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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 8 September 2016

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr Speaker: On the front page of today's Order Paper it is noted that on 9 September 1916, Lieutenant Thomas Michael Kettle, Royal Dublin Fusiliers, Member for East Tyrone from 1906 to 1910, was killed in action at Ginchy during the Battle of the Somme.

We remember him today.

Oral Answers to Questions

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport was asked—

Rural Broadband

1. **Sir Henry Bellingham** (North West Norfolk) (Con): What plans she has further to roll out broadband to remote communities. [906184]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Karen Bradley): We continue to support the roll-out of superfast broadband to reach 95% of UK homes and businesses by December next year, and we are reinvesting funds from project savings and revenues specifically to help those people in harder-to-reach areas, such as rural communities.

Sir Henry Bellingham: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her promotion and wish her well in her post, which I am sure she will make a great success of. Is she aware that, while 84% of properties in my constituency have access to superfast speeds, 9.5% still do not have access to 10 megabits per second and 2% have no access at all to even basic broadband? Many of those remote communities include farms and businesses that want to expand and get on and diversify, but they are being held back, so what more can she and her team do about that?

Karen Bradley: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words; I do appreciate them. He has pointed out that more than four in five properties in his constituency have access to superfast broadband; it is very important that they know that and make sure, if they wish, that they can access it. I know that very well, given that I also represent a rural constituency.

We are looking to make sure that there is access to superfast broadband for all in rural areas. My hon. Friend will be pleased to hear that the project savings and revenues for reinvestment are already being made

available to local projects across the UK, which can then determine how and where that money is best spent. So far, nearly £130 million of take-up revenue has been confirmed for reinvestment in local projects nationwide, and we expect up to £150 million of savings in addition. More than £10 million of that is being reinvested in hard-to-reach areas in Norfolk.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): A lot of my constituents have written to me recently about the problems with superfast broadband and lack of access to it. Obviously, if people do not have access to it, their non-access is 100%. They want certainty in timescale and when it is going to happen. What can the Secretary of State do to increase that certainty?

Karen Bradley: I fully appreciate the hon. Gentleman's comments, which are exactly the same as those I receive from my constituents. I am working, together with the Minister for Digital and Culture, to make sure that we communicate to all people and businesses when they can expect access to superfast broadband. We are also making sure that universal service is available to all in the timeframe set out.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): The village of Harrington in the borough of Kettering is just two miles from the town of Rothwell, and yet it has had tremendous difficulties in persuading BT to provide it with superfast broadband. Farms on the outskirts of Harrington are almost in despair that they will never get it. What reassurance can the Secretary of State give my constituents that they will be connected?

Karen Bradley: I encourage my hon. Friend to contact me and the Minister of State, and we will make sure that we speak both to BT Openreach and to other service providers, to find out exactly that information.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State agree that the existence of not spots in urban areas is often the result of a combination of cock-ups, including commercial rivalries between companies, which are sometimes overlaid with developers taking their eye off the ball at the wrong time and local authorities not getting their act together? Whose responsibility is it to sort that out?

Karen Bradley: The hon. Gentleman has nailed some of the problems in urban areas, the Minister and I are working very hard to rectify them.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State to her place. As a fellow graduate of Imperial College, I hope to find in her a fellow champion of the digital economy. However, although I welcome her to her place, she should be ashamed of the situation we are in. In 2016—four years after the last Labour Government's commitment to universal broadband for all would have come into force—hundreds of thousands of British citizens do not even have the speed to download an email and can only dream of the speed necessary to watch the parliamentary channel and see your good self, Mr Speaker. Will the Secretary of State disavow her predecessor's laissez-faire attitude and tell us what she is going to do to end that disgraceful situation?

Karen Bradley: The hon. Lady and I are both alumni of Imperial College, a great institution that does so much to further science and technology and to ensure that we have the right skills in the digital market so that we can be a world leader. I have to take issue with some of the comments she has made, however. This Government have done more than many others and this country is well ahead of, many others in broadband provision. I fully appreciate that if an individual does not have access to broadband, they feel somehow that that is not right. It is not right; we are determined to get it right, and we will get it right. I absolutely and totally disagree with any suggestion that there is a *laissez-faire* attitude in the Government. This Government are a Government for all the country—for everyone—and we will deliver.

Local Television

2. **Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): What recent assessment she has made of the contribution of local television services to broadcasting. [906185]

The Minister for Digital and Culture (Matt Hancock): Local TV makes an important contribution to British broadcasting, with around 1.5 million households watching it each week. Twenty-one channels have launched since November 2013, with a further 13 due to come on air next year.

Paul Blomfield: The Minister has highlighted the successful development of local TV. That success is underpinned by a partnership with the BBC, which provides an income stream in return for sharing news content, but the arrangement is now at risk with new proposals for commissioning local content. Will the Minister agree to meet the local TV network to discuss how the proposed public service content fund could be used to provide continued support to local TV?

Matt Hancock: Yes, I would be delighted to do so. The detailed arrangements that were set out in the BBC White Paper are a matter for the BBC, but it will clearly want to consult and engage with all local media. I would be enthusiastic about meeting local TV providers with the hon. Gentleman. It is disappointing to have sedentary voices from the Opposition shouting that local TV is not relevant. I think it is hugely relevant, and I look forward to working across this House to deliver it.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): May I draw the Minister's attention to Estuary TV, which was established 12 years ago at Immingham in my constituency, and is now based at the Grimsby Institute? It is a long-established channel. May I invite the Minister to follow his predecessor and visit the station, which I am sure will give him an extended interview?

Matt Hancock: Well, how could I turn down an offer like that? I love Grimsby. It is great to come to Cleethorpes with my hon. Friend, and to Grimsby, too. I hope that even these exchanges may find their way on to Estuary TV. As with other brilliant local TV stations that I have appeared on in the past, I look forward to visiting this one in the future.

John Nicolson (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): May I also welcome the new Secretary of State and her team and wish them well? Has the Minister had any opportunity to read the report on the BBC by the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport, and in particular the Committee's unanimous recommendation that there be a separate Scottish six o'clock news? Moreover, have the Minister or his colleagues talked about that with anybody senior at the BBC, and can he reassure us that there will be no Government interference to try to thwart the "Scottish Six" when it is launched?

Matt Hancock: The hon. Gentleman raises an important issue, and I know that there have been extensive discussions with the BBC at all levels about the draft charter and the framework agreement. I am afraid that he will just have to wait a short while longer for more detail about that.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): May I take the opportunity to congratulate the Secretary of State on her appointment and welcome her team to the Front Bench? May I also add my congratulations to our brilliant Olympians on their stunning success in Rio and wish our Paralympians similar success?

Local television services face the threat of serious cuts if the Government press ahead with their plan to make the BBC pay the cost of free licence fees for the over-75s. As a social benefit, that has hitherto been paid for by the Exchequer, and rightly so. Transferring the cost to the BBC could mean a loss to the corporation, and effectively to other licence fee payers, of up to £608 million a year, threatening programme cuts across the board. Will the Government think again about this utterly misguided decision?

Matt Hancock: I simply do not recognise the hon. Gentleman's characterisation. There was a very good licence fee settlement, which the BBC welcomed. If he is coming out against providing free TV licences to the over-75s, he ought to say that that is the Labour party position.

Culture: North-east

3. **Mrs Sharon Hodgson** (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): What plans she has to promote culture in the north-east. [906186]

The Minister for Digital and Culture (Matt Hancock): The Government support culture in the north-east through Arts Council England investment and the Heritage Lottery Fund. The north-east has a thriving and growing arts scene that we want to support, such as the National Glass Centre and the Cultural Spring programme.

Mrs Hodgson: I am thrilled to hear the Minister talk about culture in the north-east, and I would love to take him to the National Glass Centre in Sunderland and the Arts Centre in Washington. Does he agree with me that the disparity in Arts Council funding between the north-east and places such as London is one of the reasons why it would be excellent for Sunderland to become the city of culture 2021 to showcase our city's cultural contribution to the rest of the UK and to the world?

Matt Hancock: The hon. Lady has made an excellent case for an application to become the city of culture 2021. I am hugely looking forward to the city of culture 2017 in Hull next year. No doubt her comments will be picked up. I would love to come to Sunderland soon to see some of these things for myself.

Leveson Review

4. **Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): What recent progress has been made on the implementation of the Leveson review; and if she will make a statement.

[906187]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Karen Bradley): The Government have delivered the majority of the recommendations set out in the Leveson inquiry report.

Christian Matheson: May I, too, congratulate the Secretary of State on her appointment? The long grass into which the Government have kicked the Leveson review is getting ever longer, but the issue is not going away. The previous Prime Minister signed a cross-party agreement, and this House overwhelmingly passed section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013, so when will she implement it?

Karen Bradley: I am taking my time to make sure I listen to all sides on this matter. I have already had a meeting with Hacked Off and I am going to meet all representatives; I wanted to hear from all victims of press abuse. I will take my time and make sure I make the decision in the right way.

Mr John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con): May I join hon. Members in congratulating my right hon. Friend on becoming Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport—the best job in the Government? Does she share my concern about the continuing loss of both jobs and titles in the national and local press? Does she agree that there may be a case for saying, if there is a recognised regulator, that its members will be given the protection afforded under the Leveson recommendations, but that to impose the cost penalties would simply result in the loss of yet more newspapers?

Karen Bradley: I am having to fill my right hon. Friend's really enormous shoes as best I can, because he did an absolutely fantastic job in this role. He sums up the dilemma that we face. We want to have a free press, and we want to make sure that we have a strong and vibrant local press. I know from my own local titles just how important they are to people. They read the *Leek Post and Times*, the *Biddulph Chronicle* and *The Sentinel*, and they want to have such a strong local press.

12. [906197]. **Graham Jones** (Hyndburn) (Lab): There has been some suggestion in the national press that this has been kicked into the long grass by Ministers. What assurances can the Secretary of State give the victims that it is not being kicked into the long grass, that Leveson part 2 will be implemented, and that we will see an end point to this?

Karen Bradley: The hon. Gentleman will know that some cases are pending, and until they have been completed there can be no progress on Leveson 2. I assure him that this is not being kicked into the long grass. We are

looking very carefully at all the arguments from all sides to make sure we have a free press that protects the citizen.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I warmly welcome the whole of the new ministerial team. I am particularly delighted at the survival of the Sports Minister, whom I daily want to hug—[*Interruption.*]—still want to hug. However, as one of those whose phone was hacked back in 2003, I would just say to the Secretary of State that the victims of phone hacking—many of them were not politicians, but were other victims of crime, including members of the armed forces—are desperate for the Government to stand by the promises they made to them. First, they promised there would be Leveson 2. Can she say today that there will be? There is no reason why she should not do so, because every previous Secretary of State has done so. Secondly, why on earth have they not implemented section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013? It was a cross-party agreement. We would love her to death—I would hug her, too—if only she implemented it.

Karen Bradley: Oh my goodness—the promise of a hug from the hon. Gentleman is difficult to resist. He will know from my previous time in government that I always listen to victims of crime, make sure that their voices are heard and take note of everything they say, and I would very much welcome the chance to sit down with him and discuss his point of view. I want to make sure that we do this based on the evidence, and that we do it properly.

Historic Buildings

5. **Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): What funding her Department is making available to protect important historic buildings. [906188]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch): I am disappointed that there was no hug offer straightaway. Historic buildings provide an important tangible connection to our past and bring alive our heritage in real and exciting ways. Grant support is provided by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport for historic buildings through Historic England, the church and cathedrals repair fund and the architectural heritage fund, among others. In addition, funding is available from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Pauline Latham: If the Minister would like a hug, I am very willing to give her a hug. I also welcome the Front-Bench team to their places. Kedleston hall is a grade I listed building, and Kedleston Voice, an action group in my constituency, has campaigned against the granting of planning permission on land that used to belong to the estate, only for the planning inspector to overturn the council's decision. The group believes that is damaging to the environment of the hall. Will the Minister put measures in place so that no other grade I listed building is affected by housing too close to an historic setting?

Tracey Crouch: I have been made aware of that particular case in my hon. Friend's constituency. Across the House I think we all face similar frustrating outcomes in planning matters in our own constituencies when the

local authority has made one decision and the planning inspector another. Ultimately, it is an issue for her to take up with colleagues at the Department for Communities and Local Government. However, there is protection of the historic environment through statutory designation and planning policy. When determining planning cases, local planning authorities must have regard to the national planning policy framework, including its policies on conservation enhancement of the historic environment. We shall continue to stress the importance of that aspect of consideration.

13. [906198] **Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Even those of us who are very interested in protecting our listed buildings and heritage get really rather angry when the heritage sector seems to stop all development, including development that could actually improve heritage sites. Will the Minister look into that, and also look at the spread of money being given by the Heritage Lottery Fund to see whether parts of the country are getting less than their fair share?

Tracey Crouch: We work closely across all Departments on heritage matters. I am very proud to be heritage Minister, because it is an incredibly exciting part of what we can deliver in this country. I have regular conversations with the Heritage Lottery Fund. There has been an incredible distribution of its funds across the entire country, but there is of course always room for improvement. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to discuss that further with me, I am very happy to do so.

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): Must farm near Whittlesea and Flag Fen bronze age centre near Peterborough are among the finest bronze age settlements in western Europe. Peterborough City Council is the lead agency for developing a Heritage Lottery Fund bid for £3 million to develop a bespoke bronze age heritage centre. May I warmly invite my hon. Friend to visit the site and, more pertinently, to support that unique project?

Tracey Crouch: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question, as it enables me to thank the Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty's Treasury, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (David Evennett), for his excellent maternity cover in my absence. He visited the site that my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson) alluded to. There was an excellent Westminster Hall debate on this matter. I will of course be pleased to visit if my diary allows.

Topical Questions

T1. [906144] **Barbara Keeley** (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Karen Bradley): I would like to use this opportunity to hail Team GB's historic medal haul in Rio. I am sure that the rest of the Chamber will join me in paying tribute to the incredible achievement of all our athletes.

You may remember, Mr Speaker, that the last time I was at the Dispatch Box you arrived a little late to a debate, as you had been watching your hero Roger

Federer at Wimbledon. It was a shame that he was not at the Olympics because of an injury, but I am sure you enjoyed watching our flagbearer Andy Murray's wonderful gold medal-winning match, alongside all the other British successes. Our greatest Olympic performance in a century owed much to UK Sport's no-compromise approach and an increase in funding.

Since we were last at the Dispatch Box, the Office for Civil Society has moved into the Department and I have a fantastic ministerial team. I pay tribute to all the previous Ministers, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Mr Whittingdale), my right hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey) and Baroness Neville-Rolfe for their sterling work.

The Paralympic games began yesterday. I know the whole House will join me in wishing Paralympic Team GB well. I am delighted that Lee Pearson was selected as the flagbearer at the opening ceremony. He is a stunningly successful Paralympian who has won medals, most of them gold, at four different games. I am very proud to say that he is one of my constituents.

I can also announce that Sir Nicholas Serota is the new chair of Arts Council England. Sir Nicholas has a superb pedigree in the arts and is stepping into the shoes of Sir Peter Bazalgette, who did a brilliant job.

Barbara Keeley: I welcome the Secretary of State to her new role. I wrote to her in July, as co-chair of the all-party group on women's sport and fitness, to tell her of our concerns about the impact we felt the loss of listed events could have on women's sport. There is a threat to listed events, because the threshold of qualifying criteria of 95% reception for public service broadcasters is at threat due to the level of streaming used to watch programmes. Can she let me have a response to my letter? If we do not have reassurance, this matter should be dealt with in the Digital Economy Bill.

Karen Bradley: I am aware of the issue; it has been raised by a number of Members. We need to ensure that we have sport on free-to-air, so that we increase participation and make sure people enjoy sport. The Minister for Digital and Culture will be happy to meet the hon. Lady to discuss this matter further.

T4. [906147] **David Rutley** (Macclesfield) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend and constituency neighbour to her place. I also welcome the positive progress the Government are making in promoting the benefits of outdoor recreation. Will my right hon. Friend tell the House what steps she is taking to promote outdoor activities in the Peak district, which our constituents hold so dear?

Karen Bradley: The Peak district is most definitely a very important part of both the Macclesfield and Staffordshire Moorlands constituencies. I know my hon. Friend is a great hill walker and often walks in The Roaches. I enjoy walking in his constituency, too. I absolutely agree that we should be promoting the Peak district and all national parks as great places for outdoor activities. The Sport England inspired facilities fund has invested nearly £170,000 in mountain biking, gliding and sailing at venues and clubs across the Peak district. I am sure the whole House will join me in welcoming that.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): In the Secretary of State's keynote speech in Liverpool on 9 August, she set out plans for social impact bonds to address deep-rooted social problems, notably drug and alcohol dependency. She failed, however, to make any reference to the nightmare of gambling addiction, in which fixed odds betting terminals play such a major role. Why have the Government refused consistently to address this scourge in our communities, which damages so many lives and families despite being raised so often by hon. Members in this Chamber.

Karen Bradley: I am aware of the issues relating to FOBTs, not least through my work in the Home Office. I am well aware of the problems and we will speak to the hon. Gentleman further about this in due course.

T3. [906146] **Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Lindsey Lodge hospice in my constituency does wonderful work locally. It was an early signatory to the Fundraising Standards Board, but is concerned about the arrangements for the Fundraising Regulator. What is the Minister doing to make sure that the Fundraising Regulator does not increase pressures and costs on charities such as Lindsey Lodge?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr Rob Wilson): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. At one point I thought I was going to be like the loser's ribbons at the FA cup final—taken to the game but not used. [HON. MEMBERS: "Aah."] The sympathy vote.

