and symptoms of bowel cancer is available on the NHS Choices website. The Department advises people who are concerned about their risks to speak to their GP. Many of the cancers we have heard about in the debate were found at a very late stage. It is probable that there were some symptoms that could have led to a GP referral.

Since 2010-11, the Department and Public Health England have run 10 national “Be Clear on Cancer” public awareness campaigns, including two national campaigns to promote the early diagnosis of bowel cancer. The first campaign ran from January to March 2012, raising awareness of blood in poo as a sign of bowel cancer. It was the first ever national TV campaign to raise awareness of the symptoms of this cancer and to encourage people with relevant symptoms to go to their doctor without delay. A second campaign ran later that year.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence has guidelines on the recognition and referral of suspected cancer, which were updated in June 2015. That is important because in updating them NICE urged GPs to lower the referral threshold when they are assessing whether a referral is appropriate and to think of cancer sooner when examining patients. Switching the way we think and lowering the referral threshold is a critical change that NICE estimates will save many thousands of lives. Of course, professional advice is also available through the various expert bodies.

I emphasise that all screening programmes are kept under review, and the UK National Screening Committee will always look at new evidence. I will of course make sure that our expert advisers are aware of the significant parliamentary interest that has been demonstrated today. In responding to this short debate, I have been trying to illustrate the interaction between the two different parts of the programme—bowel scope screening and the original screening. I have also been trying to underline the point about take-up. Of course it is about individuals making an informed decision, but beyond rolling screening out to different ages, we must ensure that people in the highest risk groups, particularly the over-60s, are aware that they can choose to be screened. Many lives could be saved, so it is really important that we get that message across. We can do more.

[Jane Ellison]

In conclusion, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne again for securing this debate and drawing the important issue of bowel cancer screening to the attention of the House. I assure her and the families of all those affected—including, of course, Lauren, who started the petition—that preventing premature death from cancer is of the utmost priority for the Government. I hope I have set out how we are responding to that vital challenge.

Question put and agreed to.

Ceramics Industry

4.57 pm

Tristram Hunt (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Government support for the ceramics industry.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone.

I shall begin with a quotation from Arnold Bennett, the Tolstoy of the potteries. In his masterpiece, “Anna of the Five Towns” he described Henry Mynors working the potter’s wheel as follows:

“He knows all its tricks and aptitudes; when to coax and when to force it, when to rely on it and when to distrust it...Clay is always clay.”

Those of us who were lucky enough to catch the recent excellent BBC series, “The Great Pottery Throw Down”—filmed in Middleport in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth)—know just what wonders clay can conjure. From the success of the British ceramics biennial to the continuing allure of Emma Bridgewater’s earthenware, Britain has rediscovered its love for cups, saucers and tableware.

More than that, the defining image of the first world war centenary commemorations has been the ceramic poppies installation, filling the Tower of London moat with a sea of red. Designed in Derby and fired in Stoke, the tens of thousands of hand-crafted poppies symbolised a revival based on not just artistic innovation but industrial might. We therefore hold this debate in a moment of optimism about the future of the ceramics industry and that of the greatest ceramics city in the world, Stoke-on-Trent. Yet, if we are to secure the continued revival of earthenware, china, clay, tile, roofing and other ceramic industries, we need a Government committed to an industrial strategy that supports and grows pottery businesses throughout the UK.

The history of pottery in Stoke-on-Trent is long, stretching back a good 500 years. Out of the brown and yellow north Staffordshire clay came butter pots and flower pots. In the sun kilns of Bagnall and Penkhull, local artisans started to glaze their wares and develop a reputation for craftsmanship. But Europe’s ceramicists remained in the shadow of China, which had long mastered the magic of porcelain, the famous white ceramic formed by kaolin, named after the hill just outside Jingdezhen. Only in 1768 did the Plymouth apothecary William Cookworthy crack the recipe. With the help of Cornish clay, Britain joined Meissen and Sèvres in porcelain production. China—Britain’s new word for pottery and porcelain—became the eighteenth century rage. No one exploited the new era of industrial production, design and innovation more than Josiah Wedgwood. From his Etruria factory, he unleashed a volley of fashionable new designs that caught the attention of Queen Charlotte and Britain’s expanding middle class. His trademark jasper and basalt production followed.

In 1934, J.B. Priestley visited Stoke-on-Trent on his celebrated English journey. He, too, fell for the elemental, timeless attraction of ceramics. He celebrated the fettlers, the mould-makers, the dippers and the master potters for

“doing something that they can do better than anybody else...Here is the supreme triumph of man’s creative thumb.”

Priestley caught the industry at its peak. The decline of the British ceramics industry arguably began with the Clean Air Act 1956 and the dismantling of some 2,000 coal-fired bottle kilns. For all the benefits of open skies and modernised plant, the law imposed sudden and significant costs on the manufacturing process. In an attempt to offset those costs, the industry embarked on a round of mergers and acquisitions, resulting in an over-concentrated ceramics sector. The high interest rates and exchange rates of the 1980s hammered exports. The rise of takeaways and the end of wedding lists undermined demand. Most damaging of all was the growing threat of the far east. Labour and energy costs in China put British production at a marked disadvantage.

Wedgwood went bust and Spode went into receivership, and between the early 1980s and 2010, some 40,000 jobs were lost in the ceramics industry. With them went Stoke's cityscape and parts of its culture. The Minton factory, where Pugin's tiles were fired for the Houses of Parliament, was turned into a Sainsbury's. Then the final insult: in 2010, the entire collection of the Wedgwood Museum was threatened with disposal.

Six years on, the Wedgwood Museum has been saved and the industry is making profits, creating jobs, finding export markets and coming up with new designs. There is excitement and enthusiasm about British ceramic design. There is a new competitiveness in great companies such as Steelite, Churchill and Portmeirion. There is a new culture of partnership.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for securing this debate. Does he agree that Dudson, Steelite and many other companies have a strong record of exporting around the world? The last time I looked, ceramics make a net contribution to our balance of trade. It is one of the few industries that does.

Tristram Hunt: The hon. Gentleman is exactly right: it is a great export industry. It is interesting that the companies that stayed in the UK, did not offshore all their production, invested in research and development and design, and supported innovation, are growing. As I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North will explain, her constituency is pretty much dominated by Steelite, which grows every week. That is only to be admired.

A new culture is emerging among trade unions such as GMB, the British Ceramic Confederation and local businesses, and a new culture of research and innovation is coming out of facilities such as Lucideon in Stoke-on-Trent—our ceramics research hub. Today, as the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) suggested, the ceramics sector exports £500 million a year, employs about 20,000 people directly and enjoys annual sales of about £2 billion.

To sustain that success, I have some requests for the Minister. The ceramics industry is an energy-intensive sector. Energy comprises up to 30% to 35% of production costs. We are severely disadvantaged by the current plethora of UK and EU policies. For example, only seven ceramics manufacturers in the UK are likely to receive renewables compensation, in contrast to more than 100 German and 140 Italian companies. Policies relating to the EU emissions trading scheme are very

important for competitiveness. The question for the sector is: which processes will be awarded carbon leakage status for phase 4, which will begin in 2021?

There are particular worries about the tiering on just a handful of sectors, and concerns, which my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly) might pursue, about the roof tile and brick businesses. The Government's much-vaunted house building programme should not be carried out on the back of Polish, Belgian or Dutch bricks. We should produce them in the UK.

Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that, although of course we are all concerned about the future of the steel industry, it is very important in our discussions with Brussels that the ceramics industry is not disregarded or harmed as a by-product of our attempts to help the steel industry?

Tristram Hunt: My hon. Friend, who has been a brilliant campaigner for the brick business over many years in our part of the world, is exactly right: we would be shooting ourselves in the foot, in terms of industrial policy, if the advances that we want to make in the steel industry undermine the ceramics industry. They are both energy-intensive sectors, so they share similar challenges relating to energy costs.