I understand the hon. Gentleman's concerns and I will take a look at that particular instance. The proposals come from the sector itself and are necessary to ensure that elderly and vulnerable people are protected from poor fundraising practices, including high-pressure tactics. Committing to a proper fundraising practice should not be viewed as a regulatory burden, but as a means of restoring and increasing public trust in charities.

T5. [906148] **Neil Carmichael** (Stroud) (Con): With the continuing success of Formula 1—and, incidentally, the success of teams based here—does the Minister agree that we should be encouraging more young people to go into engineering and engage in motor sport?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch): I was weaned on Formula 1. It is always exciting to see success for British drivers, and, indeed, for teams. The Government are working closely with the engineering community to boost employer engagement with young people, teachers, schools, colleges and universities, and to showcase the exciting and diverse careers that are available, including careers in motor sport.

T7. [906150] **Danny Kinahan** (South Antrim) (UUP): I am very glad that you marked the death of Thomas Kettle MP, Mr Speaker.

Will the Minister join me in wishing the Northern Irish and Irish Paralympians—along with everyone else from Great Britain—the very best, following the thrills that we experienced during the Olympics? Will she also

note the extra bit of funding that they need to cross over to this side of the water, where the excellent facilities exist?

Tracey Crouch: I am pleased to join the hon. Gentleman in wishing our Paralympics GB team all the very best. I look forward to heading out to Rio myself next week to watch our team, as I did during the Olympics. We have increased funding for Tokyo 2020, working with UK Sport to ensure that all our Olympians and Paralympians are well funded in the future.

T6. [906149] **Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): When in opposition, we conceived the National Citizen Service. Our ambition was that, while it would never be compulsory, it would nevertheless become universal. Is that still the Government's ambition?

Mr Rob Wilson: Yes. I can assure my right hon. Friend that the Government are committed to ensuring that there is a place on the NCS for every young person who wants one. This summer, more young people than ever before have taken part in its life-changing programme. We will publish national data soon, but I am pleased to report real progress in my right hon. Friend's own area: more than 1,500 young people in Hampshire are participating.

T8. [906151] **Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): Figures published yesterday by the National Police Chiefs Council show a lasting rise in hate crime. Sections of the press share a responsibility for creating the climate in which that is happening, and all of them have an opportunity to change it. Will the Secretary of State meet newspaper editors to discuss their contribution to building social cohesion?

Karen Bradley: The last time I stood at the Dispatch Box, we were discussing this very issue of hate crime. Let me now reiterate that there is no place for hatred in our society. There is no excuse for it, and anyone who is a victim must report that crime. I am, of course, meeting editors and others to discuss many points, and I assure the hon. Gentleman that I will raise this one.

T9. [906152] **Scott Mann** (North Cornwall) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that superfast broadband should be a statutory function in all new build properties?

The Minister for Digital and Culture (Matt Hancock): We are introducing the universal service obligation to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to benefit from high-quality superfast broadband when that is possible, and fast broadband when necessary. Broadband is no longer merely a "nice to have"; it is vital to participation in modern society, and we want to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to acquire it.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): As many Conservative Members accept, it was a terrible mistake to hand over all the superfast broadband funding to one company, and communities throughout the country are suffering as a result. Will the Minister make a fresh start, and recognise the key role of competition in driving the adoption of superfast broadband?

Matt Hancock: I strongly agree with the right hon. Gentleman that competition is incredibly important to the delivery of superfast broadband, especially in fibre. I am glad to say that in the second round of Broadband Delivery UK there is competition, rather than just one company dealing with the delivery. I can also report that more than 91% of properties in the United Kingdom now have access to superfast broadband, and we will not rest until the figure becomes universal.

Mr Speaker: The earnestness of the Minister cannot be surpassed.

T10. [906153] **Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): I recently had an opportunity to visit the Corby Smash Table Tennis Centre and see those excellent new facilities, and also to meet the staff and volunteers who work there. What steps are the Government taking to promote the sport, and does the Minister fancy coming along for a game when she is next in the area?

Tracey Crouch: I am glad to learn that my hon. Friend has been inspired by Paul Drinkhall, the first GB player in 24 years to reach the last 16 in the Olympics. I would love to come and visit, but I should warn my hon. Friend that I am not sure whether my officials would allow me to do so. The last time I visited a table tennis event, I got a bit over-competitive with some table-tennis-playing pensioners.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): May I take this opportunity to welcome the two new Front-Bench teams? I do not know whether my hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench are as surprised to see them there as I am. None the less, will the Secretary of State join me in congratulating UK Sport on its successful Olympics? Team GB won more gold medals in more sports than any other country and came second in the table, but there is still an issue with team sports. There is more work to be done in sports such as basketball, possibly handball and others. Will she therefore join me in congratulating UK Sport but also urge it to do more work on team sports?

Karen Bradley: I of course congratulate UK Sport. Like the sports Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch), I was in Rio and I will be visiting it again for the Paralympics. I am incredibly proud of all the achievements in all our sports, but I have to take the hon. Gentleman up on his comment about team sports. I was at the women's hockey semi-final. There is no doubt that the women's hockey team is one of the greatest teams we have and we should all congratulate them on their gold medal success.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade was asked—

Trade Negotiators: Recruitment

1. **Thangam Debbonaire** (Bristol West) (Lab): What progress the Government have made on recruiting adequately skilled trade negotiators. [906154]

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox): May I first say what a pleasure it is to see the hon. Lady in her place looking so healthy and radiant? It is especially a pleasure for her neighbouring MPs to see her.

My Department already has a strong and capable trade policy team, which has doubled since 23 June. In the next two years, we will be developing that team to build the world-class negotiating strengths needed to deliver the best outcomes for the UK. In terms of negotiators, we have already had strong expressions of interest from individuals, organisations and Governments.

Thangam Debbonaire: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer, but will he reassure my constituents that the trade negotiators will speak to strategically important sectors such as aerospace, which employs and trains hundreds of people in Bristol, before they begin detailed negotiations, so that we may guard against horse trading between sectors, which could damage our crucial role in aerospace and other such significant sectors?

Dr Fox: The hon. Lady is absolutely correct. It is a question not simply of having a single team, but of having the expertise to deal with specific sectors as well as in-country knowledge. We will certainly ensure that we build a core ability among those negotiators and bring in the sector experts who are so important in getting the sort of deals that she correctly outlines. That is especially important in areas such as the west country.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): A team of skilled, experienced, first-class international trade negotiators has been assembled at the Legatum Institute's special trade commission. Will my right hon. Friend consult the commission and listen to its proposals for a much larger prosperity zone than the European Union?

Dr Fox: As I said, the expressions of interest have been wide: they have been from individuals, organisations and Governments. All those who are willing to put their talents at our disposal are extremely welcome. We will be looking at those individuals and the strengths they have in terms of sectoral and in-country knowledge, and we want to draw from the best that is on offer.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Can the Secretary of State confirm whether he is likely to hire any consultants to manage these trade negotiations? According to a headhunter I was speaking to a couple of weeks ago—[*Laughter.*] Not for my purposes. According to a headhunter I was talking to a couple of weeks ago, the head of a trade negotiating team, if hired as a consultant, would cost around £750,000 a year.

Dr Fox: It is nice to see that the Lib Dems are looking forward to repeating their election success at the next election. I always think it is nice for politicians to cover all their options. We do not intend to create a standing army of bureaucrats that would be expensive to the taxpayer. We are looking to see how most effectively we can create the skills and the cadre of negotiators we will require.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con): I welcome the President of the Board of Trade and his Ministers to their place. May I follow up on the previous

question by saying that those in the private sector surely have a lot of experience and insight to offer in particular markets? Will he assure the House that the private sector will be consulted and its skills harnessed and welcomed by the Government?

Dr Fox: That is correct, but I would say to counterbalance that that we also have a great deal of expertise inside Whitehall Departments, and it seems to me it would not necessarily be a good use of taxpayers' money to contract out all these functions when we have the ability to get that knowledge into the negotiations from inside the Departments we already have. I think that a judicious mix between the two would be the appropriate way forward.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State and his team to this exciting new Department and look forward to working with them to promote British trade across the world. I also welcome his progress in recruiting international trade negotiators, although it seems that they may have to wait some time before they can do any actual negotiating. Does he accept that under the current EU treaty the UK does not possess competence—the right to negotiate separate trade deals—and will he confirm that the UK will assume competence not when article 50 is triggered, but only when the UK actually leaves the EU?

Dr Fox: May I reciprocate by welcoming the hon. Gentleman to another one of his many roles in the House of Commons? Let me be very clear that while we are not able to negotiate in terms of concluding a deal while we are members of the EU, there is nothing to stop us having discussions and scoping out future agreements, and I can announce to the House that as of last week we have now concluded a deal to set up a trade working group with India to look at how we will remove barriers to trade before negotiating a free trade agreement on our exit from the EU.

Trade Barriers: Potential Cost

2. **Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP):** If he will estimate the potential cost to the economy of trade barriers between the UK and EU countries after the UK has left the EU. [906155]

The Minister for Trade and Investment (Greg Hands): We are going to make a success of Brexit. As the Prime Minister made clear ahead of the G20 summit, the UK will continue to be a powerful advocate for free and fair trade.

Gavin Newlands: I thank the Minister for that answer, such as it was. Scotland voted overwhelmingly to remain in the EU and the single European market, the largest trading bloc in the world which benefits consumers and businesses across Renfrewshire and right across Scotland. Will he be advising the Prime Minister to negotiate to remain inside the single market, yes or no?

Greg Hands: First, I remind the hon. Gentleman that more Scottish people voted to remain in the UK than voted to remain in the EU. But on the subject of the single market, our objective will be to gain as much

access as we can, consistent with the way people across the whole of the UK voted on 23 June. That is the purpose of our approach.

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): Do Ministers agree that Britain voted overwhelmingly for Brexit and we should stop listening to the doom-mongers, recognise the democratic will of 17 million people, and all work together to make this the huge success it is going to be?

Greg Hands: My hon. Friend is right. As the Prime Minister said, Brexit means Brexit, and we need to make the most of the opportunities our departure presents, getting out into the world and doing business right across the globe, banging the drum for Britain and doing trade.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): I, too, welcome the Secretary of State and his Front-Bench team to their places.

We know that the Secretary of State would like the UK to be outside the customs union and his colleague the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union believes that at the end of this process the UK will be outside the single market. We also know that the Prime Minister disagrees with both of them. May I ask the Minister to ask the Secretary of State for International Trade if he stands by his statement in July when he said:

“If the price of the relationship with the single market is free movement of people, it's a price I'm not willing to pay”?

Does he still want to leave the European single market, yes or no?

Greg Hands: I refer the hon. Lady to the answer that I gave to her colleague, the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands), just a few seconds ago. I want to make it quite clear that there will be no running commentary on the negotiations at this stage. She will know how important that is, following last year's negotiations between the UK Government and the Scottish Government on the fiscal framework, at which time the Scottish Government understood perfectly the importance of not providing a running commentary.

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): I agree with my right hon. Friend that we should not be showing our hand when we go into such massive negotiations as these, but will he expand on the parliamentary process behind any new trade deals with the EU and any other trading bloc?

Greg Hands: My hon. Friend raises an important point. Of course we would want to keep Parliament involved and consulted in relation to new trade deals, but precisely what format that will take is a matter for us and for the House authorities.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): “No running commentary” is politician-speak for not having a clue. How is the Minister getting on with delivering on the promise made by the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union that the Government would

“trigger a large round of global trade deals with all our most favoured trade partners”

by tomorrow?

Greg Hands: It is a bit rich for Opposition Members to talk about having a clue. I noted with interest the Leader of the Opposition yesterday attacking something he called “free trade dogma”. Let us be absolutely clear: the Prime Minister has said that under her leadership, Britain will seek to become the global leader in free trade, and that is what we will do.

South-east Asia

3. **Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): What recent discussions he has had to promote trade with south-east Asian countries. [906156]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Mark Garnier): Our posts across the region are in frequent, regular contact with their host Governments. In my second week in the Department, I visited Burma and Thailand to promote trade and investment. Since the referendum, major Association of Southeast Asian Nations—ASEAN—economies have expressed an interest in discussing future trade relations with the UK. We have been clear that the UK will remain open for business and investment, and we are committed to strengthening our already excellent economic ties with the region.

Michael Tomlinson: I am grateful to the Minister for his answer, and I warmly welcome him to his place. As the vice-chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on Singapore, I also welcome the indication that Singapore is open to removing the barriers to trade between our countries. What discussions will he have to promote investment opportunities for UK businesses in Singapore and across south-east Asia?

Mark Garnier: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his important work for the all-party group on Singapore. The opportunities in ASEAN and Singapore are absolutely enormous. In the next 15 years, the members of ASEAN will make up the fourth biggest economy on the planet. We are in constant discussions, we have trade envoys going out to the region and we are very keen to open negotiations to promote trade between our countries.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): It is almost exactly three years since the Government launched their action plan for business and human rights. When the Minister goes to countries such as Burma and Thailand, are human rights on the agenda during those trade talks as well as business?

Mark Garnier: The Government are never neglectful of their duty to ensure human rights around the world. There are two clear elements involved. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is key on human rights and we will support it where we can by raising the issue when we are talking about trade.

Trading Opportunities

4. **Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): What new trade opportunities he has identified as a consequence of the UK voting to leave the EU. [906157]

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox): We will continue to be a powerful advocate for free trade by playing to Britain’s strengths as a trading nation and forging our own new trade deals around the world.

Fifty-six per cent. of our export value and two thirds of inward investment projects are with non-EU countries. My Department has the experience and expertise in trading outside the EU to grow our significance as a global trading nation even further.

Dr Lewis: In order to maximise the benefits of leaving the EU, the Prime Minister has appointed three excellent Cabinet Ministers to run the Department for International Trade, the Foreign Office and the Department for Exiting the European Union. Can the Secretary of State assure us that the machinery exists to enable them to follow the example of their illustrious predecessors by adopting the mantra “All for one and one for all”?

Dr Fox: That is a difficult one! I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his question. I am reticent about indulging in personality politics but I am glad to see that he was as able to read the August press as I was. When it comes to our commitment to delivering on Brexit, he can be in no doubt that we will be working together as a tight team to ensure that that happens as soon as we can achieve it on behalf of our country, having made all the necessary preparations.

Mr Speaker: I am sure we all remember Tony Benn’s adage that it is not about personalities but about the issues.

12. [906165] **Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): Can manufacturing companies in my constituency, such as Jaguar Land Rover, have some clarity on whether the Secretary of State expects the UK to revert to the World Trade Organisation default tariffs after leaving the European Union? We need some answers.

Dr Fox: My team will be placing a great deal of emphasis on looking at our relationship with the WTO and where we exist on the current EU schedules.

Mr Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): On 24 November, I am hosting an exporters summit for businesses in the M11 area. I thank officials in the Department for their fantastic support. Given the importance of winning new trade opportunities, does the Secretary of State agree that all Members have the chance to play their part in ensuring that more British firms export to not only Europe, but the whole world?

Dr Fox: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his personal commitment to trade and the practical way in which he is demonstrating it. He makes a useful point. All of us should encourage businesses in our constituencies to export. In a nation that built itself upon free trade, it is disappointing that only 11% of businesses export. I hope that my Department will help all Members improve that position and create the expertise required to get all parts of the United Kingdom exporting to all parts of the globe.

Mr John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State explain to our European partners the huge benefit to their industries of car and truck sales to the UK and ensure that there are no obstacles to our own vehicle makers selling to the EU? While he is at it, will he

persuade other Departments to behave like their European counterparts and support domestic industry and buy British?

Dr Fox: On the latter point, the GREAT campaign has been moved to the Department for International Trade and I am keen for it to encourage people in this country to buy British where possible. He makes an important point about the wider negotiations in that the European Union has a huge trade surplus with the United Kingdom. It is more in their interest than ours—if that is possible—to maintain an open, free-trading environment.

Adam Afriyie (Windsor) (Con): Currently, 21 trade envoys deal with about 50 markets around the world, yet with the huge opportunities available post-Brexit, does my right hon. Friend agree that it may be wise to look at boosting both the number of trade envoys and the resources available to our people on the ground overseas?

Dr Fox: The programme of prime ministerial trade envoys set up by the previous Prime Minister has been extremely successful and has delivered notable results given the resources initially allocated to it. The Department and No. 10 are looking at how we can improve on the success of that programme, which will depend upon the distribution of DIT's staff overseas. I hope to make an announcement about that programme in the near future.

USA: Trade Discussions

5. **Luke Hall (Thornbury and Yate) (Con):** What recent discussions he has had to promote trade with the USA. [906158]

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox): I travelled to the US in July and had extremely productive meetings with the US trade representatives, senior White House officials, and business leaders. My message was that Britain remains open for business and that we place continued importance on the commercial relationship between the UK and the US, our largest single trading partner.

Luke Hall: I welcome the Secretary of State to his place and thank him for that answer. What particular opportunities does he think will open up for people in the west country?

Dr Fox: The US is the south-west's third-largest export market with £1.59 billion-worth of goods exported in the year to March 2016, including everything from aerospace, as mentioned by the hon. Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire), to cider and cheese. We want to expand those opportunities. I have already announced that we will open three new trade offices in the US in Minneapolis, Raleigh-Durham and San Diego. We need to look at where there are markets and not simply operate on a geographical basis.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): The Secretary of State will acknowledge that the most important ongoing discussions with the USA are on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. Does he therefore

find it strange that although the UK has voted to leave the European Union in order to reclaim parliamentary sovereignty in this country, the Government, unlike their EU counterparts, have still not made available any provision for Members of Parliament to scrutinise the secret text of the TTIP agreement, despite having promised to establish a reading room securely for this purpose in February?

Dr Fox: While we remain in the EU, we will continue to push all free trade agreements possible, because we believe in global trade liberalisation; that includes the Government's position of support for TTIP. It remains the United States' clear priority to get this agreement, but I think the hon. Gentleman will accept that given the comments that have come from both France and Germany in recent weeks, and the fact that we have elections next year in both countries, the future of TTIP, at least in the immediate future, looks less than utterly secure.

10. [906163] **Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con):** Given that the Commonwealth has a larger population and is enjoying faster economic growth than the EU, as indeed is the US, does my right hon. Friend agree that it provides a much better prospect for trading opportunities than the EU?

Dr Fox: There are indeed enormous opportunities with Commonwealth countries, and we will be wanting to explore with a number of those exactly how we might take forward trade working groups along the lines that we have already announced with Australia and with India. However, I point out that although we have political links with Commonwealth countries, they are not, in terms of economics and trading, homogenous. Therefore, there will be a great difference between the biggest markets and some of the smaller markets, although we will want to take a look at those that may be developing markets in the future.

Commonwealth: Trade Discussions

6. **Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con):** What recent discussions he has had to promote trade with other Commonwealth countries. [906159]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Mark Garnier): This Department has many valued interactions with Commonwealth partners in support of our aim for the UK to be a global leader in free trade. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently visited India and will co-chair a bilateral trade dialogue there in November. He also recently met the Australian Trade Minister. In addition, several ministerial visits are planned to Commonwealth markets, and the UK will co-host the Commonwealth Trade Ministers meeting next year.

Wendy Morton: I welcome the Minister's response. What priority is being placed on negotiating trade deals with Commonwealth countries?

Mark Garnier: As my hon. Friend will have heard from an earlier question, the Commonwealth is made up of a very diverse set of economies, so there will not be one, single trade negotiation. We are already enjoying

excellent trade relationships with our 52 Commonwealth partners and we are committed to strengthening those further. One example of this is that the UK is co-hosting with Malta the inaugural Commonwealth Trade Ministers meeting in London in March 2017, which will be an excellent opportunity to promote greater trade and investment within the Commonwealth.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): The Indian company Wockhardt exports from Wrexham pharmaceuticals to the rest of the world, including to the European Union. What comfort can the Minister give that the important regulation that exists in the single market will continue for that company in the post-Brexit world?

Mark Garnier: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said a little earlier, we are reluctant to give a running commentary on how negotiations and where ideas are going to go, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are incredibly keen to recognise the important contribution to the British economy that international companies are making when they invest in the UK, such as the company he mentions investing from India.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Lastly in this category, I call Mr Roger Mullin.

Scotland: Trade and Investment

7. **Roger Mullin** (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): What steps he is taking to support international trade and investment in Scotland. [906160]

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox): The Department for International Trade is a Department for the whole UK. I visited Scotland last month, met the Cabinet Secretary for the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work, and offered my support to Scottish businesses. The Export Hub is currently touring Scotland, with trade experts providing advice to 252 first-time exporters, from just two Scottish tours. Its focus is on demonstrating real live business opportunities that businesses in any part of the UK can apply for.

Roger Mullin: I thank the Minister for that response. The attraction of worldwide entrepreneurs to work in Scotland is a particular form of investment that needs encouraging. Will he speak to his colleagues and encourage a complete review of tier 1 entrepreneur visas, as current barriers have led to rejection rates of about 70%, thereby harming investment and growth?

Dr Fox: The visa regime is constantly being reviewed by my colleagues at the Home Office, and I take note of the hon. Gentleman's comments. In terms of having an open economy, we must welcome the concept of free trade, and ensure that we have a low-tax, low-regulation economy and access to skilled labour. The United Kingdom as a whole has a number of advantages, not least that we speak English and that we are at the centre of the world trading time zones.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): When he was the keynote speaker in Scotland of the Go movement, the Secretary of State will remember how much and

how many people there welcomed the fact that we had the opportunity to exit the EU and increase trade opportunities. Will he lay to rest the lie that everyone in Scotland is against leaving the EU?

Dr Fox: Two things are clear: the people of Scotland voted to remain part of the United Kingdom; and the people of the United Kingdom, with an equal vote in every part of this country, voted to leave the European Union. We are taking the decision as a United Kingdom, not as separate parts of it.

Topical Questions

T1. [906175] **Mr Alan Mak** (Havant) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox): This is the first time that I have had an opportunity to set out the new Department's responsibilities. We have three tasks: promoting UK exports of goods and services to support a growing economy that serves the whole of the United Kingdom; maximising opportunities for wealth creation through supporting foreign direct investment with a renewed focus on overseas direct investment to support the current account; and delivering the best international trading framework for the UK outside the European Union, including through building our capacity to negotiate and administer a national trade policy. Like the UK as a whole, the Department for International Trade is open for business, and I am pleased to say today that we will now demonstrate that by launching an open international recruitment for a new permanent secretary, which gives me an opportunity to thank very much Sir Martin Donnelly for his fantastic work in helping build the new Department.

Mr Mak: I congratulate the Secretary of State and his ministerial team on their appointments. Later today, the fourth industrial revolution will be debated in the Chamber for the very first time. Will my right hon. Friend commit to helping small and medium-sized enterprises involved in new and emerging technologies to export and to secure more overseas clients?

Dr Fox: May I first congratulate my hon. Friend on securing a debate later this afternoon? The Department for International Trade supports cutting-edge British technology companies to take advantage of overseas opportunities. Working closely with industry partners such as Tech City UK, techUK and our network of international trade advisers, we assist SMEs to scale up, reach their export potential and win overseas business. Companies have the opportunity to take part in focused trade missions, key tech industry events and meet potential buyers, and we will be setting out new ways in which we intend to maximise that in the coming months.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): The Secretary of State will be aware that, in the automotive business, the original equipment manufacturer focuses on the stability of its supply chain, which is typically sourced from many different countries. Has he identified those supply chains in the automotive sector in which the

involvement of UK companies would violate country of origin rules once the UK has left the EU, and what advice has his Department given to those companies?

Dr Fox: The country of origin complications is of course tied up with the point that was made earlier about the World Trade Organisation and the EU schedules. The WTO is still working on EU 15 schedules having not yet ratified EU 28, so the way in which it operates still has some way to go. The hon. Gentleman is quite right in looking at country of origin; it is one of the issues that the Government will look at as a whole when considering the options for our future relationship with European Union and outside.

T2. [906176] **Daniel Kawczynski** (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): Despite the difficult political situation with Russia, there are still many British companies exporting to Russia and investing in that country in sectors not affected by sanctions. Bearing that in mind and also the need to prepare for a post-sanctions relationship with Russia, will my right hon. Friend ensure that an appropriate trade envoy is appointed for this very important country?

Dr Fox: I am grateful for all job applications—formal and otherwise. Whether we have a post-sanctions relationship with Russia will depend on Russia's international behaviour, and we can only look forward to that business opportunity when we get the appropriate international behaviour by the Putin regime. When that occasion arises, if it does, I am sure that my hon. Friend has now made his well-known interest in that area a formal job application.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): The latest quarterly review published by Scottish Engineering shows a slump in orders, a sharp fall in output volume and a drop in employment levels, with companies blaming the uncertainty caused by the decision to leave the EU. Can the Secretary of State tell us what he expects the effects will be on Scottish business exports if the UK withdraws from the single market?

Dr Fox: Industry dislikes uncertainty, as the hon. Lady says, but I would add two uncertainties into the equation. The first is the uncertainty over Scotland's fiscal position. We have seen the deterioration in the position, which makes me very grateful that the people of Scotland took the sensible decision to remain in the United Kingdom. The second is the uncertainty posed by the Scottish Government and their constant reference to a second independence referendum. I can think of no greater cause of uncertainty for Scottish business investment.

T3. [906177] **Mr Peter Lilley** (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): Can my right hon. Friend, whom I congratulate on his appointment, confirm that were we to remain in the EU we would stand little prospect of trade deals with the two largest countries in the world—India and China? China is not agreeing to open negotiations with the EU and India has broken them off. Outside, we can follow the example of Switzerland, which already has a free trade agreement with China and is going ahead to negotiate one with India?

Dr Fox: Switzerland is still negotiating its trade agreement with India, but my right hon. Friend is correct that leaving the EU will give the UK greater freedom to strike

its own trade agreements, including with some of the largest and fastest-growing economies in the world. As he will well know, these will not necessarily be straightforward, as these countries are tough negotiators, but it would be much simpler to negotiate a bilateral agreement, and they have shown greater willingness to negotiate a bilateral deal outside the complications that sometimes come with an EU free trade agreement, which is often a political agreement rather than a pure FTA.

Mr Speaker: Switzerland also has its own unique selling point, called Roger Federer. Just thought I would mention that.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): The Japanese Government have thrown a huge cold bucket of water over Brexit, with their announcement that UK investment from Japan might be threatened. Is not access to the single market key to calming Japanese nerves?

Dr Fox: I had a constructive meeting with the Japanese ambassador earlier this week. It might be worth reiterating what he said in his "Today" interview:

"There is no indication so far I have received from Japanese industries that they are contemplating an exit from the UK economy because they like it here and they have benefited from working in the UK."

That will continue because the economic fundamentals of this country remain extremely strong thanks to this Government and no thanks to the Opposition.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): We know that politicians love to don high-vis jackets, walk around factories and stand next to manufacturing goods, but the reality is that 79% of our exports are in services. The UK is the world's second biggest exporter of services, and all the most successful export nations play to their strengths. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that, in setting the strategy for his Department and choosing personnel and trade missions for the future, he will focus on services as much as on goods?

Mr Speaker: I will not call people for topical questions if they abuse the system. The hon. Gentleman is a very good parliamentarian, and that question was not just too long but far too long.

The Minister for Trade and Investment (Greg Hands): My hon. Friend makes a good point. I met him in July in his capacity as joint chair of the all-party parliamentary group on trade and investment. He is right that services are vital to our economy. They provide 78% of our GDP and 80% of our jobs. It was often a frustration with the EU that it failed to deepen the single market in services. It is important to realise that we are talking not just about financial services but about digital and other services. We will make sure that they are all at the heart of our efforts as we move forward into the free trade world.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): Following the questions asked earlier by my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (Mr Spellar) and my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State more recently, has the Secretary of State met representatives of the

UK automotive industry? If so, what clarifications have they sought and what have been his responses, and if he has not, when will he do so?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Mark Garnier): The UK has a highly successful automotive industry, and Ministers are seeking input from that industry on an ongoing basis in order to make sure that we are very attentive to the needs of that industry. I cannot stress too much the importance we attach to the automotive industry. It is one of our leading and most fabulous industries, as evidenced not least by the fact that nine out of 11 Formula 1 racing teams choose to come and build their cars in this country.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I know that we have overrun, but I want to accommodate remaining questions if they are extremely brief.

T5. [906179] **Andrew Stephenson** (Pendle) (Con): Pendle is home to a number of key aerospace businesses, such as Rolls-Royce. What discussions has my hon. Friend had with the aerospace sector to ensure that we continue to support this vital industry?

Mark Garnier: The Government, with industry, are working with the Aerospace Growth Partnership to boost growth and exports. Together we have committed £3.9 billion to aerospace research up until 2026. I will shortly be visiting Rolls-Royce in Derby, and I look forward to holding a separate round-table meeting with aerospace companies later this month in Toulouse.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State will know that there is a very healthy all-party manufacturing group. Will he come and speak to us soon, and also look at our Manufacturing Commission and our campaign, Exported by Britain? We would love to talk to him.

Dr Fox: On behalf of the team, I will give full agreement to that. If I am unable to do that because of diary commitments, another member of our ministerial team will certainly do so.

T6. [906180] **Mims Davies** (Eastleigh) (Con): We heard this morning about a focus on the positive opportunities for free trade with the Commonwealth and Australia.

Does the Minister agree that that gives a great opportunity to reassure businesses in our constituencies that this Government can make a great success of the bold choice made by our voters?

Greg Hands: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made clear, we are encouraged by comments coming from across the Commonwealth, from leaders and Ministers of countries such as Australia. Several additional ministerial visits are planned in Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth markets—for example, Australia, New Zealand and Singapore. I will be in South Korea and Taiwan, and other Ministers in China, Japan and Vietnam in the coming months.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I warmly endorse what the Secretary of State has just said about Russia. I am glad he is adopting that attitude, but may I urge him to extend the same attitude towards North Carolina? I think it bizarre that he has opened a new office in North Carolina, when Deutsche Bank, PayPal and a string of other businesses and many US states are boycotting North Carolina because of its ludicrous homophobic new policy in relation to transgender people.

Dr Fox: I made the point earlier that what we need to do to provide certainty about jobs and profits in the United Kingdom is to be in the markets where we have the greatest maturity and the greatest potential for value. That means, in the United States, not just looking at the established areas where we have personnel, but looking to where we have growing markets that can prove to be of value to the United Kingdom, its people and its businesses.

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): Given that in two decades' time, one in four people on this planet will be African, will my right hon. Friend give an assurance that his Department will focus on trade in Africa, because that is a sure way to keep the economies of that continent fully functioning and stable?

Dr Fox: My hon. Friend is right. We will also require to see greater co-operation between Government Departments and a cross-Government approach to Africa. I expect to make an announcement shortly about a joint visit by myself and the Secretary of State for International Development to Africa in the coming months.

Mr Speaker: I am most grateful to the Secretary of State and to colleagues. There is no shortage of demand in this session, and I dare say that that will continue.

New Grammar Schools

10.43 am

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): To ask the Secretary of State for Education to make a statement on the Government's plans to lift the statutory ban on opening new grammar schools in England.

The Secretary of State for Education (Justine Greening): As the Prime Minister has said, this Government are committed to building a country that works for everyone, not just the privileged few. We believe that every person should have the opportunity to fulfil their potential, no matter what their background or where they are from.

Education is at the heart of this ambition. We inherited a system from the Labour Government, however, where far too many children left school without the qualifications or the skills they needed to be successful in life. Our far-reaching reforms over the last six years have changed this, strengthening school leadership, improving standards of behaviour in our classrooms, ensuring children are taught to read more effectively and improving maths teaching in primary schools. As a result there are now 1.4 million more pupils in schools rated as good or outstanding than in 2010.

This means more young people are being given the opportunity to access better teaching and to maximise their potential. This is what we want for all children, and we are continuing our reforms so that every child can have the best possible start in life. It is why we are doubling free childcare to 30 hours for working parents of three and four-year-olds. As I said in July, on the issue of academic selection I am open-minded because we cannot rule anything out that could help us grow opportunity for all and give more people the chance to do well in life.

The landscape for schools has changed hugely in the last 10, 20, 30 years. We now have a whole variety of educational offers available. There will be no return to the simplistic binary choice of the past, where schools separate children into winners and losers, successes or failures. This Government want to focus on the future, to build on our success since 2010 and to create a truly 21st-century school system. However, we want a system that can cater for the talent and the abilities of every single child. To achieve that, we need a truly diverse range of schools and specialisms. We need more good schools in more areas of the country responding to the needs of every child, regardless of their background. We are looking at a range of options, and I expect any new proposals to focus on what we can do to help everyone to go as far as their individual talents and capacity for hard work can take them. Education policy to that end will be set in due course.

Angela Rayner: Wow! Despite that waffle, the cat is finally out of the bag. The Government have revealed their plans for new grammar schools in England, but not in this House—we did not even hear the word “grammar” just then. Instead, they did it through leaks to the press and at a private meeting of Conservative Members. So much for the one nation Government we were promised. Will the Secretary of State promise today that future such announcements will be made here so that we can give this policy the scrutiny it so badly needs?

Perhaps the Secretary of State can tell us the evidence base for this policy today. Has she read the Institute for Fiscal Studies report “Entry into Grammar Schools in England”? If so, perhaps she remembers the conclusion: “amongst high achievers, those who are eligible for”

free school meals

“or who live in poorer neighbourhoods are significantly less likely to go to a grammar school.”

The OECD and the Sutton Trust, and even the Government's own social mobility tsar and their chief inspector of schools, have all cited the evidence against this policy. In Kent, where we have grammar schools, the attainment gap is far wider than it is elsewhere. So can the Secretary of State tell the House what evidence she has to support her belief that grammar schools will help disadvantaged children and close the attainment gap?

At a time when our schools are facing a crisis in teacher recruitment and retention, with thousands taught in super-size classes and schools facing real-term cuts to their budget for the first time in nearly two decades, pushing ahead with grammar schools shows a dangerous misunderstanding of the real issues facing our schools. What will the Secretary of State be doing to address the real problems facing our schools today?

The Prime Minister has said this policy is justified because we already have social selection. Quite how making things worse by bringing back grammar schools as a solution remains a mystery. Perhaps the Secretary of State can tell us why she is not ensuring that all children get a decent education?

This policy will not help social mobility but will entrench inequality and disadvantage. It will be the lucky few who can afford the tuition who will get ahead and the disadvantaged who will be left behind—a policy for the few at the expense of the many. I was told that the Tories know the cost of everything and the value of nothing. I do not even think they know that anymore.