We would like to hear that the Minister is fighting to ensure that heavy clay producers are also awarded carbon leakage status. We welcome the ceramic valley enterprise zone, but without support on the EU emissions trading scheme, even state-of-the-art facilities will be punished for their carbon costs. We serve neither British industry nor the global environment if we rack up industrial energy prices, export jobs from Britain and import carbon emissions.

It is very important that consumers know where products are made. The outsourcing of production is nothing new in the ceramics business—indeed, during busy periods, Josiah Wedgwood himself sometimes asked other manufacturers to make up blanks for him—but in an age of brand value, the back stamp remains all-important. In Stoke-on-Trent, we are proud to house the turnover club, whose members flip the crockery in restaurants and even dinner parties to find out where it was made.

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise (Anna Soubry): Dinner parties? Good heavens!

Tristram Hunt: Not while the food is on it, Minister. *[Interruption.]* Well, sometimes.

For a long time, manufacturers have made products abroad and backstamped, "Made in England". The rules are clear: the country of origin is where the blank is fired. In an age of global trade, it is perfectly right that products are made in China, Thailand or Indonesia, but consumers also have a right to know whether their purchases are subsidising poor environmental standards and weak labour laws. For an embarrassingly long time, the free market fundamentalists at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills have opposed the European Union's compulsory country of origin proposals. Will the Minister tell us whether that is still the case today?

As I am talking about Europe—I subject I know you care passionately about, Mr Hollobone—this is a good moment to reflect on the merits of being inside the

[Tristram Hunt]

European single market for the ceramics industry. It is not only that Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire have been helped by £130 million of EU funds and that Europe is a crucial export market; it is thanks to being part of the European Union that our ceramics industry has benefited from the anti-dumping tariffs of between 13% and 36% that are placed on Chinese kitchenware and tableware. Those tariffs have played an important role in the pottery industry's regeneration. Will the Minister confirm that we will support their extension in 2018, that being part of Europe has helped us—although, I hate to say it, the Government have always opposed those measures—and that if we were outside Europe, tariffs would be placed on British ceramics manufacturers exporting to the single market?

I might be guilty of over-concentrating on the history of the ceramics industry—[*Interruption.*] Never! Our heritage is part of our brand and our pride. We have to build the careers, apprenticeships and markets of the future. I support the Government's apprenticeship levy, and I hope that Staffordshire University will forge new partnerships with other higher education institutions to increase the number of designers and manufacturers. I hope to see new factories in the enterprise zone, and I fully back the Materials Processing Institute's plans for a materials catapult centre to benefit research and development in the ceramics industry. Will the Minister ensure that the materials catapult is given a supportive hearing by her Department?

This week we heard that the Government will centralise all school expenditure as part of the funding review. As a Stoke-on-Trent MP, it drives me mad to see schoolchildren eating off trays, rather than plates, as if they are being set up for life either in prison or as airline passengers. Education Ministers love to micro-manage, so will we see them urging schools to buy and use ceramic plates for their pupils?

New jobs, new orders, new businesses being started, and even another series of "The Great Pottery Throw Down" being commissioned—these are exciting times. Thanks to automation and globalisation, we will not return to the tens of thousands employed in the ceramics and pottery industries in previous decades, but we can build a new high-wage, high-skills ceramics industry of the future, trading on Stoke-on-Trent's heroic past while taking products and processes into the future. I very much hope that we may take from the debate the Government's support in that endeavour.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order. The debate finishes at 5.58 pm. I will call the first of the Front-Bench speakers no later than 5.36 pm. Two Members are standing, so you have about 12 minutes each.

5.11 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Tristram Hunt) on securing the debate on a subject that is close to my heart. The motion is about Government support for the ceramics industry, and the starting point of any industry is the raw material—I am

speaking about china clay. If we are to support the ceramics industry in the UK, we need to support the china clay industry as well.

I am incredibly proud to speak not only as a Cornishman who grew up surrounded by the china clay industry in and around St Austell, but as the Member of Parliament for the area, which has been at the forefront of china clay production for hundreds of years. The sky tips dominate the landscape of mid-Cornwall, reminding us every day of our great heritage and our history of clay production. Generations of Cornish families, including my own, have worked in the industry. Barely any part of my constituency has not been touched directly by china clay production.

China clay has long been big business in Cornwall. St Austell's relationship with it, as the hon. Gentleman rightly pointed out, goes back more than 200 years, to when William Cookworthy first made the discovery in Cornwall. At the height of the trade, literally millions of tons of china clay were being exported to all corners of the world. Cornwall soon got a reputation for the highest-quality clay in the world, so it is no surprise that that was quickly recognised by the ceramics industry, establishing the connection with places such as Stoke-on-Trent.

A large proportion of Cornwall's china clay production has moved overseas in recent years, but the industry remains extremely important to Cornwall. In fact, it is difficult to overstate its importance to Cornwall and, in particular, my constituency. Although employment in the industry has declined over the past 20 or 30 years, it is still the largest private sector employer in the area. The majority of the clay produced in Cornwall is exported. In fact, china clay contributes about £150 million a year to the UK's balance of payments, and that should be preserved. The industry has also shaped our heritage in mid-Cornwall, and that is of great importance to us. As I said, every day we see the marks left on our landscape—for example, the Eden Project is built in a former china clay pit.

With the clay and ceramic industries so important, we should look at ways in which the Government can support the industries and the thousands of workers throughout the country employed in them. As producers in Brazil and China emerge, undercutting exports, there are fears that problems could be exacerbated if action is not taken and if the existing proposals for carbon leakage protection are pursued.

In my constituency, Imerys is the only remaining company that produces kaolin and ball clay. Such operations, by their very nature, are highly energy-intensive processes, and energy represents about 27% of production costs. Consequently, energy consumption has always been a major focus for the industry and is minimised by it wherever possible. Imerys has been at the forefront of energy efficiency and the use of alternative and renewable energy sources for many years. However, the fact remains that, given the international market for its products, further increases in production costs could result in it losing business to European Union and non-EU competitors.

That brings me to my key point: what will the Government do to support the ceramics industry and, specifically, the china clay industry? Kaolin and ball clay operations are deemed to be at risk of carbon leakage. They therefore received a free allocation of

allowances. However, there are concerns that, under the UK's preferred approach to carbon leakage protection post-2020, Imerys is likely to receive what it feels is an inadequate level of free allowances to remain internationally competitive.

The reduction in the free allowances will have a significant impact on the industry and force the company to purchase a significantly greater proportion—possibly all—of its allowances to cover future carbon emissions. That will obviously severely damage its global competitiveness and disadvantage the kaolin and ball clay sector against competing suppliers that may receive higher levels of carbon leakage protection.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that when we talk about rebalancing the economy, we are talking not only about the midlands and the north of England, but about areas such as Cornwall, which desperately need to maintain this kind of economic activity? Surely it is incumbent on the Minister to remember that when thinking about the relevant policies.

Steve Double: I wholeheartedly agree. It is well known that the Cornish economy, and that of the south-west in general, fall way behind the UK national average. It is crucial to do all we can to bridge the gap, but I would say that the Government are doing a great deal, investing record amounts of money in the south-west and already supporting the Cornish economy in many ways.

I am, however, addressing the specific sector of the china clay industry in Cornwall. I do not want to see it put at greater disadvantage on the world market, so no decisions that make it less competitive on the world stage should be made. Based on existing emission levels and forecast prices of carbon, the proposed carbon leakage changes could add £1 million a year to Imerys's production costs. We should, however, not only be proud that the UK produces the best-quality china clay in the world, but be doing all we can to protect and support the industry as a world leader.

Recently, we have seen the impact of uncompetitive production costs, driven in particular by energy costs, on a major industry: our steel industry. We cannot allow the same fate to fall on the china clay industry. We cannot sacrifice the china clay and ceramics industries in order to save other sectors. I simply urge the Government to look carefully at their approach to the carbon leakage allowance and not to make any decisions that will reduce the competitiveness of an industry that is vital to Cornwall.

5.18 pm

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to be here under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double).

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Tristram Hunt) for securing such an important debate. I, too, am proud to represent the potteries, the beating heart of the British ceramics industry since its birth, and I am the chair of the newly formed all-party group for ceramics. I have the privilege of representing Burslem, the mother town of Stoke-on-Trent, where—I hate to challenge my hon. Friend—a thriving pottery industry has existed since as far back as the 12th century.

Today, it is the home of such fantastic British companies as Steelite, Royal Stafford and Moorcroft. Those businesses are complemented by competition from Dudson and Churchill, based in Tunstall, and are supplied with raw materials from my hon. Friend's constituency by our very own Furlong Mills.

Those companies live up to our heritage and represent the very best of modern British manufacturing. In Middleport, home of our historic Burleigh Ware, we see the firing up of a new generation of master potters on "The Great Pottery Throw Down", which I am delighted to announce has been recommissioned for a second series by BBC Two—I urge all hon. Members to apply for next year.

Today, more than 2,500 people are directly employed by the ceramics industry in my constituency, fuelling world demand for high-quality ceramics from tiles to tableware. The industry remains the single largest employer in Stoke-on-Trent North and Kidsgrove. It continues to innovate, invest in new technology and fulfil its commitments to green and sustainable manufacturing. While I am touching on the industry, it would be remiss of me to suggest that ceramics is only tableware and tiles. Many other products are reflected in the industry.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): Raeburn Brick in my constituency is Scotland's only remaining clay brick company, making 15% of the bricks used in Scotland—the other 85% are imported—and it operates as a highly energy-efficient company. Does the hon. Lady agree that we must do all we can to support this local employer and that, with tens of thousands of new houses to be built throughout Scotland in the coming years, it is in our economic interests to do so?

Ruth Smeeth: I wholeheartedly agree that investment in ceramics is as much in our national interest as it is part of our wider economic interests. Like our city, the industry has a proud past, but it could have an even brighter future if the Government are prepared to support it. My local businesses are keen to invest in research and development, to expand production and to create jobs, but a toxic cocktail of policies is creating great uncertainty. If future profits are seen to be at risk, investment will stall and our economy will suffer.

I am proud to support the British Ceramic Confederation's EARTH campaign, which is doing vital work to bring policies to light. One such policy is the decision to confer market economy status on China, which would prevent meaningful anti-dumping measures against unfair Chinese export practices. The Government have tried to claim that granting China market economy status would not affect the ability to protect British industry and that anti-dumping measures could still be put in place, but that fails to take into account the fact that anti-dumping measures are calculated at a far lower rate for free market economies.

If China were to be granted market economy status, any anti-dumping measures placed on it would be calculated on the basis of the domestic cost of production in China, which is greatly subsidised by state support and kept lower by the cheap cost of labour employed in appalling conditions. The result would be so-called protections that in practice would be virtually worthless

[*Ruth Smeeth*]

and nothing to stop European markets from being saturated with Chinese productions at extremely cheap prices.

Paul Farrelly: Does my hon. Friend agree that the industry's concern for many years has been not just dumping from China, but counterfeiting? Many companies such as Doulton and Wedgwood have found themselves in a position where, weeks after producing new designs, professional salesmen from Chinese industrial complexes are going around Europe with portfolios of copies of their designs marketed at a third or a quarter of the price. That remains a concern.

Ruth Smeeth: I very much agree with my hon. Friend and would suggest that one reason we need to protect our industry is the quality of what comes out of our factories as well as the design and investment.

Angela Smith: My hon. Friend is illustrating perfectly why MES for China would be damaging to our ceramics industry. Our steel industry, which is already under severe stress, would also be threatened by such a move. Does she agree that the Government ought to think again about their support for MES for China, given the risk it poses of potentially permanent damage to two of our important foundation industries? As parliamentarians, we need to support both industries in their bid to create a level playing field in terms of both cost and competitiveness.

Ruth Smeeth: Of course I agree with my hon. Friend, who speaks with authority as one of the few Members who represents both the steel industry and the ceramics industry, both of which could be heavily damaged by China's market economy status.

China currently meets just one of the five criteria required for market economy status, a fact that has been confirmed by the Minister. However, simply to say that China does not meet the criteria is to grossly underestimate the extent to which the Chinese economy is rigged in its own favour to the detriment of British and European industry. A recent report by the European Parliament—those may be words to avoid—concluded that state-led distortions in the financial sector are rife, that bankruptcy systems are malfunctioning and that political influence can be seen in close to 100% of China's biggest firms. Far from being anything resembling a free market, 38% of China's industrial assets are state owned.

Yet while the EU recognises the threat posed by granting MES to China, the Government appear to be supportive of the bid. The effect of that would be catastrophic for British ceramics and devastating to the British economy as a whole, affecting about 3.5 million jobs and up to 2% of GDP in the first two years. Import-sensitive sectors such as tiles and tableware would be especially hard hit, as they have no defence against Chinese dumping. Companies such as Johnson Tiles, based in my constituency, are at the forefront of modern production, but if we are not careful, their reward for innovation will be to be undercut in a market that they have pioneered.

It should come as no surprise that the Government have been equivocating on this issue. Their approach to China has resembled less of a negotiation than a fire sale.

From steel to real estate and our nuclear reactors, the message coming out loud and clear is "Everything must go." When it comes to supporting ceramics specifically, the Government talk a good game, but a significant proportion of the tableware used in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills is made in China. Far from celebrating "Britain is GREAT," the Minister eats from tableware at the Department—

Anna Soubry: I certainly do not.

Ruth Smeeth: Sixty percent of its tableware is made in China.

Anna Soubry: I do not normally intervene, but it is really important that we do not mislead. I certainly have never had any tableware of any origin in the Department. If I do eat there, it is a takeaway sandwich in plastic wrapping or a plastic box.

Tristram Hunt: That is the problem.

Anna Soubry: I accept that is wrong, but I will not have misleading information.

Ruth Smeeth: As a former trade union officer, I urge the Minister to try to get better terms and conditions and to eat a meal. I suggest that, for her colleagues who sit down to eat, 60% of the crockery used in the Department is made in China. That statistic was secured through a parliamentary question. When will "Buy British" be a policy and not just a slogan?

We have already seen from the devastating impact on the British steel industry of what happens when the Government sit back and do nothing to defend British jobs and trade, and we cannot afford for the ceramics industry to suffer the same fate. Our ceramics businesses are doing everything right. They just have the misfortune of living, as the Chinese might say, in interesting times. However, I am in no doubt that the industry can continue to thrive if the Government are prepared to stand up for British business.

All we ask for is a level playing field. Our ceramics industry is the best in the world, but we cannot compete fairly if state-funded Chinese companies are allowed to flood our domestic market with cheap products. For generations, the lives and livelihoods of my constituents have been shaped by the ceramics industry, as the clay beneath our towns was shaped by the potters' hands. A world-beating industry was born in the kilns of Stoke-on-Trent and wherever we travel today we will find products proudly bearing our back stamp. We cannot let that great industry go up in smoke.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): We now come to the Front-Bench speeches. The SNP gets five minutes, the Opposition get five minutes and the Minister gets 10 minutes—not my rules; they are the guidelines for the House.

5.28 pm

Dr Paul Monaghan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Tristram Hunt) on winning the debate and his entertaining account of the industry. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) noted, ceramics are enormously important to Scotland's economy and to my constituency.

Anta pottery in Fearn, Highland Stoneware in Lochinver and Northshore Pottery in Caithness are examples of companies that produce ceramic products in Scotland.