Finally, the Prime Minister promised to lead a one nation Government. She said that her policy would be led by the evidence, and she claimed that she would govern for the disadvantaged, not the privileged few, yet this policy fails on every single count. It may be a new Prime Minister, but it is the same old nasty Tories.

Justine Greening: The first thing I would say to the hon. Lady is that we have not yet actually made any policy announcements; they will be made in due course. She has given a commentary on what I guess she presumes the policy announcement will be. I would encourage her to wait. Broadly, we are interested in increasing diversity and meeting parents' desire for choice in having a school near to them that matches the needs of their child. We also want to see capacity built into the system, in two ways. We want more good schools near to children where they need them. There are too many parts of our country where, in spite of all the reforms we have made and the improvements in attainment that we have seen, there are still children who cannot get good enough access to a good school. We also want to build capacity by having some of our best schools work with other schools in the system to help collectively to raise attainment and standards as a whole. We want to see all parts of our education system, not just the school system but universities as well, playing a stronger, better role.

[*Justine Greening*]

The hon. Lady asked about evidence. She quoted a report by the IFS that does mention free school meals. However, I must say that I do not understand her argument. She seems to be criticising the status quo while resolutely defending keeping it in place. It was really interesting listening to her, because, in many respects, the words echoed the voices that I heard in my childhood—people having a dogmatic debate about the education system while I studied in my local comprehensive entirely untouched by that ideological debate. What we want to do, and what we think this Parliament and the country should do, is to be prepared to look at the practical ways that we can improve attainment for our children, and to leave no stone unturned to do that.

Complaining about one aspect of our school system and then saying that we should not even have a debate about that element is, frankly, an untenable argument. It is, in essence, politics and dogma coming before pupils and opportunity. It is about Labour Members prioritising, as we can see today, an ideological debate, while Government Members want a debate about the practical steps we can take to tackle generational failure and schools that still are not delivering for children who live near to them. It would be wrong to discount how we can improve prospects for those children, especially the most disadvantaged, purely because of political dogma. If Labour Members are not willing to ask themselves these difficult questions, how can they possibly come up with any of the solutions?

We do believe that selection can play a role, and we think there is evidence to show that it does for many children in grammar schools—but anyhow, we need to leave no stone unturned. We will set out our policies for consultation in due course, and I am sure that hon. Members will want to debate them thoroughly after that.

Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): The World Economic Forum has recently reminded us that we are well down the tables in terms of literacy and numeracy. It says that some 20% of 16 to 18-year-olds struggle with literacy, and the figure for numeracy is even worse—25%. Does the Secretary of State agree that it is absolutely vital that any discussion about grammar schools does not distract us from our fundamental task of improving social mobility and ensuring that we make the best use of all the talent across the whole country and do not just talk about the few?

Justine Greening: I strongly agree. The Sutton Trust report focused particularly on free-school-meal children and how they performed in, for example, grammar schools. The educational gains from attending grammar schools were twice as high for pupils with free school meals compared with the impact for pupils at grammar schools overall. As my hon. Friend points out, while grammars, in their own way, provide a stretching, outstanding education for many children from all backgrounds that helps them to have better prospects in life, they are one part of a very broad-based school system—a system that has been transformed out of all recognition from when grammars were originally introduced. We now need to look at how we can have a 21st-century education policy that takes a pragmatic

look at the role of grammars and, of course, across the whole system. He is absolutely right that we will not lose sight of the broader reforms that we are bringing through that will improve standards across the board.

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State represents a London constituency, so she will know that London schools have improved dramatically over the past 15 to 20 years. Does she agree that that has happened because of a focus on high standards for all children in all schools, not by going down the route of selection? May I urge her not to turn the clock back to grammar schools, but to focus on high standards in all schools in all parts of the country, for all children?

Justine Greening: I absolutely reassure the hon. Gentleman that we will not be turning the clock back. I think that the London lessons are about collaboration, school leadership and sharing those best practice experiences across schools. The challenge that I want us to discuss is how we can make sure that all schools play a role in doing that, rather than simply setting grammars to one side and saying that they should not play as great a role across the rest of the school system. I think they should, and we want to have that debate and discussion. Fundamentally—I come back to my opening comments—this is about having more good school places for more children. It is about building capacity through better and more places and by sharing best practice, and about improving school leadership by having schools working closely together.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): In Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School in Faversham, I am fortunate to have an excellent grammar school in my constituency. As my right hon. Friend will know, people move to Kent because of its grammar schools. Does she agree that it is not right for an excellent academic education to be available only to those who can move to the catchment areas of outstanding schools?

Justine Greening: We need to improve diversity and choice. As the Prime Minister has said, the reality is that too often in Britain we do have selection, but it is on the basis of house prices, which is totally unacceptable in a modern Britain. We need to challenge ourselves to talk about how we can change that and improve standards for children, wherever they are in our country. Simply saying that something is off the table because of political ideology and dogma does not serve the children whose future prospects we want to improve.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): May I beg the new Secretary of State to listen to the expertise that is out there? She might know that I chair the advisory council of the Sutton Trust. I ask her to listen to the Sutton Trust, because we believe in evidence-based policy, and to the chief inspector of schools, and to look at those areas that have for years had this kind of education, with the 11-plus, and at what it has done to the entirety. If she looks at Kent in depth, she will learn some lessons that might push her in a different direction.

Justine Greening: It is time that we look at the Kent experience. I know that Kent has done a lot of work to dig into how it can get more children from disadvantaged

backgrounds into its grammar schools. The hon. Gentleman has raised issues of principle, but my attitude and response is, if that is how he feels, why would he want us to discount looking at how we can make grammars work more effectively with the rest of their local communities, and not just for those children who get to them, but for those who do not? It seems to me that the Labour party's response to all of those challenges is to raise them, but to then simply put them to one side and ignore them. I do not think that that is sensible.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): Bradford is one of the worst-performing education districts in the country. There is a wide provision of some outstanding results and some very dire results. People who can afford to buy a house in a good catchment area tend to get a school that produces outstanding results, whereas those who cannot afford to buy a house in a good catchment area tend to get a school with the worst results. When can people in Bradford, including working-class people, get access to the very best grammar schools that we need? They surely should not just be a preserve of the Tory shires.

Justine Greening: I think that my hon. Friend speaks for many constituency MPs around the country. The point is that people should have choice, and it should not be for Government to deprive them of that choice about how they want to educate their children. This is about choice and diversity, as well as about building capacity in the system.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): The Secretary of State well knows that apart from giving our young people the best possible teaching, the most important thing we can do for them is to encourage them as they make their way through school. Given that we are still, as a nation, dealing with the legacy of a divided education system, why on earth does she think that subjecting more 11-year-old children to the experience of being told by their tearful parents, who have opened the envelope, that they have failed will encourage them and support their self-esteem and continuing career through the education system?

Justine Greening: Dare I say it, that was yet another Labour MP telling us what is wrong with the current system, in his view, while also arguing that we should not look at that. The legacy that we are interested in challenging is the one left by the previous Labour Government: grade inflation; declining standards; and children leaving our education system without even the basics in maths and literacy. While I was sat on a train last weekend, I listened to a young man talking about how the fact that he did not know how to spell was holding him back at work. We managed to take power from the Labour party, but that man has to live with the consequences of an education system that fundamentally failed him every single day of his life.

We inherited a university system that had a cap on the number of children who could enter it. Record numbers of young people were not in employment, education or training. Youth employment had gone up by 50% by the time Labour left office. We are interested in not only catching up that lost ground for our young people, but making sure beyond that that we leave no stone unturned. We want to look across our entire

education system to turbocharge the prospects and opportunities for all children in our country, but especially the most disadvantaged and especially those who do not currently have the opportunities that they need, deserve and should have.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): I welcome the Government's decision at least to open this debate. A statutory ban on the establishment of grammar schools should be no part of a Conservative Government's policy. Evidence from my area, where grammar schools are available just down the road in the neighbouring council area, indicates that there is widespread support for the establishment of a grammar school. Coastal communities are particularly vulnerable to poor educational standards, so I hope that the Secretary of State will give due consideration to that if the policy goes forward. May I also urge her to consider the extension of bilateral schools?

Justine Greening: I am sure that my hon. Friend will be interested to see our policies when they are published shortly. He talks about some of the elements of our secondary system. I know that he wants to make sure that his local community has access to better schools for more local children, and that is precisely what we are aiming to achieve overall.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): The Secretary of State is quite right not to rule out a discussion of grammar schools forming part of the wide range of schools that we have. I declare an interest as the product of a wonderful grammar school. Would she like to visit Northern Ireland, where grammar schools still exist? In Northern Ireland, grammar schools are hugely popular. There is good education right across the spectrum, no matter what a young person's ability. Results continue to improve and to be better than those in the rest of the United Kingdom, and there is very little private education. Perhaps she might like to go to Northern Ireland and talk to the First Minister.

Justine Greening: I thank the hon. Lady for that invitation; I am sure I will want to take her up on it shortly. I should emphasise to the House that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) said, this is the opening up of a debate. It is important for our children that we have that debate if we are to rise to the challenge of looking at what will improve attainment and ensure that they have good schools where they are growing up.

We will look at all the options very carefully. I recognise that this is an emotive debate, but that is because it matters. That is why we should be prepared to have a debate about this, given how much our broader school system has changed. I will look very carefully at all the arguments that are made and all the evidence that is produced, because that is important, too. I am keen to hear from colleagues on both sides of the House and we will be setting out all our policy options shortly.

Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con): I warmly welcome the Secretary of State's comments. All children have the right to fulfil their full potential. Will she assure the House that she is considering all methods of selection and that this is not about bringing back the 11-plus?

Justine Greening: We will set out our policies much more broadly, but I assure hon. Members that there will be no return to the past. This is about moving forward with a 21st-century approach to our school system, and precisely not one rooted in the 1960s and 1970s. I just hope that the Labour party is able to engage in a modern debate, rather than one that is 40 to 50 years old.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): In the clamour from some areas about creating new grammar schools, many people forget that the creation of new grammar schools de facto creates secondary modern schools, because the intake is skewed by grammar schools. In his speech to London Councils on Monday, the chief inspector accepted that grammar schools, where they exist, do “a fine job” with the intake they have, but said that they have a very poor track record in admitting youngsters from “non-middle-class backgrounds”. If we are to go down this road, what can the Secretary of State do to confirm that that would not be the case in other parts of the country?

Justine Greening: That again underlines why we are right to open up this agenda for debate. In a way, we will not be able to tackle any of the issues that the hon. Gentleman cares about without a broader look at what a modern policy approach to grammars should look like. We should not simply discount the excellent education that so many children get at grammars, including children from very disadvantaged backgrounds. We should look harder at how we can make sure that grammars play a role more collaboratively in a wider, broader school system, while ensuring that they build capacity and provide more good places as they steadily improve.

Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): Yesterday, during an Education Committee evidence session, we heard about the truism that what affects pupils’ attainment most is good teaching in the classroom. That is evidently true, but does the Secretary of State agree that structures can sometimes support learning? A 2011 PISA—programme for international student assessment—study showed that giving schools autonomy improves outcomes, so further choice for parents, teachers and students may provide further opportunities.

Justine Greening: I think that is right. Critically, we need the right level of autonomy for schools so that they can actually get on with the job of teaching our children. We need fantastic leadership in our schools. We know from the London experience that that was absolutely critical. Heads who showed what could be done in difficult schools then worked with other schools so that they could put in place the same approaches. More broadly, we also need teaching staff who are motivated and able to work effectively in the classroom with children who can be disciplined effectively by a head who genuinely feels they have control over and can exercise leadership in their school. All those things make a difference.

Beyond that, if we are to make an impact on long-term social mobility in Britain—it will not change overnight—we need not just schools and the education family to drive social mobility, but communities, business, our universities and civil society to do so. Everybody needs to play a role, alongside core education reform, to make sure that

children in the classroom and outside it can get the skills, knowledge, advice and experience that they will need truly to develop their potential.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): When the chief inspector said that the idea that poor children would benefit from an expansion in the number of grammar schools was “tosh and nonsense”, was he being ideological?

Justine Greening: As we open up this debate, people will have different views, but I do not believe that that is a reason not to have the debate. It is too important for that. Improving attainment and having more good school places for more children—building the capacity we need in our system so that we can have great schools on the doorstep for every child in our country—is too important simply to be put in the “too hard” bucket and for us to say that we might have a bit of a debate about it. I think we should have this debate and that we should work out what we must do to do a better job of raising the attainment of the children who currently do not go far enough.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: I call Dr Julian Lewis.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Oh, not him!

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I am not an expert on the theory of secondary education, but having attended a grammar school with a largely working-class contingent in the 1960s, I know something about the practice, from which we all benefited. Will the Secretary of State explain why it is acceptable to nurture and promote sporting excellence but not academic excellence?

Justine Greening: My right hon. Friend raises a good point about the broader issue of selection. All children are different, so playing to their talents and natural interests is important. Parents should have more choice and diversity in the school system so that they are able to find not just a good school, but a good school that will be particularly good for their child.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): The job of education in the 21st century is to maximise opportunity for the maximum number of children, whatever their background. Ofsted’s chief inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw, said this week that a return for grammar schools would not do that, but would be a

“profoundly retrograde step that would actually lead to overall standards sliding back, not improving”.

He said that in grammar school Bexley, just 9% of disadvantaged children go to its grammar schools, while in non-grammar school Hackney, 62% of children go on to university compared with 48% in the country as a whole. Does the Secretary of State agree that where there is failure and disadvantage, the answer should not be this festival of bring-backery, but instead a focus on expanding opportunity for all schools right across the system?

Justine Greening: Expanding opportunity is at the heart of what we are doing. Rather than jumping the gun, I encourage the right hon. Gentleman to wait to

see the Government's proposals. Yet again we have heard the Labour party complaining about the current system while seemingly maintaining a position of not wanting to have a debate about how we can make it better overall and then ensure that the entire school system can benefit from that improvement.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I realise that the right hon. Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) may experience some teething problems as he makes his adjustment to Back-Bench life. We look forward to hearing from him on a regular basis, but unfortunately as he is no longer a Minister he does not have a guaranteed slot. However, an expectant nation will hear him now.

Sir Desmond Swayne: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am slowly adjusting myself to the metaphysical plane.

I welcome what the Secretary of State has said about diversity and choice, but will she acknowledge that a grammar school might not be suited to every town? I would not relish the prospect of informing parents in Fordingbridge, Ringwood, New Milton or Lymington that their child, not having been able to get into the grammar school, would have to be bussed elsewhere.

Justine Greening: My right hon. Friend raises the important point that local communities need to be intrinsically involved in how their school system develops, and I assure him that we are very seized of that. I should also take this opportunity to put on record how much I enjoyed working with him in our previous roles within the Department for International Development. He did an outstanding job and was a pleasure to have as a ministerial colleague.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): All of us want the best for our children, but in answering the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns)—although in my view she did not answer it—did not the Secretary of State understand the very real fear that reintroducing grammar schools also reintroduces secondary moderns? That will mean, in essence, recreating divisions when the consensus has been that we should not allow those divisions in our education system. How will proposing new grammar schools, which will bring in secondary moderns, improve attainment for all pupils in all our communities?

Justine Greening: The fundamental premise of the hon. Gentleman's question is wrong. This is absolutely not about going back to the past. Secondary moderns for many years did not even put their children through a single exam. Our school system has, thankfully, been reformed beyond all recognition since then, so the premise of his question is wrong. This is about improving standards for all children. He asked how we can help to make that happen. One way is by having good and outstanding schools playing more of a role and lifting other schools that can benefit from their experience and knowledge.

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's focus on excellence and education for all. I invite her to come and look at the mixed economy that exists in Salisbury, with grammar schools, university technical colleges, a free sixth form, local authority

schools and a multi-academy trust forming shortly. I would like to place an emphasis on the dynamics between the different types of schools. In particular, grammar schools work with their neighbours nearby to raise standards across the board. The focus on the Progress 8 score—the progress made by every school—is surely where the emphasis needs to be placed.

Justine Greening: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Collaboration and having good schools working with the broader family to raise overall attainment is important. Secondly, he is right that we should be looking to challenge schools on the progress of every single child. Part of the problem with the floor approach of getting children into GCSEs and achieving good A* to C grades was that it missed out on the often brilliant progress that schools make with children who are perhaps further back in their attainment. We should value that work, and that is the intention of Progress 8.

Mr Speaker: I think we should hear from a philosopher. I call Dr John Pugh.

John Pugh (Southport) (LD): Thank you, Mr Speaker. On a consensual note, the Secretary of State will surely share the view that the biggest and most significant problem in British education is the long tail of underperforming boys in our poorer areas, few of whom will actually pass the 11-plus. How on earth does she think the creation of grammar schools, in simple terms, is a solution to this problem?

Justine Greening: The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to hear that the Department for Education has a range of different policies. We are allowed to have more than one policy to tackle poor attainment. We will be bringing forward proposals on how we feel the broader schools system, including grammars, and the broader education system can work together more effectively to raise attainment. He is absolutely right to highlight the point about white working-class boys. Interestingly, the Sutton Trust looked at primary schools that were doing a good job on improving attainment for white working-class boys. Sadly, only about eight or 10 really improved attainment dramatically. We can, however, learn from that experience and make sure that best practice is spread more effectively. The issue is absolutely critical and he is right to focus on it.