Anta is one of the largest employers in Easter Ross outside of the manufacturing and oil industries. Highland Stoneware is based in Sutherland and has a smaller factory in Ullapool in Ross-shire. It is a major employer in the local economy, with a reputation for producing some of the finest hand-crafted ceramics in the world, completing more than 700,000 orders each year—a remarkable achievement. Northshore Pottery operates in a far north-western corner of Scotland, close to Wick. The company is owned by a lady called Jenny Mackenzie Ross, who reflects Norse culture in her work and specialises in architectural ceramics. These are very different companies. Each operates in remote and rural areas, supports a range of local tradesmen in completing their work and, of course, returns approximately 65% of turnover to staff wages.

As the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central noted, the ceramics industry is very energy-intensive. In 2014, some ceramics manufacturers reported that their energy bills made up 35% of their total overhead costs. In addition, its energy demands are inflexible and cannot be easily tapered depending on the time of day. Energy costs appear critical to the success of the industry. Ceramics producers, including brick makers, have been critical of the fact that the steel industry has received exemptions from UK renewables taxes, while ceramic producers have not, rendering the industry unviable. Closing down energy-intensive industries will not make a difference to global carbon output, but will export jobs from an industry that makes a net contribution to the economy, as the hon. Members for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) and for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) noted.

The British Ceramic Confederation criticised the UK Government's autumn statement for failing to provide certainty on, among things, energy costs for this industry. The hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) mentioned the confederation's submission made in January in respect of the Budget. As part of its EARTH campaign, the confederation listed five actions that the UK Government should take in order to create a level playing field internationally. It called for an EU emissions trading scheme to ensure that all ceramic subsectors receive full mitigation measures to guard against leakage of carbon, investment and jobs to competitors outside the EU, as well as action to reduce the cumulative costs of energy, climate and environmental policies that are harming the sector's ability to remain internationally competitive.

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): I am glad to hear the hon. Gentleman talking about energy in that way, because it seems fundamental. It is important we understand that, in Germany today, ceramics manufacturers are paying approximately half what manufacturers are paying in the UK. All of us have a role to play in getting the balance right between green taxes and lower energy costs, because it is vital for these industries.

Dr Monaghan: I absolutely agree; it is vital. These industries are struggling in the UK and need support from the Government to create the level playing field that the hon. Gentleman speaks of.

The confederation calls for long-term partnership working with the UK Government and funded assistance for the sector to accelerate investment in existing technologies and the development of breakthrough decarbonisation technologies. The confederation has also called for the rejection of unilateral recognition of China as a market economy, which would leave manufacturers inadequately defended against a rising tide of cheap imports, about which we have heard today. Finally, it called for the UK Government to achieve higher levels of economic growth through a revised housing policy, to enable investment in the supply chain in the UK rather than overseas.

The Scottish Government recognise the importance of Scotland's manufacturing sector and are committed, through their new manufacturing strategy, to continue doing whatever is necessary to support the sector. Through their enterprise agencies, that demonstrable commitment is focused on strengthening and supporting Scotland's economic links with overseas markets. The Scottish Government will continue to invest in and promote exports to help to build sustainable economic growth for Scotland. Similar affirmative action by the UK Government would be of enormous benefit.

5.34 pm

Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Tristram Hunt) on obtaining this debate and speaking so passionately about the importance of the ceramics industry to his constituency. The UK ceramics industry has a proud heritage in the area, as so eloquently described by my hon. Friend, but it is also in the vanguard of novel material development and advanced manufacturing. Some of Britain's most iconic brands have been, and still are, found in the ceramics industry—I hope that my hon. Friends will not fight about which ones came first. However, as we have heard, the full growth potential of the industry is not being achieved, as a combination of policies is undermining investment, trade, growth and jobs.

The British Ceramic Confederation launched the EARTH campaign in January this year, with five asks of the Minister, to ensure the level playing field that we have heard so much about and secure thousands of jobs in the UK ceramics industry. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) for taking up the baton and forming an all-party group for this industry.

The confederation's first ask is on the EU emissions trading scheme. A tiered approach to the next phase of the EU ETS will not help this industry, as only a few energy-intensive industries will benefit at the expense of others. Indeed, the Department of Energy and Climate Change paper co-authored with other member states understates the effect of the tiered approach on the ceramics industry by using the floor and wall tiles sector as a proxy for the whole industry, which underplays how unfavourable a position the heavy clay subsector would be in should that be adopted. What discussions has the Minister had with her colleagues in DECC regarding that issue?

Secondly, the industry asks for action on the cumulative cost of compliance. There is a package of renewable compensation measures for electro-intensive industries,

[Yvonne Fovargue]

but—due to the design of the scheme—only a handful of confederation members will receive any compensation. In fact, as we have heard, only seven members are likely to be compensated in the United Kingdom—none of which are in Stoke-on-Trent North—compared with more than 100 in Germany and 140 in Italy. Will the Minister look again at the design of the scheme?

The third ask is to reduce carbon emissions through a long-term industrial policy. The British Ceramic Confederation is working with partners, including academics and the Knowledge Transfer Network, to share good practice and inform Government policy. I also hope that the catapult centre will take root in Stoke-on-Trent, as we need more of those centres outside the M25 corridor.

As we heard from the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), China's dumping is already causing a problem with trade, but it is now applying for market economy status. My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North spoke knowledgeably and passionately about the problems that that would cause. Although trade is an EU matter, the Government are influential. Surely the matter would be better decided through the World Trade Organisation. What is the Minister's view on that? How will she ensure that any granting of MES with exemptions will not lead to problems similar to those already being faced by other industries—for example, the steel industry, for which my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) is a doughty campaigner?

I turn finally to housing. Joined-up working is needed to ensure that quality British products are used in the housing sector and that the opportunity is spread to all sections of it. How will the Minister engage with the industry to ensure that that is the case? Indeed, I hope that the people inside the houses will be turning over their pots to make sure that they are British-made; I hope that the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills will do so as well.

More than 20,000 people are employed in the ceramics industry, which pays £500 million a year in wages and national insurance. More than that, it is in the DNA of Stoke and the surrounding area. The Government must act now to protect this historic yet forward-thinking industry.

5.38 pm

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise (Anna Soubry): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. May I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Tristram Hunt) on securing this debate? I congratulate everyone who has taken part in it. A number of issues have been raised, and I will try in the time available to address all of them.

First, I would like to pay tribute to all those working in our ceramics industry. It is a very important part of the manufacturing base of our country and, as we have heard, a significant part of various products. More than just cups, plates and bowls are made in the ceramics industry and exported, and that is very important to us. The industry is not just about beautiful cups and saucers made over decades by outstanding British companies such as Royal Doulton and Spode; it is also about the

funky ware—if I can put it in that way—being made by people such as Emma Bridgewater, who has been doing a sterling job in Stoke-on-Trent, and about tiles and bricks. There are also technical ceramics. The electronics, aerospace, automotive and healthcare industries all benefit from this wide and very important sector. Several high-profile firms have unfortunately closed, as the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central described, in giving us—as I would expect from him—a very eloquent history lesson. I need not repeat the fact that unfortunately, in north Staffordshire, the number of jobs fell from 52,790 in 1979 to 7,200 in 2008. That really does speak volumes about the decline of an industry, certainly in terms of the huge numbers of people affected.

As we have heard, there is a lot of good news. We have heard about investment in technology and factories and about distinguished names such as Waterford, Wedgwood, Royal Doulton, Wade and Steelite—that company is new to me, I have to confess; I hope that nobody holds that against me. I am very happy to go and see it, if it is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford—

Jeremy Lefroy indicated dissent.

Anna Soubry: Wherever the company is, I am more than happy to go and see it, if I can. I would love to—[*Interruption.*] Stoke-on-Trent North is where it is; it sounds very interesting.

Jeremy Lefroy: Just very quickly, I point out to the Minister that she can see these products all over the world, because these companies have made huge inroads into the hospitality sectors around the world. If she cares to look in pretty much any tourist hotel anywhere in the world, she may find these products there.