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): There is no doubt that there is a virtual scrum of parents around almost every grammar school in the country trying to take advantage of the excellent education and opportunities that they provide. The answer, therefore, is not to sneer at grammar schools or to try to close them down, but to enhance them. At the moment, new schools can select on the basis of children's ability at performing arts, sports and music, but not on their ability at maths or English. How can that be right?

Justine Greening: My hon. Friend is right. The scrums around good schools are not just around good grammars; they are around good and outstanding schools more generally. That is why our focus surely has to be on opening up the system as much as we can to make sure that we absolutely maximise our ability to get good schools and more places at such schools for children in

[Justine Greening]

their local areas. Many of our colleagues talk about how children come from miles away to attend the good school in their constituency. Perhaps if we already had a good school closer to where those children live, they would not need to spend their time travelling, and losing out on homework and study time.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I very much welcome the comprehensive-educated Secretary of State to her post and wish her well in this new challenge.

The

“age of 11 is too early to make final decisions about a child’s future.”—[*Official Report*, 8 July 1970; Vol. 803, c. 683.]

So said Margaret Thatcher, the Secretary of State who oversaw the greatest expansion of comprehensive education. Does the current Secretary of State really want to increase the number of children taking the 11-plus and to bring back secondary moderns and grammar schools, with the negative impact on achievement predicted by Her Majesty’s chief inspector and the negative impact on social mobility predicted by the Government’s social mobility adviser?

Justine Greening: I have a great amount of respect for the hon. Gentleman. I know he spent a career in education before coming into this place. I would simply say to him, as I have said to many other colleagues, that he should wait for the policy options to come out. I will be interested to hear his response to them in due course.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): I went to a state grammar school in south London, and I owe my place here to that school. The best grammar schools actively seek children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and 14% of pupils at Wallington County grammar school, next door to Croydon, are on free school meals. Does the Secretary of State support that school’s plan to open a satellite grammar school in my constituency, rather like the one that was opened in Sevenoaks a few months ago?

Justine Greening: I think all of us are here because of the education that we were lucky enough to have. The challenge that we face, and the challenge that we are debating today, is ensuring that no child misses out on that opportunity because of the postcode lottery of where they happen to have been born. We need to ensure that good schools, whatever kind of good schools they are, have more freedom to expand and deliver more good places in our school system for children who do not currently have them.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): I have listened carefully to the Secretary of State, and I have not heard her explicitly support the policy that was announced by the Prime Minister at last night’s private Back-Bench Conservative meeting and leaked to the media. The Secretary of State smiles, but that is an interesting fact. The Prime Minister has repeatedly boasted that she likes to make decisions—thinking very carefully about them—on the basis of evidence. Is the Secretary of State aware of any evidence that shows that a grammar school system improves attainment across the piece, or improves social mobility?

Justine Greening: As I have said in the past, we have not set out the policy proposals—they will be set out in due course—but I refer the right hon. Gentleman to research conducted by the Sutton Trust, which clearly identified improved attainment by children on free school meals in grammar schools. The trust also said that its research showed no negative impact on the attainment of children outside the grammar school system. I recognise that different studies have identified different challenges relating to selection, but if that is the view that Members take, is there not all the more reason to open up a debate and discuss how we can develop a sensible policy on grammar schools?

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I was educated in a comprehensive school, and I saw the benefits of both academic and vocational education. Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the things we must do in society is assess young people and ensure that we can provide teaching that stretches them to the utmost so that they achieve the best they can, and does she agree that assessments at all ages are important so that we end up with the best possible people in society?

Justine Greening: Absolutely. While we are right to focus on the academic attainment of children in our schools because if they do not learn the basics they simply will not be able to succeed in any walk of life, we should recognise that one of the most important things we can do alongside that is embed our reforms of vocational education and apprenticeships, and ensure that those are competitive routes for young people who want to choose a path in life that is fundamentally different from an academic one. Underlying these exchanges at times is a slight sense among Opposition Members that education is purely about academic attainment. That is critical, but it certainly does not represent the totality of what we want our children to gain before leaving an education system. They must gain knowledge, but also, critically, they must gain skills. We must build skills pathways for the children who will be pursuing a much more vocational life course.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): The Secretary of State recently told *The Times Educational Supplement*:

“The times I learnt best were when I had great, amazing teachers, who could excite me about learning”.

I entirely agree. However, heads and chairs of governors in my constituency who are working really hard to raise standards and increase opportunities for all our young people tell me that the recruitment and retention of good teachers is the biggest challenge that they face. Does the Secretary of State not understand the frustration that they feel because she has focused on structures when evidence does not suggest that they work, rather than focusing on the problems that they see every day when trying to deliver a fantastic education for people in Nottingham?

Justine Greening: The hon. Lady is right. As she says, the issue of recruiting and retaining teachers, and unlocking their ability to get on with their job and to be excellent in the classroom, is truly important, and is relevant to some of the policy options that we will set out in respect of selection. It is indeed absolutely vital, and I assure the hon. Lady that we are not losing our focus on it.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I am sure many people throughout Torbay, where three grammar schools work perfectly well with comprehensive schools, a studio school and a successful technical college, will have listened to some of the comments we have heard today, particularly from the shadow Education Secretary, in amazement. Does the Secretary of State agree that there is nothing radical about the idea of giving other areas the chance to choose to have the education system from which Torbay already benefits?

Justine Greening: For me, it is about two things. It is about being prepared to leave no stone unturned in asking what it is going to take to improve our education system for children and it is about having a practical debate on that which goes beyond the ideological debate and puts pupils first.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): In Trafford, where we have selection, our schools perform very well not because of selection but because of great teaching and good leadership, but I must tell the Secretary of State that the majority of parents in Trafford, especially parents of children with special educational needs, do not feel that they get their child into the school of their choice. In particular they feel that the grammar schools are reluctant to take children with special needs because they will depress the school's results. Can she assure the House that the needs of those particularly vulnerable children will be given appropriate attention in the strategy she proposes?

Justine Greening: I am grateful for that question. I would be happy to sit down with the hon. Lady to discuss that matter further. It is incredibly important that we not only raise attainment across the board but leave no child out of the progress that we are seeing in our schools.

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Con): Parents in Dover, Deal and Kent as a whole see grammar schools and faith-based schools as engines of opportunity and aspiration. If the Government are going to look at having new grammar schools, which I wholly support, will they also look at more faith-based schools and more skills education throughout life to give people the greatest life chances at every stage in their lives?

Justine Greening: I agree that it is about choice, about diversity and about having more choice for parents and a school system that means that they can find the school for their child that is tailored to their needs.

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): How does this help the Government's new industrial strategy? We know that they still have a policy of having technology colleges, which seem to have disappeared somewhat. How will grammar schools help the new industrial strategy? In addition, has the Secretary of State had any discussions with the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church about the potential impact on existing faith schools, particularly in the Teesside conurbation?

Justine Greening: As I have said, we will announce our policy options in due course. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will want to respond to them, but education

in schools is critical to delivering our long-term industrial strategy and to meeting the dual challenges of having a successful economy and of having our migration levels more under control. One way we can do that incredibly constructively is to meet more of our skills needs through our own young people—to train and educate them to be able to play their role in British industry, helping our country to be successful.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that with all the different schools now available, if parents do not want to choose a grammar school education for their children, such schools will not survive and thrive? We should at least give parents with limited means the same choice that better off parents have.

Justine Greening: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We should not accept poor school standards, whatever school the children are in. We must challenge low attainment wherever we find it, but the point I am making today is that it is not good enough to take something off the table just because of political ideology. We need to challenge all aspects of our education system to play a greater role in raising attainment and building capacity.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): There remains a fundamental contradiction at the heart of the Government's thinking, which I suspect has been muddled by the ideology that they are accusing Labour of: either the school selects or the parent chooses, but you cannot have selection and choice together. Therefore, does not the suggestion last night by the Prime Minister that she wants to see an element of selection surely indicate that the Government have abandoned parental choice?

Justine Greening: I encourage the hon. Gentleman to wait for the policy options to be announced. I am sure that he will want to respond to them.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): I am sure parents in Newark will warmly welcome a new grammar school, as hundreds, often on very low incomes, have to cross the border into Lincolnshire. Does the Secretary of State acknowledge what a lot our existing grammar schools are achieving on very low funding? My local grammar school, which is in Gainsborough, gets by on £4,000 per pupil, while the lowest performing school in Lincolnshire, in Lincoln, has almost £8,000, so grammar schools do provide good value for money as well as high standards.

Justine Greening: My hon. Friend makes his point very well, and he will be aware that we are developing our proposals on reforming the funding formula for schools. I know he will want to represent his community as we do that, but it is important that we get more equitable funding for pupils than we currently have.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): It has been a trait of this Tory Government that they steal the language of the left to cover up the mean and regressive policies they introduce, using terms like "social mobility" when they mean quite the opposite. All the empirical evidence shows that investment in early-years does more to move children forward than any form of selection at 11 could

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ever justify, so does the Secretary of State regret closing 800 Sure Start centres? Should we not be investing there, rather than having this pointless debate about bringing back selection?

Justine Greening: I do not accept this either/or characterisation of policy. What we need to do is improve education at every stage of a child's life, including early-years.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con) *rose*—

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: What a choice! Mr Peter Bone.

Mr Bone: I am not entirely sure what Northamptonshire has done to deserve getting the last questions.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) on securing this urgent question, but I think she is under a misapprehension. I know that under Labour announcements were made in the press, but this Government make announcements here. At the meeting last night, there were no new announcements of policy, and I would be the first to object if the Government started to do that. Will the Secretary of State confirm that once the policy has been decided upon, she will come to the House and report on it?

Justine Greening: I think that was a very good choice, Mr Speaker, and yes I can assure my hon. Friend that I will come to make a statement.

Mr Hollobone: I have to tell the Secretary of State that in Kettering, where five of the six secondary schools are already academies and we have one of the fastest

housebuilding rates in the country, and where recent exam success was very encouraging, the debate is not about whether we bring back grammar schools or not; it is about having more school places. Will she confirm her support for the Conservative manifesto commitment that all good schools, whether maintained, academies, free or grammar, be allowed to expand?

Justine Greening: Yes, absolutely. Our desire is to make sure that it does not matter what kind of school a good school is, but that it has the chance to create the additional good places that our country needs. For areas that do not have any good schools, we need to ensure we have a school system that is freed up enough so that schools can be set up there that really do improve prospects for children, or that we network those schools with other good schools nearby that are delivering. I have to say, however, that there are some parts of our country where that has proved challenging, which is why we need to leave no stone unturned.

Tom Pursglove: Does my hon. Friend agree that not only do different things work in different areas, but it is essential that we have a mixture of routes by which our young people can go on to succeed? Surely it is only right that a new Government are reviewing exactly where we are and looking at how best we can enhance what matters most, which is opportunity.

Justine Greening: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have 1.4 million more children in good or outstanding schools. We have done that in a variety of ways in terms of what children are learning in the class, but also in how we are getting schools to work together more collaboratively, but we now need to ask how we can take that to the next level. Critically, for the 1 million-plus children who still are not reaching the attainment levels we want and are living in parts of the country where they do not have a chance to get to a good school, we have to make sure that we change the terms of trade in terms of their educational opportunities.

Business of the House

11.34 am

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House give us the business for next week?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Lidington): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 12 SEPTEMBER—Remaining stages of the Wales Bill.

TUESDAY 13 SEPTEMBER—Second Reading of the Digital Economy Bill.

WEDNESDAY 14 SEPTEMBER—Motions to approve statutory instruments relating to welfare reform in Northern Ireland and to pensions, followed by Opposition day (un-allotted half day). There will be a debate on NHS sustainability and transformation plans on an Opposition motion.

THURSDAY 15 SEPTEMBER—Debate on a motion relating to domestic abuse victims in family law courts, followed by debate on a motion relating to quantitative easing. The subjects for these debates were determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 16 SEPTEMBER—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 10 October will include:

MONDAY 10 OCTOBER—Second Reading of the Neighbourhood Planning Bill.

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall for 15 September and 13 October will be as follows:

THURSDAY 15 SEPTEMBER—Debate on sixth report of the Justice Committee of Session 2015-16 on prison safety. This subject was determined by the Liaison Committee.

THURSDAY 13 OCTOBER—General debate on the tobacco control strategy. This subject was determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

I am sure that all right hon. and hon. Members of all parties represented in the House will want to wish the GB Paralympic team success on this, the first day of competition. Speaking personally, as the Member of Parliament who represents Stoke Mandeville, I think that everyone in the United Kingdom can take some considerable pride in the fact that it was in this country, due to the genius and drive of Ludwig Guttmann, that we saw the creation of the disability sport movement, which has grown into the worldwide Paralympic movement whose achievements we shall celebrate over the next two weeks.

Paul Flynn: We thank the Leader of the House for his answers. We are all basking in the reflected glory of the brilliant successes of our Olympians, and we too acknowledge the pioneering work in this country on the introduction of the concept of the Paralympic games. We all wish our Paralympians well. If there is a minor quibble, it is that this is an odd moment, when we are celebrating our sporting success, to diminish the time available for Culture, Media and Sport questions. The Opposition have reluctantly gone along with that decision, but we see it as a temporary measure. We certainly do not see any of those areas as minor in any way, and we

look forward to the restoration of the full time that was previously available for those questions.

Next week's Welsh debate will illustrate the degraded system of our democracy and the way in which it is heading into further distress. The Wales Bill will not guarantee a compensatory increase in the number of Members of the Welsh Assembly, although their work load has trebled. Wales will lose 11 of its 40 MPs as well as the four MEPs who represent Wales. There is great turmoil in our democratic system as the disgrace of buying places in the House of Lords continues. The press have rightly condemned the decisions taken by the previous Prime Minister to award places in the House of Lords, which is already bloated and trying to cope with 300 extra Members that it does not need, in order to placate the interests of lobbyists, cronies and party donors. Instead of piecemeal reform of only one defect in our democracy that will please and help only the Tories and disfranchise 2 million voters, we should get together and realise how degraded is our democracy and reach an all-party agreement on an all-embracing reform that will consider all the abuses in order to create a fair system that is good value for our electors and one that can win back international respect for the quality of our democracy.

The decision to halt the contract for Hinkley Point C was bold and brave. There is no crisis of security; the system being introduced is out of date and has never worked anywhere in the world due to endless construction delays—multi-billion cost overruns have happened in other countries. We must also reconsider the striking of an atrocious deal that will saddle electricity users with the world's highest electricity prices for the next 35 years. Will the Leader of the House give us a debate before any final decision on Hinkley is taken, so that we can consider all these aspects in this House before we blunder into what could be a gigantic financial and technological disaster?

Finally, the Leader of the House had a distinguished record as a Minister for European affairs, so why are we retreating from our role of providing the gold standard for human rights in the world—certainly throughout Europe? By insisting on a minor matter of our own traditional practices, we are inviting other countries—oppressive regimes—to go back to their traditions of abusing their citizens and degrading human rights. If we are no longer the trailblazers and do not provide the gold standard, others will slip backwards. Is that not a retrograde step? We should consider continuing to be a full part of the European Court of Human Rights and following all the European traditions of human rights, in which we have led for many years.

Mr Lidington: On the rota for oral questions, the usual channels will review it depending on how the new arrangements work out in practice.

Turning to the hon. Gentleman's question about human rights, I must say that there is absolutely no retreat on the Government's part from the high human rights standards that we set for ourselves in this country, and which we follow through in the promotion of our foreign policy objectives. The human rights of the United Kingdom were well developed, established and had a fine reputation before the enactment of the Human Rights Act 1998. There is a long-standing issue over decisions relating to the application of article 8 of the

[Mr Lidington]

European convention on human rights in particular extradition cases, so we are looking at how we might remedy some of those problems. However, the Prime Minister and the entire Government are absolutely clear that we stand by the human rights embodied in the European convention, which after all was very much the product of work by United Kingdom jurists and politicians at the time.

On Hinkley, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said yesterday, we intend to take a decision very soon. In framing an energy strategy, we always have in mind the need to deliver on our climate change objectives and on ensuring security of energy supply, at reasonable cost, to both domestic consumers and British industry, so that British industry can be competitive in some quite fierce global markets.

I suspect that on the House of Lords the hon. Gentleman and I voted the same way, when those things were debated in a previous Parliament, in respect of a wholly or a partially elected upper House, but the truth was that there was no consensus, nor anything approaching it, in the House of Commons, within parties or across them, as to how that issue should be addressed. So it is not likely to be fruitful to try to pursue House of Lords reform as an early priority.

I was sorry about the disparaging tone that the hon. Gentleman adopted towards the Wales Bill, because this Government's record in Wales has been about delivering the increased devolution that the Welsh people, the Welsh Assembly and political parties, for the most part, in Wales have been saying they wanted to see. I was not shocked, but I was disheartened by the critical remark he threw in about the approach of the parliamentary Boundary Commission and the framework within which it is operating. One of my treats since my appointment has been to dip into his autobiography, and I found on pages 57 and 58 of his memoirs that he lauded the achievements and record of the Chartists. He spelled out that one of the Chartists' key objectives was that we should have constituencies with equal numbers of electors in each constituency. The framework under which the Boundary Commission is operating will deliver one of the charter objectives, which he so strongly supported, so I should have thought he would be cheering us on, not criticising us.

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority is consulting on some remarkable changes—at least they are proposed changes. It is presenting itself before various Committees and will have two sessions before the Administration Committee, in which I have some interest. Will he agree to a debate in the House that might give IPSA the opportunity to get a better understanding of what it is like to be an MP and how it can assist, rather than hinder?