Anna Soubry: As you might imagine, Mr Hollobone, I do not have time to go swanning off around the world; I am far too busy. I can barely get out of my office where, I can assure you, I do not have food on plates.

We will move on, because there are some seriously important issues to be discussed and debated—I am going to cut the next part of my speech, because I want to get to the real heart of this debate. As we have heard from a number of hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), there is very serious and real concern about the high cost of energy. Like many industries that rely heavily on using a lot of energy, the cost of energy is of serious concern, as is carbon leakage, tiering and a number of other issues that look as though they are coming down the track, if I may put it that way.

On the positive side, it has to be said—if I may say this to Opposition Members—that the Chancellor of the Exchequer should be congratulated on announcing, in the November 2015 spending review, the exemption of energy-intensive industries from indirect costs of the renewables obligation and small-scale feed-in tariffs. We have made all those advances over in the EU, with compensation coming forward. In fact, we have now said that from 2017, EIIs will have an exemption from those particular obligations—those particular taxes.

Hon. Members then say, “Well, that's all great, wonderful and brilliant, but unfortunately, it doesn't affect the ceramics industry enough.” I absolutely hear that message and understand that that is deeply concerning for all

those who work in the industry. However, we have something called the industrial 2050 road map—that is a very good example of Government using dreadful language. “What on earth is a road map in the ceramics industry?” I asked, and my brilliant officials, as ever, helped to tell me. I went to a conference yesterday in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, which was attended by the equally brilliant British Ceramics—I cannot remember the next part of its name. Somebody will tell me in a minute, but anyway, it is brilliant. It is basically the industry’s group, which gets together all the businesses involved in the ceramics industry and represents them extremely well. Its representatives have been to see me, and I am more than happy to see them on a regular basis.

Yesterday, by way of example, we had a conference in which we looked at what we are doing as a Government and how to improve, such as by achieving more compensation, perhaps, and by looking at how we get cheaper energy, because that is the real solution—ensuring that we have an abundance of cheap energy. However, it is also about ensuring that we do everything that we can to reduce the amount of energy that these industries use. The road map is basically a plan—it is a strategy—that looks at how we can reduce the burden of high energy prices through the reduction of usage and through better usage, and so on and so forth, for ceramics and others.

I attended that excellent event only for a short time, unfortunately, but that is the sort of work we are doing, because we certainly get that there is a problem, and I am absolutely determined to do all I can to be a champion for this excellent part of our manufacturing sector, to achieve a better deal and to ensure that we indeed achieve that level playing field. In that respect, I think the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North and I absolutely agree, as I think the hon. Member for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue) does, that all this industry asks for is a level playing field—not subsidies or special treatment—and I agree with it.

Opposition Members and I are now going to have a falling out, because they make much of the market economy status and China. I do not intend to use a pun, but that is a complete and total red herring, because Russia has market economy status but it is not precluded from tariffs being imposed on it—and rightly so—by the European Union. Therefore, the idea that tariffs cannot be imposed on China if it were to receive MES is not true—it really is not the case.

Angela Smith: Surely the issue is that the tariffs will not be of a sufficiently high rate because of the market economy status that is enjoyed by those countries.

Anna Soubry: No, I do not know of any reason why not. Russia does not at all have a lower tariff because it has MES, so this is a red herring.

I think, however, that we can find some common ground on dumping. The critical point with dumping—there are many examples from the steel industry and two recent examples in ceramics, although when I say “recent”, I mean from the last five years or so—is getting the balance right. If the tariff is too high, it is not a question of the British Government being difficult; it is actually people in the industry who often do not support the tariffs being put on, and there will be other sectors of the British economy that are against tariffs—

David Mowat: Will the Minister give way?

Anna Soubry: I will in a moment—sorry, I am just on a bit of a roll and I want to make this point, because it is really important. What we do—certainly what I do—is look at each case on a case-by-case basis. For example, a particular type of steel was used by a particular part of our economy. The buyers—the users—of it said, “Please do not vote in favour of tariffs, because it will have a direct impact on British jobs”, so in that instance, we abstained. However, on two other issues of tariffs on steel, I did not hesitate to give the direction—telling the officials—to vote in favour of tariffs, but we look at it on an individual basis. I will quickly give way to my hon. Friend.

David Mowat: I am interested in the point about MES, because industry—whether it is aluminium, steel or ceramics—is telling us quite the opposite. I am interested to understand which of our sectors, in the Government’s view, benefit from giving China MES, because it is not these ones. Is industry really so wrong in what it is telling us, and BIS is right?

Anna Soubry: Let us get this point about market economy status absolutely clear. First, that will be decided by the European Union, and that will be with all the benefit of everybody being involved. When I went over to Brussels about two or three weeks ago, I was told that this is absolutely the hot topic for the EU. It looks as though—as we might imagine with the EU—there will be some sort of fudge or middle way, but it will be for the EU to decide and it will be the hot topic. My point, however, is that if China were to get market economy status, that does not preclude it from being subject to tariffs, because Russia has market economy status and it can have tariffs put on it. There is no debate about that: Russia can have tariffs put on it. I have had this argument with the steel industry, but that is a fact. Tariffs can be put on a country even if it has market economy status. Whether China should have market economy status and the arguments for and against whether it should are a different matter, but do not conflate tariffs and MES.

What time do I have to finish, Mr Hollobone?

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): I am going to be very generous to the Minister, because I feel that she has engaged the House and Members are intervening. My blind eye is turned towards the clock, so the Minister has a few more minutes left.

Anna Soubry: Right, so I am basically running out of time. That is very sweet of you, Mr Hollobone; I am very grateful.

Paul Farrelly: Will the Minister give way?

Anna Soubry: The hon. Gentleman will have to be quick, or I will be in trouble. Go on.

Paul Farrelly: May I briefly suggest—and thank you, Mr Hollobone—one more subject for the Minister’s road map? For many years, we have pursued the issue of mandatory origin marking, in part to combat counterfeiting from China, as well as on product safety grounds, but the Department has always resisted it, because it feels

[Paul Farrelly]

that it is protectionist. Will the Minister look afresh at that and tell us, perhaps in writing, where this issue stands in the Department and, at the moment, in discussions in Brussels?

Anna Soubry: I was about to come on to that issue, so that is good timing. We did a study on mandatory country-of-origin marking, which was published on 2 March 2015. I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that the majority of companies that took part did not believe that compulsory origin marking would enhance product safety or tackle counterfeiting. However, I do not doubt that more work can be done, because there is marking that is misleading. There are all sorts of things that I will not go into now, Mr Hollobone, because that really would have me here all night, but I am not happy about the markings on lots of products that make out that they are British when actually they are largely made somewhere else. More work can be done on that, and I am very happy to do it.

We are looking at catapult status for the Materials Processing Institute. I am in all sorts of discussions with other hon. Members, notably from Redcar and the north-east, and that will continue. It is something that we are revisiting and looking at, and we will judge it on its merits.

Hon. Members asked about the European Union. It is undoubtedly the case that we are stronger, safer and considerably better off by remaining within the EU. We are making huge strides by ensuring that on dumping, for example, the EU is acting much more quickly and also reducing regulation, and ensuring that it, too, is getting the message on energy. I will finish on this very strong line, if I may. When I went over specifically for the energy intensive industries competitiveness meeting two or three weeks ago, the various sectors did not hold back in making it absolutely clear that we have to have sensible energy prices. We must not overly burden people with taxes. We must create a level—

Angela Smith: Will the Minister give way?

Anna Soubry: What do you think, Mr Hollobone? He says yes.

Angela Smith: Mr Hollobone is being very generous, and so is the Minister. On energy prices, I completely agree with her that we are better off in the EU and we need to keep working with the EU on those prices, but surely the unilateral imposition of the carbon floor price is doing as much damage as anything that the EU has introduced in terms of energy taxation, and surely the Minister ought to be lobbying the Exchequer to do something about that.