Mr Lidington: It is an important principle that IPSA is statutorily independent, but my hon. Friend is right in saying that any decisions about the salaries, pensions and expenses of Members of Parliament ought to be informed by a proper understanding of what the responsibilities of being an MP involve and of the

multifarious ways in which different Members, because of the nature of their constituencies, go about doing the job. That information is important. On a debate, I suggest that the proper course would be for the Backbench Business Committee to consider this, if a large number of Members feel that a debate of that kind is needed.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I, too, thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business for next week and join him in wishing the very best to our Paralympians as they start their business of, we hope, winning a new clutch of gold medals for this country.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister announced that there would be no “running commentary” on the Brexit negotiations, when refusing to say whether she was in favour on the simple question of whether we should be in a single market or not. That sounded to me—it might just be me—that this House will simply be expected to accept whatever this Government concoct in this Brexit deal, as soon as they get round to deciding what that is going to be in the first place. The Leader of the House is Parliament's champion; he has an obligation and a duty to represent this House. Will he confirm to us today that this House will be kept bang up to date on every detail of these negotiations on the single biggest issue in our public life today?

We already know that this Government have no intention of bringing the trigger for article 50 to this House—God knows where that leaves their whole concept of parliamentary sovereignty. We have also learned, second hand, that there will be no Australian points-based system. That is the UK Independence party's favoured immigration system, yet it is too liberal for the Tories. Instead, they are going to have some sort of great wall of Calais constructed. I say to the Leader of the House: please let us have no more meaningless waffle from the Secretary of State for splendid isolation and no more keeping this House and the public in the dark about what this Government propose on Brexit.

This morning, it was announced that billions of pounds will be spent on refurbishing this House. I am sure that the Leader of the House meant to announce that we were going to have a full statement on that and a proper debate in Government time on the proposals, particularly as we have learned that this project could cost up to £4.3 billion of public money. I am sure that all our constituents would want to know whether that is a good use of public money.

Lastly, let me go back to the constituency issue in the House of Lords that the shadow Leader of the House so deftly raised. The Government were going to make an announcement on their latest plans to gerrymander constituency boundaries. They do not really need to do it any more, as the plans were designed to stymie the Labour party, which does not need to be stymied any further. I know that the plans give the Conservative party a lead of 30 seats, but that is not necessary any more. When we have that debate, can it be for all of Parliament, because we have to take into account what is going on in that absurd House down the corridor? It cannot possibly be right that we are increasing the number of unelected Lords while at the same time decreasing the number of elected Members. Can we have that debate and that statement?

Mr Lidington: Yes, Parliament will be kept fully informed at the appropriate times about the progress of the negotiations, although I think even the hon. Gentleman will understand that if there is an ongoing negotiation, it would be foolish of any Government of any political party to go into minute detail about how those negotiations were progressing, because that would disadvantage this country in the progress of those negotiations. The Government will indeed report back at regular intervals, and Ministers will additionally be available to answer those oral and written questions. It is also open to Members to make an application to Mr Speaker for urgent questions and debates if they feel that the case is strong.

I just say to the hon. Gentleman that he should look at the track record this week. On the first day back, we had my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union answer questions about this matter for about two hours. Yesterday, in giving a statement about the G20 summit, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister spent a lot of her time responding to Members' questions about the impact on the United Kingdom's international position of the decision to leave the European Union. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman can claim to have been short-changed this week.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the report on the restoration and renewal project that is to be published at midday today by the Joint Committee. It is a report which, like any Select Committee report, has been developed by the Members concerned. The Government have not had any input into it, nor have we had any prior copies of the report sent to us so that we could make comments before the Committee made its announcements today. Parliament will have an opportunity to debate the matter before any decisions are taken. Decisions about the future of the Palace will be a matter for this House and for the House of Lords.

Finally on the boundary changes, I just say to the hon. Gentleman that the principle involved here is equality of weight of votes. It really would be an affront to democracy if we went into an election in 2020 on the basis of electoral rolls that were based on a census that was nearly two decades old by that point and where we had some Members representing 100,000 electors and others representing significantly fewer than half that total.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I note that the Leader of the House has announced the Second Reading of the Neighbourhood Planning Bill, and wonder whether there is enough time in that to debate the substantial and innovative recommendations of the local plans expert group to simplify the whole process, including neighbourhood planning, or whether he will recommend a second debate.

Mr Lidington: I think there will be opportunity during proceedings on the Bill to have the kind of debate that my hon. Friend wants, but should he be dissatisfied, other opportunities will be available.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): On behalf of the Backbench Business Committee, I welcome the opening of a new and positive dialogue with the Leader of the House about the allocation of parliamentary business

to Backbench debates. I know that he would welcome advance notice of any time-sensitive subject applications. We had such an application to the Committee on Tuesday for the week beginning 10 October from the hon. Members for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) and for Colchester (Will Quince), with support from across the House. The week beginning 10 October is baby loss week and they sought a debate about baby loss, infant mortality in the first year of life and still birth, which I think would gain great support across the House. If we could find a slot during that week, we would be very appreciative.

Mr Lidington: The hon. Gentleman makes a powerful and persuasive point. I cannot make a promise today, but I will do my best to accommodate his request.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Wellingborough prison is a reserve prison so it is not operating at the moment. It is at the end of a large residential area, and three days ago 10 Traveller families dumped themselves on the prison car park. The Ministry of Justice has tried its best to move them. The situation has become unacceptable to my constituents, especially those living nearby. May we have a statement next week on how the Government deal with Travellers who are on Crown property?

Mr Lidington: Quite a number of Members from all parties have had this problem where there has been an unauthorised encampment on privately or publicly owned land and local residents have become distressed about it. I am sure that the appropriate Minister will want to talk to my hon. Friend about this particular case, but he might want to consider applying to Mr Speaker for an Adjournment debate so that he can air his views about the local situation more fully and secure a detailed response from the Minister concerned.

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): The Campaign for Better Transport has this week set out its concerns that the Government's Bus Services Bill will have a huge impact on rural bus services. I regularly receive complaints from constituents about the deterioration in their bus services, especially in the rural areas around Silloth and the Solway plain. Will the Leader of the House ensure that when the Bill comes for debate there will be proper time to discuss the impact on rural bus services?

Mr Lidington: I am sure there will be ample time to have those discussions, which will of course be relevant to Members across the House who have rural constituencies. There are some real challenges; many rural bus services provide a vital lifeline to what is often a minority of people due to the spread of car ownership. So the customer base shrinks, but those services are still important. I hope that the debate will encompass other things, such as the use of new technology to help provide community transport services, which in my constituency and others are providing a useful additional form of support to people living in villages.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): May we have a debate on paediatric training in the NHS in England? In my constituency the children's emergency centre at County hospital has been temporarily closed due to a lack of

[Jeremy Lefroy]

sufficient trained staff, and I understand that I am not the only Member of Parliament who has this problem in their constituency.

Mr Lidington: I understand, particularly given the history of hospital services in Staffordshire, why my hon. Friend is so concerned. He has been a strong champion of patients in his constituency. I was sorry to hear what had happened. The local health authorities have obviously taken the decision on the grounds of patient safety, and that clearly must come first, but I hope that those local problems can be resolved as rapidly as possible. The Government are certainly determined to continue to ensure the highest possible paediatric training standards.

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): May I take the opportunity to congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his appointment? In January, the Government announced welcome proposals for a partnership between the Department for Transport and Transport for London to specify and manage metro services in London when individual franchises lapse. May we have a debate on how those proposals have developed in the months since and how the Government intend to take them forward in the months ahead?

Mr Lidington: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his welcome to me. I will draw his remarks to the attention of both the Minister for London and the appropriate Minister in the Department for Transport, and I will ask one of them to make contact with him about the matter.

Chris White (Warwick and Leamington) (Con): I am delighted that the importance of industrial strategy has now been formally recognised, not least with its inclusion in the title of a Government Department. May we have a debate on its terms of reference and its aims and objectives?

Mr Lidington: It sounds to me as though that would be an excellent idea for my hon. Friend to propose to the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns) as Chair of the Backbench Business Committee. I am sure my ministerial colleagues would welcome it if such a debate were secured, because the industrial strategy will be important for the future prosperity of this country. It is important that we have a strategy that works for all sectors of industry, particularly for the new industries that will provide the growth and opportunity for this nation in the future, and that it is a strategy that works for all parts of the United Kingdom.

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): Every single day in my constituency, I have low-income workers getting in touch after their tax credit support, wrongly and without warning, is stopped by Concentrix, an American company contracted by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and paid on a payment-by-results model—in short, commission. This causes immense stress and hardship to households. At this point, 12% of all inquiries to my office are about this issue. Will the Leader of the House commit to holding an urgent debate on this matter before more people experience this harsh and brutal situation?

Mr Lidington: Although decisions about tax credits are not always what applicants want, every constituency MP would agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is very important that decisions are taken as promptly as possible and that they are accurate. He is right to say that people who are on low incomes to start with are completely thrown if an application that is justified is rejected or there is an attempt unjustifiably to claw back money after the event. I will let the relevant Treasury Minister know about the point. The hon. Gentleman may want to seek an Adjournment debate on it, but I hope very much that the problems that he has described will be resolved by HMRC and its contractors as rapidly as possible because constituents deserve a better service than that.

Alistair Burt (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): To assist my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House in the consideration of the Brexit process, I have a little idea to run past him. Can he enlighten us about the state of the discussions on the scrutiny by Select Committees of the Brexit process? My sense is that the convention is very clear: each Department should have a Select Committee. We have two new Departments; there should be two new Select Committees. Bearing in mind the complexity of the issue, the need for bandwidth and the need for all sorts of other committees to be involved as well, it would help if we got going on those Select Committees as soon as possible. Can he help, as I am sure the House wants to see such scrutiny?

Mr Lidington: I will do my utmost to help. These matters are the subject of continuing discussions between the usual channels. In anything relating to the establishment of Select Committees, if it is humanly possible to have cross-party agreement, it is better that we should achieve that.

Steven Paterson (Stirling) (SNP): Trossachs Mobility is a new and innovative charity that has been established in my constituency to offer opportunities to people who are wheelchair users to get out and about in the outdoors—the spectacular terrain, woodland and hills in the Trossachs. May we have a debate to explore how we can promote such excellent initiatives across the country?

Mr Lidington: That is an excellent subject for the hon. Gentleman to draw to the attention of Department for Work and Pensions Ministers at the next Question Time, or for him to seek an Adjournment debate on, because if that scheme is working well in his constituency, the word should be spread and others should look to see whether that is an example that they could copy.

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): The next time the House meets with meaningful time to hold debates will be in October. The Government have given a lot of money to flood defences around the United Kingdom, with another £12.5 million today for the north. Could we have time to have a debate in this Chamber, or a statement from the Government, about the future of flooding and flood defences? Flooding—not just sea flooding, but flash flooding internally—affects all our nation, and it has to continue to be debated in this Chamber.

Mr Lidington: My hon. Friend raises an important point. I well recall that his constituency was very badly affected by floods a couple of years ago, and he was the most fearless and outspoken champion of his constituents at that time. A report was, coincidentally, published earlier today by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on flooding and the Government's 25-year plan for flood resilience. I would urge my hon. Friend and all Members who take an interest in these matters to study that report. It has a number of important conclusions, but also proposals on how the Government will take these matters forward into the future. I take note of his request for a debate; I clearly cannot promise one at the moment, but I understand the importance of the subject.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): On 19 August, a faulty Indesit tumble-dryer caused a major fire at Shepherd's Court, a block of over 100 flats overlooking Shepherd's Bush green. Some 26 families were forced to move out, and the homes and possessions of some of them were totally destroyed. It is a miracle there were no deaths or serious injuries. There are millions of these faulty products out there; they are not being recalled by the manufacturers. May we have a statement from the Government on how manufacturers can be made to recall and replace faulty white goods, as demanded by the London fire brigade's "Total Recalls" campaign?

Mr Lidington: There is a question mark in my mind about the legal position if goods have indeed been sold that are a demonstrable threat to the safety of those customers. I would hope that, if the situation is indeed as the hon. Gentleman has described, the manufacturer would take note of his remarks and act accordingly. I shall ask the relevant Minister to look at the case that he has described. If he would like to write to me with the details, I will happily pass them on to the relevant Department, and let us see whether we can get the appropriate action.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): My right hon. Friend was the longest-serving Europe Minister, and I have a familiar question for him—about Cyprus. May we have a statement, following the new Minister's visit to Cyprus this week, which coincides with the three meetings taking place this week between the Cypriot leaders and with President Anastasiades saying the "end of the road" has been reached and it is time to reunite Cyprus?

Mr Lidington: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe and the Americas would be delighted to talk to my hon. Friend about his recent visit to the island. I think all of us across the Floor of the House want to see the day when Cyprus can be reunited and the Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities brought together again. That would be a really good day for the United Kingdom. I think there will be an opportunity to raise this at the next Foreign Office questions, but a conversation between my hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend the Minister is probably the best immediate way forward.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): Yesterday, the BBC reported that Katrina Percy, the ex-chief executive of the Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust, which is being investigated because of the lack of investigation

into unexplained deaths at the trust, had resigned from her post but was then shunted into a £240,000-a-year job, which was created just for her, with no other candidates. May we have an urgent debate in Government time on this very worrying decision?

Mr Lidington: My understanding is that this appointment was wholly within the jurisdiction of the local board of the relevant NHS trust, and it is a decision that that board therefore needs to explain and for which it is accountable.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): Health provision is hugely important to Solihull, as to all other constituencies, with an ageing population and particular acute health needs. Given that, may we have a debate in Government time about the NHS in the west midlands, and particularly the mergers of clinical commissioning groups and NHS trusts that are serving my constituency?

Mr Lidington: My hon. Friend raises an important point. He is already, in his first year in the House, building a reputation as somebody who really does stand up for good health services and the interests of patients in the west midlands. When we have Health questions on Tuesday 11 October, he will have an opportunity to make some of these points to the ministerial team.

Graham Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): Newham Council's application under the Sustainable Communities Act 2007 to control fixed odds betting terminals, alongside 92 other councils representing 42% of the population of England and Wales, expired on 14 July. The Act says that the Government have to compromise with the Local Government Association in these negotiations, but no debates have taken place. When will we get a statement on this important issue for a huge proportion of the country?

Mr Lidington: I will ask the responsible Minister to write to the hon. Gentleman about that.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for the Attorney General to make a statement about appealing against unduly lenient sentences? A number of people, including some of my constituents who have contacted me about this, felt that the sentence given to Anjem Choudary was derisory, given the serious level of the offences that he had committed. Today, we found out in the newspapers that the Attorney General is unable to appeal against an unduly lenient sentence for that crime. We promised in our manifesto to extend the number of crimes that could be appealed with regard to unduly lenient sentences, so will the Attorney General come to the House and explain when we are going to crack on with it?

Mr Lidington: As my hon. Friend points out, the Government were elected on a manifesto that pledged us to extend the list of crimes that were covered by the right of the Attorney General to refer an excessively lenient sentence to the Court of Appeal. Work on that is ongoing. As soon as it is completed, either the Attorney General or the relevant Justice Minister will come forward with a statement to the House.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): The Petitions Committee has already agreed, after an evidence session, that the petition on driven grouse shooting will have a parliamentary debate. There is also a petition on the badger cull that has about 40,000 signatures and will, I am sure, reach the 100,000 required. Given that when we had a debate on the badger cull in Westminster Hall this week, over 40 MPs were in attendance and lots of people wanted to watch the debate but were unable to fit into the Public Gallery, can we ensure that both those debates are held in the main Chamber, so that people can come along and watch and that there is sufficient room and time for MPs to take part?

Mr Lidington: There is always a pressure that Government business managers, and the Chair and members of the Backbench Business Committee, have to wrestle with about which matters are debated in Westminster Hall and which are debated here in the Chamber. The hon. Lady will have an additional opportunity to raise this on Thursday 13 October when Ministers from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will be answering questions here.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): I know that the Leader of the House is very aware of the anxiety caused in Corby by the ongoing discussions about the future of the steel industry. May we have a statement next week from Ministers to update my constituents on exactly where we are with those discussions between the industry, the Department and the unions?

Mr Lidington: I will make sure that the Business Secretary and the International Trade Secretary are aware of my hon. Friend's concerns. I certainly understand the importance of the steel issue for his constituency. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said during her statement on the G20 yesterday that she had raised the question of over-production on global markets in the plenary session of the G20 leaders while she had been in China and that she hoped that that would lead to the international powers considering a way forward to manage this.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Leader of the House is very popular in my constituency, and my constituents have asked me to ask him this question. Whether they voted for Brexit or voted to remain, they want to know why, if this is a sovereign Parliament, after all the negotiations have taken place and they can see the deal, Parliament cannot have a vote. Because they love him so much, they would also like a debate on the closure of the accident and emergency department in Huddersfield. In addition, with the landfill tax going up to £85 across West Yorkshire, unscrupulous waste contractors are setting fire to waste, to save money. May we have debates on all those subjects?

Mr Lidington: On waste management, the hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity to raise that at DEFRA questions on 13 October. On his local health issue, there are questions to Health Ministers on Tuesday 11 October. As somebody who, as the House knows, was strongly on the remain side of the campaign, I have to say that, if we are democrats, we must, however reluctantly, accept the result. Had the result been 52-48 the other way round, I would have been the first to say

to my colleagues supporting the leave campaign that it was time to fold their tents. We simply have to respect the view that the electors have taken.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): As I am sure the whole House will be aware, this weekend the world black pudding throwing championships are taking place in Ramsbottom in my constituency. They date back to the Wars of the Roses. May we have a statement on what the Government will be doing to promote this prestigious and historic event in future?

Mr Lidington: For a moment, I thought that my hon. Friend was going to propose this as an experimental sport for the Tokyo Olympics in four years' time. I envy him his round of constituency engagements. He has made his point very forcefully, as usual. I hope that he gets the chance to sample the black puddings before they are thrown rather than afterwards.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): While giving evidence to the Procedure Committee, on which I serve, the Leader of the House's predecessor offered to visit a local pub in my constituency to discuss the intricacies of English votes for English laws with my constituents. In the event, he did not do so—much to the great disappointment of my constituents. Will the new Leader of the House use his good offices to visit my constituency to discuss English votes for English laws with my constituents in his place?

Mr Lidington: It is a delight to have such a tempting offer from the hon. Lady. Of course, her constituency, like many others in Scotland, contains vibrant communities and some absolutely wonderful landscapes. While I would hope to be able to visit North Ayrshire and Arran at some stage in the future, I cannot give any firm diary commitment at the moment.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement that there will be a debate in Westminster Hall on the Government's tobacco control programme. The issue at hand is that the control programme that was running for five years has expired, and we were promised a replacement in the summer of 2016. I realise that the summer can stretch into the autumn, but we still do not have the new programme published. The Government have met the targets that they set themselves under the five-year programme. Will my right hon. Friend make sure that the Minister announces the date for publication during the debate and that it is also announced in this place?

Mr Lidington: I will make sure that the Minister is aware of that. My hon. Friend will have an opportunity not just to take part in the Back-Bench business debate in Westminster Hall but to raise this in Health questions on Tuesday 11 October.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): When will Members know when they can elect the Chairs of the Select Committees?

Mr Lidington: As soon as possible, I hope. Obviously, after this week, we have to provide for an additional Select Committee Chair election, but I hope that the process is not delayed for any longer than is absolutely necessary.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Will the Leader of the House look again at the time allocated for questions to the new Department for International Trade? I do not think that he was in his place this morning when we had half an hour for questions to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and then half an hour for questions to the new International Trade Department. Almost 50 oral and substantive questions were listed on the Order Paper for a one-hour period, whereas a normal one-hour slot would have only about 35. Despite his huge experience, the Speaker had to make heroic efforts to try to squeeze everybody in, and even then the session overran by 10 minutes. Surely, we can do better than this, given the importance of international trade post-Brexit.

Mr Lidington: I personally will look at what experience tells us of the new roster for oral questions, and if the House needs to be asked to review it again, then obviously we will do that.

Mr Speaker: I think that will be very welcome in the House. The danger otherwise is that there is a recipe for disappointment. There is always unsatisfied demand, but it was very striking this morning. There were huge numbers and a lot were disappointed.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): Further to the question from the hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law), I have also been contacted over the summer by hundreds of single women who have been affected by the behaviour of Concentrix. Yesterday I received a written parliamentary answer saying that the contractor had breached its performance standards on 120 occasions over the past 11 months. May we have an urgent debate about the behaviour and performance of this contractor, so that it cannot continue for another day to punish individuals, particularly single women?

Mr Lidington: Clearly, the state of affairs and the number of contract breaches described by the hon. Lady are completely unacceptable. She might want to write to the Financial Secretary, who is probably the appropriate Treasury Minister, to ensure that her constituents' concerns are being represented directly to those Ministers dealing directly with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, but it seems to me that it is the responsibility first of the HMRC senior management to manage the contract effectively and of the contractor to deliver a decent service to the hon. Lady's constituents and everybody else's.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): May I associate myself with the remarks of the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes)? The decision by Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust was greeted with a fit of apoplexy in my constituency in the New Forest.

May we have a debate on the scandalous, enduring and rigged duopoly of the wholesale newspaper distribution market and the disastrous consequences it has for independent retailers?

Mr Lidington: My right hon. Friend is obviously returning with relish and energy to his role as a Back-Bench champion, particularly for small retailers in his constituency.

I am sure he knows the ropes well enough to know that an Adjournment debate might be the opportunity to air those concerns further.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I was recently contacted by a constituent of mine, Mrs Jones, when she discovered that her E.ON energy account had a standing charge of 14p per day higher than that of other constituents. E.ON tells me that it is entitled to charge a higher rate to those who do not pay their accounts by direct debit, but that amounts to more than £50 a year for people who do not have bank accounts, who are often some of the poorest people in society. May we have a debate about ending that very unfair and penalising practice?

Mr Lidington: Again, I think that the way forward would be for the hon. Gentleman to see if he can catch Mr Speaker's eye during Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy questions on Tuesday 13 September, when he can put those points to Energy Ministers.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): May I strongly endorse what the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) and my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) said about the extraordinary decision of Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust to create a post with a salary greater than that of the Prime Minister to accommodate someone whose position as chief executive had become untenable?

May I ask for a ministerial statement on the plight of Afghan and other former interpreters for British armed forces in hostile environments who have applied for but not yet been given asylum in this country? That is not only a debt of honour, but necessary for the future functioning of British troops in hostile environments where we are greatly dependent on indigenous interpreters.

Mr Lidington: My right hon. Friend raises an important point. Clearly it is a very important principle that all asylum decisions are taken on the merits of each particular case. That is true of applications from former interpreters as well as those from everybody else. It is also the case, however, that both the Ministry of Defence and the Home Office continue to review the overall situation in order to ensure that we are providing protection to people who have helped to protect us. My right hon. Friend will, I think, be pleased to know that there will be Defence questions next Monday 12 September, and he may wish to raise the issue with Defence Ministers then.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): May we have a statement on reports that emerged over the summer that the Government Equality Office has awarded G4S the contract to deliver the equality advisory support service helpline formerly provided by the Equality and Human Rights Commission? Hon. Members have long expressed concerns about the performance of G4S in relation to public contracts. The matter is urgent. I understand that the contract is due to take effect from 1 October, so can the Leader of the House arrange for a statement to be made to the House on the subject next week?

Mr Lidington: I cannot promise an oral statement, but I will draw the hon. Lady's concern to the attention of the relevant Minister dealing with the Government Equality Office.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Parliamentary scrutiny of Sports Direct has helped employees get a better deal from a rogue employer. May we have a debate on how a good increase in the minimum wage leads to some employers cutting back terms and conditions for their staff, resulting in a net reduction in pay? That cannot be right.

Mr Lidington: It is certainly not right, but I would have hoped that the hon. Gentleman might at least have acknowledged that in setting the first ever national living wage, it is this Government who have lifted, very considerably, the minimum levels of pay that low-paid employees around the country can now expect.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): The right hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) asked the Leader of the House what progress has been made in setting up Select Committees to scrutinise the new Departments for Exiting the European Union and for International Trade. He said that discussions are ongoing, but when we get back here on 10 October it will be more than three and a half months since the referendum. We have had very little detail this week of what the Government propose to do, and I—like lots of other hon. Members, I am sure—am being inundated with requests from businesses and individuals in my constituency, asking what the Government are going to do in the light of the vote. Can the Leader of the House guarantee that, when we return on 10 October, those Select Committees will be in a position to get up and running and to scrutinise those Departments to try to get the answers that we have not had this week?

Mr Lidington: I very much want that to be the position, and I hope that the ongoing discussions through the usual channels have a successful outcome soon.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): May we have a debate on the performance of Southeastern trains? The Government have put £20 million into trying to sort out the mess of Southern trains, but my constituents are suffering equally due to the poor performance of a company that is behaving like it has one foot out of the door because it can see the prospect of Transport for London taking over the franchise. We cannot continue in this way. The Government are responsible for the contract, so let us have a debate about it in Government time.

Mr Lidington: There will be Transport questions next Thursday 15 September, so the hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity to raise the matter directly with Transport Ministers then.

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): My constituent, Mr Adamson of Bo'ness, is, like other sufferers of Dupuytren's contracture, waiting for a decision from the Department for Work and Pensions. In repeated parliamentary written answers, we are fobbed off with promises of a decision being reached in due course or shortly. On 12 January, I was advised that "a decision whether or not to add it to the list of prescribed diseases will be made early this year".

As we are still waiting, may we have a ministerial statement to explain the delay and bring the deliberations to a conclusion?

Mr Lidington: I will certainly draw that matter to the attention of DWP Ministers, because clearly, whatever the decision will be, the sooner that people know the outcome, the better.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): The Leader of the House and I have something in common, in that we were both once contestants on "University Challenge". If we were able to have a debate on enhancing democracy, how would he answer this starter for 10? Under what school of political logic do we enhance democracy by cutting the number of elected politicians and increasing the number of unelected peers?

Mr Lidington: As I said to the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn), I wish that there had been consensus on reform of the House of Lords in the previous Parliament, but that consensus was absent, and we are where we are. I doubt that opinion across the House of Commons has changed all that much since that abortive attempt at reform a few years ago.

The answer to the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) is that he really cannot evade the central point that we are now operating on electoral registers based on a census taken in 2001. They are very out of date, given the population changes that have taken place since then. It is also plainly wrong to continue with a situation in which constituency electorates are of such disparate sizes. That in practice means that there is gross inequality between the weight of votes of individual electors in different seats.

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): In June this year, my constituent John "Richie" Anderson, a miner for 35 years, was killed by a gas blowout at Boulby potash mine. In August, a contract worker was electrocuted with 11 MW while doing surface work at the same mine. Back in April, 11 miners escaped with their lives after the oxygen ran out in a safety zone because of an underground fire. The Health and Safety Executive has investigated the mine on a number of occasions in the past 12 months. Some of those 11 miners have had to return to work with clear signs of post-traumatic stress disorder because the sick pay of just over £80 a week is not enough to cover the cost of feeding a wife and children. Can we have a debate about health and safety law and the implications of workers having to return to work because sick pay is not adequate, when companies have accepted liability for the danger that they have placed their workers in?

Mr Lidington: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for bringing that serious matter to the House. I express my sympathy with his constituents who have gone through this horrific experience, and with their families. The matter that he raises crosses the border between the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Department for Work and Pensions, in respect of benefits and sickness pay arrangements. I will draw this question to the attention of Ministers in both Departments. He might also like to raise it at Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy questions, when it comes

up, or seek an Adjournment debate so that there can be a consolidated ministerial response from across Government to address his concerns.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): Around three people a day die because of a shortage of transplantable organs. Earlier this week, brave Renfrewshire mum Corinne Hutton, a quadruple amputee, posed nude with her body painted with organs that are deemed to be transplantable. Does the Leader of the House agree that Corinne, whom I recently witnessed becoming only the fourth person to be awarded the freedom of Renfrewshire, is an inspiring woman whose lead we should follow by debating organ donation?

Mr Lidington: The hon. Gentleman has used today's opportunity well to highlight his support for organ donation. I, too, know constituents who have been given not only a longer life, but a life of unexpectedly improved quality because of a successful organ transplant. I am sure that he can find many ways in which to highlight the matter during parliamentary proceedings.

Points of Order

12.33 pm

Mr Charles Walker (Broxbourne) (Con) *rose*—

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Order. I would prefer to save the hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) as a specialist delicacy of the House. We will come to him in due course.

Mr Charles Walker: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Can you advise me how best I can bring my concerns to the attention of the House in relation to the boundary review and Lords reform? It seems perverse to reduce the number of elected representatives in this place while the Lords continues to gorge itself on new arrivals. I believe in an appointed upper House, but not at the current price and not at the expense of this elected, and therefore accountable, Chamber. We in this place must guard against bringing this country's democratic settlement into disrepute.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Is it further to that? Is it on that very theme?

Philip Davies: It is further to that point of order.

Mr Speaker: In that case, let us hear from the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), and then I will respond to both.

Philip Davies: I absolutely endorse everything that my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker) has just said. In addition to that, we also have the situation whereby the Government propose to reduce the number of MPs by 50 but not to reduce the number of Ministers by an equal proportion, thereby giving the Government more control over the House of Commons. That is clearly an outrage, and surely it is something that needs to be considered in conjunction with the points raised by my hon. Friend.

Mr Speaker: I am very grateful to both hon. Members for raising their points of order. Let me seek to deal, in so far as they require to be dealt with, with each in turn. First, in relation to the point of order from the hon. Member for Broxbourne, who is, as we all know, the illustrious Chair of the Procedure Committee of the House, I remind colleagues that the hon. Gentleman asked the Chair by what means he could register his concern. As the hon. Gentleman knows, because he is a perceptive and sagacious fellow, he has found his own salvation. He has made his own point with his own inimitable eloquence, and it is on the record. I know how strongly he feels about it, and I know there are many Members across the House who feel very strongly about it, and these matters will doubtless be further debated.

Secondly, in relation to the hon. Member for Shipley, I note the force of his point about reductions in the number of MPs needing, as he sees it, to be accompanied

[Mr Speaker]

by reductions in the number of Ministers. The hon. Gentleman has got such a long-established good memory for what people have said in the past that I feel sure that, although he did not say it today, he will be well aware that I myself expatiated on this matter on 19 January 2011 in a lecture to the Institute for Government. On that occasion, I made the point that it would be a rum business to reduce the number of MPs but not to cut the number of Ministers. I said it then and was right then, and therefore I am very happy to say it again, five and a half years later, and to be right a second time.

We had better leave it there. I am not sure that either of them was a point of order, but they were jolly good fun.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Yesterday, I was allocated question 12 in Cabinet Office questions, asking:

“What recent progress has been made on the National Flood Resilience Review.”

We did not reach question 12, so I received a written response later that day:

“The National Flood Resilience Review has been assessing how England can be better protected from flooding and extreme rainfall. The review has been working to identify actions needed to strengthen our resilience to flooding.”

That is one of those answers that tells you absolutely nothing. To my surprise, this morning we had a written statement and this very hefty document, the “National Flood Resilience Review” published. The written statement, although it is from the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, is jointly in her name and the name of the Cabinet Office Minister. At the very least, was it not extremely discourteous of them not to flag those things up in the written response yesterday, or does it suggest that the Cabinet Office Minister was not aware that he was about to publish this review?

Mr Speaker: It would be rather disturbing, it has to be said, if a Minister of the Cabinet Office were unaware of the imminent publication in his, or a departmental colleague’s, name of such a report. I find that very hard to credit. It might well be regarded as discourteous; that is, to some extent, a matter of opinion. What I can safely say is that it was, at the very least, unhelpful. There is a general principle that ministerial answers should be as informative as possible, so it was unhelpful. I think I can say—possibly at the risk of irritating a Cabinet Office Minister, which I will have to bear with stoicism and fortitude—that at the very least it was extremely unimaginative of the Minister answering not to consider providing more information or, alternatively, to consider and then to decline. Very unsatisfactory—he really ought to be able to do better than that.

The great thing that we have on our side is that the new Leader of the House—there have been lots of illustrious Leaders of the House—as was flagged up a moment ago, is, of course, I think twice a winner on “University Challenge”, with a gap of, I think, 30 years in between. It used to be said that the former Member for Havant, in the previous Parliament, was “Two Brains”. I leave colleagues to speculate or, indeed, to compute how many brains the Leader of the House has. He is a

very cerebral fellow, and I am sure that he can spawn more imaginative and considerate thinking among his ministerial colleagues.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Oh, very well. I call Kevin Brennan, and we will then come to the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

Kevin Brennan: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. May I point out, in all modesty, that I too have twice been a winner on “University Challenge”?

Mr Speaker: I must admit that I did not know that, but I do now, and I promise not to forget it.

Kerry McCarthy: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I am obliged at this point to say that I was on the first ever season of “Blockbusters”, but all I came away with was a sweatshirt.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Lady has made the best case she can, and I thank her for that.

Crispin Blunt: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. This is pursuant to the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) yesterday. There has been a further development, increasing the seriousness of it, which you acknowledged yesterday. On Monday, *The Guardian* reported the central recommendation of a draft report being put to the Committees on Arms Export Controls. The meeting to consider this was held yesterday in private. On Tuesday, “Newsnight” produced excerpts of the text of the draft report, and that was the excepts subject of the hon. Gentleman’s point of order.

Yesterday, the Committees met and resolved to report the matter to the Liaison Committee. As I understand our procedures, the Liaison Committee will have to consider the matter and decide whether it should be referred to the Privileges Committee, which would then have to decide whether and how to pursue this matter. Subsequently, last night, “Newsnight” reported extracts of the amendments tabled by the right hon. Member for Warley (Mr Spellar) and me, which can only have come from the consolidated list of amendments circulated to members of the Committees on Tuesday.

Separately, Patrick Wintour in *The Guardian* today—this was put online at 00.01—reported the number of amendments we had tabled to the report, a fact which was not reported on “Newsnight”. “Newsnight” chose to contextualise the amendments tabled by the right hon. Gentleman and me in the light of our previous membership of the all-party group on Saudi Arabia, work I did in the middle east 12 years ago and the right hon. Gentleman’s record of supporting employment provided by the British defence industry. “Newsnight” emphasised that none of this was improper,

“but it gives you a sense of where people stand”.

In parallel, members of the Committees received between 1,500 and 2,000 emails on Tuesday and overnight, which appear to have been organised on someone’s behalf by Avaaz, a self-styled global citizens movement, which was aware that the Committees were meeting to consider this issue. The right hon. Gentleman believes

one of them was from a constituent, but my office did not identify any constituents before it called the organisation to invite it to desist.