Anna Soubry: As you might imagine, Mr Hollobone, I do not just lobby the Exchequer. I also—and actually it is a genuine pleasure—work with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate

Change and other Government colleagues, because we absolutely get that there is a problem. As I keep saying and as is absolutely the case, all the industry asks for is a level playing field, and that is what I will seek to achieve, as their ministerial representative, to ensure that we do the right thing. On that hopefully more positive and happy note, thank you for your generosity, Mr Hollobone, and if I have not answered all hon. Members' questions, I will write to them.

5.52 pm

Tristram Hunt: This has been an excellent debate. I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Stoke-on-Trent North, for Newcastle-under-Lyme and for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith), all the Front Benchers and the hon. Members for Stafford and for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double).

I thank the Minister for her summing-up. She should be in no doubt that we will return time and again, with the British Ceramic Confederation, to energy pricing. As she says, we want a level playing field and we want effective compensation for these highly energy-intensive sectors, particularly the heavy clay producers. The Minister would also do well, when she talks to her colleagues in the Department of Energy and Climate Change, to think about gas storage. We face a great deal of tightness on gas usage; we are very vulnerable in terms of gas storage capacity in the UK. That is a real worry for energy intensive sectors.

I hope that the Minister will continue to support the tariffs on dumping for the ceramics sector. Yes, she should always listen to the CBI and the British Retail Consortium, but if we want to keep our manufacturing industry going, we should also listen to its voices, because these are good, well paid, long-term jobs that have a trickle-down in terms of the broader ecology of the British economy and need support.

I urge the Minister to stay on top of the country-of-origin issue, which is very important for the ceramics sector. Locally, we certainly make our displeasure known when businesses are making a product abroad, decorating it in north Staffordshire and suggesting that it was made in England. It has to be fired properly in England. I also hope that we will have a good result on the materials Catapult centre.

I thank the Minister for listening. Clearly, the major issue to come out of this is the great 12th century/16th century debate on the precise level of ceramic production in north Staffordshire. Of course, though, on the Isle of Thanet, ceramics dating back 2,000 years have been found, so we might be blown out of the water in north Staffordshire by Medway.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered Government support for the ceramics industry.

5.55 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Tuesday 8 March 2016

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Enterprise Bill

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise (Anna Soubry): I am today placing in the Library of the House the Department's analysis on the application of Standing Order 83L in respect of the Government amendments tabled for Commons Report stage for the Enterprise Bill.

Analysis on application of Standing Order 83L (Enterprise Bill—Analysis on the application of Standing Order No 83L), can be viewed online at:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2016-03-08/HCWS586/>.

[HCWS586]

Competitiveness Council

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise (Anna Soubry): My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Baroness Neville-Rolfe) has today made the following statement.

The Competitiveness Council took place in Brussels on Monday 29 February. I represented the UK for the internal market and industry discussion.

The Council started with the “competitiveness check-up”. The discussion focused on the issue of scale-up within the European Union. Commissioner Elzbieta Bienkowska, responsible for the internal market and industry, gave a presentation which highlighted the importance of young firms for job creation. Member states were asked to comment on the challenges faced by firms trying to scale up and to identify what more could be done at EU and national level to support them.

I led the interventions by member states, highlighting the action taken by the UK Government to support SMEs and scale-ups. I drew attention specifically to: growth hubs, enterprise zones, “Catapult” centres, and the British Business Bank. I also emphasised that the proposed services passport and better enforcement of single market rules are both areas where the EU could add value.

The following item focused on the text of Council conclusions prepared by the Dutch presidency. Commissioner Bienkowska opened the debate by noting the existing barriers to trade despite the economic evidence that suggests a deeper single market, particularly in services, would bring significant benefits. The Commissioner announced that she would propose a services passport by the end of the year. In my intervention I said that the UK supported an ambitious services passport that would tackle disproportionate regulatory barriers. The majority of member states were supportive and wanted to secure ambitious language on the use of mutual recognition. However, some member states remained concerned in the absence of a clear proposal from the Commission. As such, the presidency was required to offer a compromise text, removing reference to mutual recognition and qualifying how regulatory barriers should be tackled as part of the passport. All member states ultimately accepted this and agreed the conclusions but expressed regret that it had not been possible to agree a more ambitious text.

The next item on the agenda was on the steel industry. This opened with the Commission arguing that both member states and the EU could help create the environment for the steel industry to grow but industry would also need to play its part. The Commission further noted that a record number of trade defence measures had been applied on steel cases and the modernisation of trade defence instruments (MTDI) package would help accelerate future investigations. I, along with other member states, intervened strongly to stress that the reduction of trade defence investigations time scales from nine months to seven would not be enough. I went on to say that while provisional investigation into cold-rolled steel had been welcome, now was the time for urgent EU action. Several member states argued that the stalemate on MTDI needed to be broken and that market economy status (MES) for China needed to be considered carefully.

The presidency concluded that there was agreement in Council that the period for anti-dumping measures should be shortened; access to EU funding should be simplified to facilitate investment in breakthrough technologies; and the burden of regulatory costs, especially for the EU emissions trading scheme, should be significantly reduced for the best performing plants. Presidency conclusions were later distributed.

The European semester and the implementation of country-specific recommendations (CSRs) to tackle barriers to growth were discussed over lunch. Several member states noted that it was important there was a role for the Competitiveness Council and the high-level group on competitiveness and growth. The presidency reported back to Council that it had been a fruitful debate with member states exchanging experiences and agreeing that effective implementation was indeed important for economic growth.

The afternoon session started with a policy debate on the circular economy. The presidency set out the handling arrangements for the cross-cutting circular economy package, which was released in December. It explained that while the legislative aspects would primarily be dealt with in Environment Council the Competitiveness Council had an important role to play in examining the proposals and considering the opportunities and challenges created by the proposed action plan. The Commission noted that both national and local level engagement would be needed. I intervened to support the ambition behind the circular economy action plan and stressed that action should be prioritised to ensure ambitious use of voluntary approaches and measures to improve the coherence between existing EU legislation and initiatives. Several other member states suggested that flexibility was needed to take account of differing member state circumstances: a one-size-fits-all approach would not be appropriate.

A number of items were discussed briefly under “any other business”. In a change to the published agenda the unitary patent and plant breeders' rights were discussed before the Council considered the update on the portability legislative proposal and the recently announced “Privacy Shield” agreement between the EU and the United States of America.

Commissioner Bienkowska stressed that she was keen to see the unitary patent ratified as soon as possible. And in respect to plant breeders' rights the Commissioner stressed that the Commission had no intention of reopening the Biotech directive.

There was then an update on the portability of digital content, Commissioner Günther Oettinger, responsible for the digital economy and society, set out that rapid progress had been made on the proposed legislation. I intervened to welcome the Commission's approach and spoke about the importance of speedy implementation of the portability package, subject to the necessary technical changes.

Commissioner Oettinger informed member states that the draft text of the new EU-US “Privacy Shield” agreement had been published. The new agreement would facilitate the transfer of personal data between the EU and the US following the invalidation of the previous “Safe Harbour”

agreement. The Privacy Shield would provide updated safeguards, including a more robust framework for citizens to seek redress, and an annual review. The UK did not intervene.

[HCWS587]

TREASURY

ECOFIN

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke): A meeting of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council will be held in Brussels on 8 March 2016. EU Finance Ministers are due to discuss the following items:

Mandatory automatic exchange of information in the field of taxation

The Council will hold a discussion on a presidency compromise text on the Commission's proposal to amend the directive with regards to the mandatory exchange of information in the field of taxation as part of the EU taking forward the recommendations from the OECD.

Current legislative proposals

The presidency will update the Council on the state of play of financial services dossiers.

State of play of the banking union

The Commission will give an update on several dossiers linked to the banking union: the single resolution fund, the bank recovery and resolution directive and the deposit guarantee scheme directive. Following this, the presidency will update the Council on progress to establish a European deposit insurance scheme which the UK is not participating in.

Fiscal sustainability report 2015

Ministers will adopt conclusions outlining the Council's position on the Commission's fiscal sustainability report.

Follow-up to the G20 meeting of Finance Ministers and central bank governors on 26-27 February 2016

Following the first G20 of the Chinese presidency in Shanghai on 26-27 February, the Commission and the ECOFIN chair will debrief Ministers on discussions.

European semester 2016: implementation of country-specific recommendations drawing on the country reports and in-depth reviews.

The Commission will report to ECOFIN on the implementation of 2015 country-specific recommendations with a particular focus on removing the barriers to investment. Also, the Commission will present the country reports, published 26 February. This will be followed by an exchange of views.

[HCWS594]

DEFENCE

Armed Forces' Pay Review Body Report

The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon): The 2016 report of the Armed Forces' Pay Review Body (AFPRB) has now been published. I wish to express my thanks to the Chair and members of the review body for their report.

The AFPRB recommendations are to be accepted in full and will become effective from 1 April 2016. Copies of the AFPRB report are available in the Vote Office.

[HCWS593]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

North Korea

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire): I would like to update the House on recent developments on the Korean peninsula, the international response and what actions the Government are taking.

I remain deeply concerned by North Korea's continued development of its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, and its sustained prioritisation of these programmes over the well-being of its own people. Following the nuclear test on 6 January and the satellite launch using ballistic missile technology on 7 February, the UN Security Council has now unanimously agreed resolution (UNSCR) 2270. This was adopted on 2 March. In his statement of the same day, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr Hammond) welcomed the adoption of this resolution, which contains robust measures to tackle North Korea's illegal nuclear programme.

UN Security Council resolution 2270 expands and strengthens the sanctions against DPRK. It contains a range of measures that: tackle proliferation networks; increase inspections of North Korean cargo, and controls on shipping; add new sectoral bans on the export of coal, iron ore, gold and other metals, and on the import of aviation fuel; and the mandatory closing of North Korean financial sector entities and banks that we suspect could be contributing to the DPRK's nuclear or ballistic missile programmes. It also designates additional North Korean individuals, entities, registered vessels, as well as certain luxury goods. These measures provide strengthened means to tackle North Korea's illicit proliferation and its illegal nuclear programmes and are a strong signal that the international community is prepared to take tough action in response to violations of UNSC resolutions.

We are working to ensure all states fully implement UN Security Council resolution 2270, along with their obligations under all previous UN Security Council resolutions. The UK is not a member of the Six Party Talks but we will remain in close touch with the US, the Republic of Korea, China, Russia and Japan on their approach towards North Korea. The Foreign Secretary has spoken in recent weeks to the South Korean Foreign Minister, the Japanese Foreign Minister, and the US Secretary of State to confirm the UK's strong backing for a united and robust international response to the DPRK's provocations and reaffirm the support of our allies in the region.

Our message to North Korea is clear. If it is willing to stop its provocations, fundamentally change its approach and take concrete steps towards re-engagement, it will find that the international community will respond positively. If it continues on its current course, prioritising the development of its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes over improving the well-being of its own people, it will face further isolation and international action. We continue to urge DPRK to engage in credible multilateral talks on denuclearisation and for North Korea to fully abide by its UNSCR obligations.

[HCWS588]

HEALTH

NHS Pay Review Body

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt): I am responding on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the 29th report of the NHS Pay Review Body (NHSPRB). The report has been laid before Parliament today (Cm 9210).

Copies of the report are available to hon. Members from the Vote Office, to noble Lords from the Printed Paper Office and is also available online. I am grateful to the Chair and members of the NHSPRB for their report.

We welcome the 29th report of the NHS Pay Review Body. The Government are pleased to accept its recommendations in full.

We will take forward NHSPRB's suggestions for how we can continue to improve our support for its important work.

Report of NHSPRB (Cm 9210) (54488 Cm 9210 NHSPRB 2016), can be viewed online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2016-03-08/HCWS589/>.

[HCWS589]

Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration Report

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt): I am responding on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the 44th report of the Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration (DDRB). The report has been laid before Parliament today (Cm 9211). Copies of the report are available to hon. Members from the Vote Office, to noble Lords from the Printed Paper Office and is attached. I am grateful to the Chair and members of the DDRB for their report.

We welcome the 44th report of the Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration. The Government are pleased to accept the recommendations in full.

We will take forward DDRB's suggestions for how we can continue to improve our support for its important work.

Report of the DDRB (Cm 9211) (54290 Doctors and Dentists Pay Review 2016), can be viewed online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2016-03-08/HCWS590/>.

[HCWS590]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Justice and Home Affairs (Pre-Council Statement)

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): The Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council is due to be held on 10 and 11 March in Brussels. I will be attending Interior Day on behalf of the United Kingdom.

Thursday (Interior Day) will begin with a discussion on migration, continued over lunch, during which the Council will evaluate the implementation of measures taken by the EU and member states to address the

migration crisis. The discussion will also consider what further action should be taken. I will use this discussion to reinforce our longstanding messages on securing the external EU border and the effective implementation of "hotspots" in Greece and Italy and the UK's ongoing contribution to joint efforts in these areas. I will set out our view that we should not replace the longstanding principles of the Dublin regulation, and that any reform should focus on making the existing principles work better. I will also urge EU colleagues to consider whether current EU asylum systems allow member states to respond effectively to the migration crisis and will use the discussion to encourage more radical thinking on how the EU collectively restores control over the system. Lastly, I will reaffirm the importance of a coherent approach along the migration routes, from countries of origin through to countries of destination. In this regard it is essential that the EU and member states continue collective efforts to address migratory flows further upstream, both on the eastern Mediterranean and the central Mediterranean routes, including implementation of the priorities agreed under the Valletta action plan.

This will be followed by discussion on the proposal for a regulation setting up a European Border and Coast Guard Agency, which is likely to focus on the "right to intervene" and concerns that some member states have around national sovereignty. The presidency are aiming for a general approach in April and political agreement by June in order to make the new system operational as soon as possible. The Government support the strengthening of the external border but, as the proposal builds on provisions of the Schengen acquis in which the UK does not participate, the UK will not be bound by this regulation. The Government's policy priorities in this negotiation are to ensure a continuation of our current relationship with Frontex, whereby the UK participates in operations and other activities on an ad hoc basis by mutual consent, to maintain our seat (as a non-voting observer) at the Management Board, and to protect and ensure no adverse impact on our existing bilateral arrangements such as those in operation at the juxtaposed controls. The UK supports the proposal that the Council take a greater role in the decision making process, rather than that decision resting with the Commission.

There will then be a first reading on a proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council directive 91/477/EEC on control of the acquisition and possession of weapons. The presidency will seek a steer from the Council on a number of policy issues.

The counter terrorism agenda item will commence with a presentation, based on a paper, by the counter terrorism co-ordinator. The presentation reviews progress made against the 20 November 2015 Justice and Home Affairs Council conclusions. The UK will continue to push for our priorities on the firearms directive including a prohibition on certain high powered semiautomatic weapons. I will outline our priorities of the effective and reciprocal sharing of information between Schengen and non-Schengen states as concerns refusals of entry, removals and visa revocation.

Friday (Justice Day) will begin with discussion of the draft EU directive on combating terrorism, which will revise the 2002 framework decision on combating terrorism (2002/JHA/475), as amended, with a view to reaching a

general approach. The UK has decided not to opt in to the directive. The UK has, however, been an active negotiator and continues to support international collaborative efforts to tackle foreign fighters. The Government broadly support the aims of the directive, which seeks to ensure further compliance with UN Security Council resolution 2178, and the Council of Europe additional protocol to the 2005 convention on the prevention of terrorism. The Government have decided not to opt in to this draft directive, as the UK is already compliant with those international obligations.

There will follow a progress report on the digital single market, specifically on the proposed supply of digital content directive and the distance sales of goods directive. In December the Commission published two new draft directives as part of the digital single market strategy to harmonise consumer contractual rights for the sale of digital content. The Government welcome this approach, which should align progress on the tangible goods proposal with the result of the Commission's research for the consumer protection regulatory fitness and performance programme (REFIT programme) which aims to cut red tape, remove regulatory burdens, simplify and improve the design and quality of legislation.

This will be followed by a policy debate on the proposal for a European Public Prosecutor's Office. The UK will not participate in the proposal, and the discussions are not expected to cover how the European Public Prosecutor's Office might seek to work with non-participating member states such as the UK.

The Commission will be providing an update on the progress of the EU-US umbrella agreement which is a draft agreement between the US and the EU on the protection of personal information; on its proposals for the EU to sign and conclude the Council of Europe convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence; and on its dialogue with IT companies on tackling online hate speech. The presidency will provide an update on the outcomes of its 7 March conference on securing, exchanging and using e-evidence.

Over lunch, the Commission intends to present a short update on the "EU-US Privacy Shield", intended to provide a renewed framework for the transatlantic transfer of personal data, on work on radicalisation in prisons and on proposal to authorise enhanced co-operation in relation to matrimonial property regimes. The UK will not be participating in any such enhanced co-operation.

[HCWS596]

Violence against Women and Girls

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): On Tuesday 8 March, to mark International Women's Day, the Government are publishing their Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy for this Parliament. A copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

We have made progress since publishing the original "Call to End Violence against Women and Girls" in 2010. Data from the crime survey for England and Wales shows a general downward trend in sexual assaults since 2005-06 and that 8.2% of women were a victim of

"any domestic abuse" in the last year—the lowest estimate since these questions were first asked in the 2004-05 survey.

At the same time, reporting of what often continue to be hidden crimes is increasing which the Office for National Statistics attributes to greater victim confidence and better recording by the police. The number of prosecutions and the number of convictions for VAWG crimes were all higher than ever before in 2014-15.

But there were still an estimated 1.35 million female victims of domestic abuse in the last year, and over 300,000 victims of sexual violence. This is wholly unacceptable and we remain determined to end violence against women and girls.

Over the next four years, we will support a transformation in service delivery and a step change in social action to do more still to achieve a long-term reduction in the prevalence of these terrible crimes, to help women and girls rebuild their lives, and to break the inter-generational consequences of abuse. We will continue to ensure victims get the help they need, when they need it, and drive a shift from a model of crisis intervention to prevention and early intervention. We will develop the evidence base on, and embed, what works to tackle the causes of offending behaviour to achieve sustainable reductions in violence and abuse.

Over this spending review period, we are providing £80 million of dedicated VAWG funding to continue to provide a bedrock of critical services for VAWG, and to support the a transformation in local service delivery to support local areas to build coherent pathways of support for victims at every stage.

[HCWS595]

JUSTICE

England and Wales Prison Service Pay Review Body Report

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Andrew Selous): The fifteenth report of the Prison Service Pay Review Body (PSPRB) (Cm 9206) has been laid before Parliament today. The report makes recommendations on the pay for governing governors and other operational managers, prison officers and related support grades in England and Wales in 2016-17. Copies are available in the Vote Office and the Printed Paper Office.

I am grateful to the chair and members of the PSPRB for their hard work in producing these recommendations.

The recommendations for 2016-17 will be implemented in full.

[HCWS592]

PRIME MINISTER

EU-Turkey Summit

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): I attended the EU-Turkey summit and informal European Council meeting in Brussels on 7 March. The context for this summit was the significant increase in the number of

people crossing the Aegean from Turkey to Greece in the early months of 2016, compared to the same period in 2015, and the recent actions by EU member states to restrict the numbers travelling on the western Balkans route. From the beginning of this crisis we have been arguing that a comprehensive approach is essential. An approach which tackles the drivers of migration at source; which helps refugees live in dignity as close as possible to their homes; and which reduces the risks to human life by breaking the link between getting on dangerously overcrowded boats and securing entry to the EU. We made important progress in this direction at the London conference on Syria last month, which raised \$11 billion to help refugees in the region. This EU-Turkey summit demonstrated clearly that our argument is now widely accepted. It also established the outlines of a new deal with Turkey which, if implemented as envisaged, could finally break the people smugglers' business model and dramatically reduce the number of illegal border crossings from Turkey to the EU. We began with the EU-Turkey summit meeting with Prime Minister Davutoglu, which discussed the main elements of a potential new agreement. EU heads and Prime Minister Davutoglu made clear that their shared aim was rapidly to reduce the flow of illegal migration from Turkey to the European Union. Prime Minister Davutoglu brought a very significant set of new proposals to this summit. For the first time, Turkey offered to accept the return of all those illegally crossing from its territory to the Greek islands, in return for steps by the EU to help it cope with the very large number of refugees it is currently hosting, and certain wider advances in the EU-Turkey relationship. We also discussed the importance of free speech and an independent media. This summit meeting was followed by an informal meeting of the European Council to discuss the EU's response to Turkey's new proposals. Good progress was made in the course of these meetings in establishing broad agreement on the principles which should underpin a new EU-Turkey agreement. These principles will be worked on intensively over the coming week, with the aim of reaching final agreement at the 17-18 March European Council.

Among the key principles were that Turkey would take back all those crossing illegally from Turkey to the Greek islands, whether from Syria or from other countries; and that the EU would reinforce this deterrent to people smuggling by resettling an equivalent number of Syrians to those returned in this way directly from refugee camps and elsewhere in Turkey. The aim would be definitively to break the business model of the people smugglers and to end illegal crossings by boat within a short period, by making clear to all concerned that paying people smugglers to get on a boat would not result in securing access to the EU. The UK would not be obliged by this agreement to resettle any additional

refugees: we are already resettling 20,000 of the most vulnerable Syrians directly from Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan through our own national scheme.

The EU made clear in parallel that it was determined to take wider steps, effective immediately, to close the western Balkans route for illegal migration. It was also agreed that the members of the Schengen area would speed up the process of visa liberalisation for Turkish citizens; and that the EU would in due course consider extending the current financial support to help Turkey cope with the costs of hosting such a large number of refugees from Syria from 2018. The EU agreed to prepare for a decision on the opening of new chapters in Turkey's EU accession negotiations as soon as possible, building on the October 2015 European Council.

If these principles can be turned into a final agreement, and that agreement is then implemented as envisaged, it could provide the basis for a breakthrough in the resolution of this crisis, by breaking the link between getting on boats and securing access to the EU. This is what this Government have been arguing for for over a year now. The agreement envisaged would not impose any new obligations on the UK in respect of the resettlement or relocation. Because we are not members of the Schengen area, we are able to maintain our own border controls and make our own decisions on asylum. We will not be part of the process of liberalising visas, and will still require visas for Turkish citizens to visit Britain. The single biggest factor driving the very large-scale migration we have seen in the last two years has of course been the ongoing conflict in Syria. Between the EU-Turkey summit and informal European Council, I hosted a meeting with Chancellor Merkel, President Hollande, Prime Minister Renzi, Prime Minister Davutoglu and EU High Representative Mogherini to discuss the situation in Syria. Along with my EU counterparts, I updated Prime Minister Davutoglu on the phone call we had jointly made to President Putin last week. We agreed on the importance of all sides respecting the current truce to provide space for genuine peace talks and to allow humanitarian access to those areas most in need. We also agreed on the need to continue our support for the moderate opposition, so that they are able to play a full role in the political process. Their participation is essential if a lasting settlement is to be achieved, and a new transitional Government put in place which can represent all the Syrian people. A copy of the statement by the EU Heads of State or Government has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses and can also be found at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2016-03-08/HCWS591/>

[HCWS591]

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