Mr Speaker, this amounts to a *prima facie* case of a deliberate campaign to influence a Select Committee, relying on in-confidence information provided by a Member of this House or their staff. Conceivably, the information could have come from Committee staff, but I think you would agree that that is highly unlikely. I cannot recall an example of such deliberate and repeated leaking of information in our time in the House.

Will you confirm, Mr Speaker, that it would not be open to the Privileges Committee, if this is referred to it, to call in the police, as this is not a criminal matter, but that it would be able to call on the services of private investigators? They would have the capacity to interrogate the electronic records, including deleted emails, relating to potential sources for this confidential and private consideration by Committees of matters, in this instance, of the greatest seriousness, involving life and death issues and the employment of tens of thousands of our fellow citizens. Will you encourage the Liaison Committee to consider this as a matter of urgency, and confirm your view of the seriousness of this attempt to undermine the work of Select Committees?

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I have participated in only two meetings of the Committees on Arms Export Controls, because three other members of the Defence Committee have been nominated as our regular attenders; I have total confidence in them. May I, however, express my disquiet about something I learned only yesterday? The draft report, which is very one-sided, was produced without any heads of report discussion prior to the drafting of the report. That means there was no opportunity for members of the Committees who dissented from the thrust of the report to raise their objections and try to reach consensus before a draft report was produced and then leaked in a very sensational way. I must say, as someone who has been at one remove from the operation of the Committees, that something went terribly wrong with the procedures, because there should have been room for consensus to be built before any such one-sided report was leaked. I say that as someone who is highly critical of Saudi Arabia and in some sympathy with some of the arguments in the draft report.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) and the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) for their points of order.

With respect to what the right hon. Gentleman said, I am intimately conscious that I cannot and should not intervene or overly pronounce on the way in which Select Committees of the House conduct their affairs.

From my own experience as a member of several Select Committees before being elected to the Chair, I can say that it was certainly my normal and satisfied expectation that before draft reports were produced, there would be a period of considerable discussion by the Committee not only about chapter headings, but, more substantively, about the direction of travel that colleagues could anticipate, even in the first draft. In other words, the process would be Member-led, rather than Chair-decreed, still less official-determined. I therefore understand the sense of angst that the right hon. Gentleman has conveyed in a very reasonable, balanced way. I think colleagues would do well to consider what he has said.

More widely, I would say—if colleagues want to come back on this, they will—that the Committees on Arms Export Controls carry out extremely valuable work. To do so, they rely on the co-operation and consensus of the Chairs and members of four Select Committees. I very much hope that this co-operation can be maintained so that the House can benefit from their important work.

The Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee focused very much on the matter of the leak and what might flow from that. Let me just say that it is for the Committees concerned to investigate the cause of the apparent leak to decide whether it constitutes a substantial interference with their work—a matter on which Members not on the Committees may also have a view—and to inform the Liaison Committee, seeking its views in the process. Thereafter, it would be sensible for them to decide—indeed, it will inevitably be decided—whether to make a special report that would stand referred to the Committee of Privileges.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about the use of private investigators. I can only say that I do not know whether that would be effective in this instance, although it is perfectly conceivable that it might be. Probably the best approach for me to take is to say: let the Liaison Committee, which is an established and respected Committee within the House, make a judgment. It is perfectly legitimate for colleagues to make representations to the Liaison Committee about what they think should happen. Rather than for the Speaker to say what the Liaison Committee should do, the Liaison Committee should consider the matter carefully, taking note of these points of order in deciding how to proceed.

This is a very serious matter, indeed. If the Committees of this House are to work effectively, we cannot have a situation in which individual members of a Committee leak information, in advance, to advance a particular point of view or to retard the progress of another. That is wholly against the spirit of the operation of the Select Committees of this House. I thank colleagues for what they have said, and for the spirit in which they have said it.

Backbench Business

Scamming: Vulnerable Individuals

12.49 pm

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House believes that the elderly and vulnerable are a high-risk group from having harm done to their financial, emotional and psychological wellbeing from criminals who target them with scam calls, post and visits; praises the work that trading standards bodies do to combat scams; calls on financial institutions and the communications industry to put in place mechanisms to protect potential victims from scams; further calls on the Government to recognise the threat from scams to victims' ability to live independently; draws attention to the measures proposed by Bournemouth University, the Chartered Trading Standards Institute and National Trading Standards Scams Team on financial harm as useful first steps in tackling such scams; and calls on the Government to make suggestions on further steps to tackle such criminality.

It is difficult to overstate the damage done to our economy and society by fraud and scam artists. Such people prey on some of our most vulnerable citizens and can strike at many points in our lives, whether we are buying a home, hiring a tradesman or investing in our pensions. As a former consumer rights and personal finance journalist, I have seen at first hand the real harm that these fraudsters can do. They not only leave people poorer, but can cause a huge range of health and confidence problems far into the future.

While working for the BBC in 2003, I covered the story of a Southampton pensioner who fell victim to scam artists pretending to represent something called the Canadian lottery. They convinced him to wire £1,600 to Canada as an administration fee to unlock his winnings, which of course never materialised. Instead, there were only escalating demands for more cash, and good money went after bad; indeed, in the end that individual paid out more than £9,000 to those fraudsters. In a particularly cruel twist, I remember he told me that he had been told to wait up with his wife, because someone would call at his house to deliver a cheque for his winnings and a bunch of flowers. The door was never knocked on. When he spoke to the fraudsters again, they laughed down the phone at their own cruelty. It is very easy to form snap judgments about people who fall victim to these sorts of schemes—indeed, the victims often blame themselves, which is one reason why only 5% of cases come to light—when we ourselves have been lucky enough never to fall victim to one.

Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a good case. Does he agree that these crooks are getting ever more sophisticated? Using scanning technology and the ability to take pictures from the internet, they often copy the logos and trademarks of reputable companies, which makes it even harder to detect the scam.

Julian Knight: My right hon. Friend is absolutely correct. There is an ever-rising tide and the methods are becoming more sophisticated. While we are talking about logos, these people use governmental logos—that of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs among others—so that they can pretend to be quasi-governmental. They also use logos that are very similar to governmental logos and those of other institutions. He is quite right to raise that point.

As I say, it is easy for us to rush to snap judgments, and some people do that about what they perceive as their own foolishness. However, the gentleman I was discussing was no fool. He had run his own business for more than 30 years. The scammers were not only persuasive but, as they often do, preyed on his very best instincts, especially the thought of how he could help his children with the winnings.

I thank the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) for co-signing the motion. I also thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have talked to me prior to the debate to recount their stories of constituents who have been affected. I was struck by one from my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), who wrote to tell me that an elderly lady in her constituency was robbed of almost £35,000 by people posing as, of all things, an anti-fraud unit from her local bank. Unfortunately those fraudsters were not caught, and as the banks are not liable, her savings have not been returned. That has had a devastating impact—not just financial but emotional—on the lady concerned.

Those incidents are just two among the thousands that occur each and every year. They highlight why we need to do more to combat this detestable style of crime. I thank the many external organisations that got in touch with me, especially those that provided so much useful data and information, such as the Chartered Trading Standards Institute, Age UK, Financial Fraud Action UK, Standard Life and the Fairway financial consultancy.

The cost of fraud to the economy is truly astonishing. According to the Chartered Trading Standards Institute, it amounts to £52 billion a year. Numbers can get thrown around, but to put that into context, £52 billion is more than we spend on defence or education. If we were to cut that figure by just 10%, we would reinject £5 billion into people's savings and the wider economy itself. That would equate to much of the economic boost that has come about in recent years due to payment protection insurance payouts.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for leading the debate. A quarter of the population of my constituency is over the age of 65, and the average age of those being scammed is 74, so my constituents are particularly concerned. He talked about financial cost, which is of course important, but those being scammed are some of the most vulnerable in society. This is an issue of not just the financial cost, but the human cost.

Julian Knight: I could not agree more. The demographics in our constituencies are very similar, certainly in terms of age—in Silhill ward in my constituency, 40% of people are over 65. As my hon. Friend says, the average age of scamming victims is 74. Fraudsters have many different ways of making their approach, but in the main they instinctively target elderly people—although not to the exclusion of everyone else—because, frankly, the older generation is quite polite. They do not want to put the phone down straightaway and they might respond to a letter. However, as I will explain, as soon as someone does that, they enter a whole new world in terms of the information gathered by these fraudsters.

The national average cost of fraud per victim is purportedly just over £1,000, but the amounts can be a lot higher. I was staggered to find that in my constituency the average cost is £9,000 for each event of fraud, which probably reflects our relatively affluent population and also the fact that we have an older population, as my hon. Friend and I discussed a moment ago. Older people are disproportionately the target of scammers, but we must not forget that the youngest reported victim that I have been alerted to was only 19. Can we imagine starting out in life, effectively, as an adult, and finding that one of our first experiences is to be hoodwinked by one of those despicable fraudsters? That demonstrates that no one who is old enough to handle their own finances can afford to be complacent about the risk of fraud.

Being stung is often only the start of the process. A victim's details can be sold on more than 200 times, putting them in the sights of a much larger pool of international criminals. The National Trading Standards scams team has found an astonishing 106,000 potential victims of fraud on captured criminal target lists. The fraudsters call those sucker lists, which shows what they think of people. Investigations suggest that the names of 560,000 victims from the UK are already in circulation.

We must not fall into the trap of considering only financial costs as the social and human damage caused by fraud can be just as severe. Indeed, according to trueCall, the phone screening service, the impact of scamming is comparable to that of violent crime. For starters, 29% of victims suffer a major depressive episode in the 20 months after a crime, compared with just 2% of non-victims.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): Has my hon. Friend also considered the risk and actual harm caused when scammers market fake medicines online? That is a particular problem. Operation Pangea has been seizing many such products as they come into the UK, but people need to be aware of the danger of buying from online pharmacies. They need to be sure that they are buying from a reputable agent of the pharmacy industry in the UK, and people can look at logos to check that they are doing so.

Julian Knight: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that point. She will have come across that issue in her role as Chair of the Health Committee. As I understand it, such cases are not simply a question of being defrauded of money; they can actually cost people their lives, in the worst possible circumstances.

As well as depressive episodes, 45% of victims suffer a generalised anxiety disorder compared with just 15% of non-victims. The stress that victims suffer can both exacerbate pre-existing health conditions and induce post-traumatic stress, and 10% of victims have unexplained hospital admissions within three months. The circles of these frauds—their effects within our wider society—roll outwards and outwards. More horrifyingly, people who have been defrauded are two-and-a-half times more likely than non-victims to be in care or dead within two years of the event. Scammers take so much more than cash. They can rob us of our self-confidence and elderly citizens of the ability to live independently.

We should not forget the people who fight back. I have enjoyed reading stories of people called scam baiters, who turn the tables on these predators by wasting their time and making fools of them. I particularly liked one story that the BBC covered a few years ago of a gentleman who managed to persuade a Nigerian scammer to daub himself in war paint to prove his dedication to a made-up religion. Overall, however, the clear knock-on effects for personal independence and relationships add huge invisible costs to the headline figures of fraud.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on the excellent case he is making about this very important subject. From personal experience, I know that some scammers concentrate on people who are beginning to suffer from short-term memory loss. Will he explain to what extent that is a feature of this phenomenon? If it is, as I suspect, a very significant feature, does it not highlight the importance of people who are beginning to lose their faculties trying, whenever possible, to give power of attorney to reliable relatives so that they are not vulnerable to being taken advantage of in this way?

Julian Knight: That is absolutely correct. We also need better training for bank staff. Nationwide is very good at spotting the signs of when an individual is being defrauded. I remember one case that was told to me by my grandmother, who is 91, of a lady on her estate who had tried to withdraw several thousand pounds from the Nationwide with two burly men behind her. That case related to fake tarmacking and the usual fake repairs. Nationwide must be commended for stopping that withdrawal from happening. The Post Office, too, has put in place such training. My right hon. Friend is right to make the link between scamming and the ever-increasing instances, due to longevity, of dementia in our society. This is another challenge we must meet as a society through financial institutions, and family and other support networks.

The clear knock-on effects for personal independence and relationships add huge invisible costs to the headline figures I mentioned, both by increasing demand for state support and simply in terms of human misery. One of the reasons why fraud is so difficult to tackle is that it can take many different forms. Con artists are adept at exploiting people's unfamiliarity with the technical aspects of a product or service in order to trick them. They are also quick to exploit the latest news story or Government initiative, and sometimes simply try to exploit our generosity after a natural disaster by posing as someone in need of disaster relief. An email apparently coming from a disaster zone and asking for help is a very common trick of the fraudsters.

Several constituents have visited my surgery to complain that their insurers will not allow them to take money out of their pension funds to invest into unregulated investments—so-called “penny shares”—which allow scammers to sell people worthless stocks and other asset classes. I am sure that other hon. Members have received similar visits. I have had to be very clear to those individuals that their insurers are perfectly right and that they should never put their pension at risk. I encourage Members to remain vigilant about such stories. This “pensions unlocking”, as it is called, is just one way in which con artists are trying to exploit the

[Julian Knight]

Government's new, more liberal pensions system. I fully support the Government's desire to give more power to individual savers, but such cases highlight the importance of developing anti-fraud protections alongside policies, rather than after they are implemented. That applies to our regulators, too.

Impersonating banks is another common form of financial fraud, as the constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury discovered. According to Financial Fraud Action UK, scammers are now targeting individuals directly for passwords, passcodes and PINs as security systems become ever more sophisticated and complex. FFA UK reported that losses to financial fraud totalled £755 million in 2015, but that was only what was reported. Worryingly, that figure represented a 26% increase on 2014, despite bank and card company security systems intercepting and preventing £1.76 billion of fraud, or £7 in every £10 of potential losses.

Fraud is also flourishing on the internet. According to consumer group Which?, more than 5 million online scams were carried out last year, with an astonishing £9 billion lost to fraudsters. It also reports that six in 10 of us reported being targeted by online scammers in the 12 months up to May this year. Frankly, I am surprised the figure is only six out of 10; I am forever being asked to wire money to various parts of the world, basically for it to be laundered. The most common types of fraud are phishing emails—usually purporting to be from a bank or senior official—seeking money, and bogus computer support.

Alongside this cutting-edge crime, the more traditional forms of fraud flourish too, such as false tradesman tricking people into paying extortionate amounts for unnecessary work and often providing cover for outright distraction burglaries into the bargain. I was struck by a case sent in by the Chartered Trading Standards Institute on this very point. The case involved a 78-year-old pensioner from Lincolnshire who lived alone and was isolated from family. The pensioner was conned out of his house by a conman who convinced him that major repair work was needed on his property. After being cold-called and visited, he agreed to will part of his property in return for the work being carried out. However, the documents he signed actually gave the house to the scammers, who then placed him in a caravan park. It was only the victim's testimony in court that guaranteed a conviction. The officers involved had no doubt there were other victims, silent victims, who had lost homes in this way.

The huge financial and human costs of fraud make the case for action clear, but the problem could very well be much more serious than we realise. The CTSI believes that only 5% of scams are ever reported, with fear and shame keeping victims silent and preventing them from seeking help. There are already some very strong efforts in this area. In addition to the preventive measures by banks and card companies that I have already mentioned, trading standards has been collaborating with charities and the police to afford better protection to victims. For example, there has been a concerted effort to provide previous victims, and those whose age or health makes them likely to be victimised, with call blockers. These have so far protected 1,600 vulnerable people and blocked 95% of 81,000 attempted nuisance calls.

Based on the overall statistics, trading standards estimates that more than 11,500 scams, which would have been carried out, have been stopped. Expanding the capacity of trading standards, as many have called for, would make these efforts more effective. More needs to be done, especially when the resale of personal information makes so many people vulnerable to crimes such as identity theft. The CTSI has called for much stricter regulation and control of personal data to counter industrial-scale and legal harvesting of personal data which can then be put to illegal use or sold on. So often, the first purchase of the information can be done through clicking a box, for example to sign up to a newsletter. The information then goes into the ether. I do not believe that people know quite what they are signing up to: there is no transparency. The first few purchases of that information might be bona fide and legitimate. Further down the scale, however, we start to find in investigations that holding companies, which are a front, are effectively buying in the information for fraudsters.

Despite the fact that 85% of people, a huge majority, think that businesses have an equal or greater responsibility to protect their customers from fraud than consumers, the Cyber Security Breaches 2016 Survey found that only 5% of firms invest in ongoing monitoring of hacks into their systems, despite more than six in 10 reporting such breaches. I know from personal experience that some banks have a long way to go in their own security arrangements, too. Very recently, HSBC asked my wife to send some very sensitive financial and personal information to a private email address. That was legitimate. It was bona fide. But what on earth is a bank doing allowing private and sensitive information to go outside its own networks?

Some firms report to me the astonishing claim that some of our current systems work against responsible corporate behaviour. A partner in the financial consultancy firm Fairway wrote to me that the Financial Ombudsman Service was holding his firm accountable for losses incurred via some very risky, and frankly quite murky-sounding, investments that his firm had clearly warned its clients to avoid because they would put their life savings at risk. One adjudicator at the FOS had apparently suggested that the firm should have refused to advise the people involved. How can we have a system that makes it harder for people engaged in potentially problematic and risky investments to receive professional advice? It is essential for us to ensure that our regulators are focusing on the authors of dodgy investment schemes which blur the line between legitimate business and outright fraud, and not unfairly penalising those who try to help.

The Government can also make a real difference by stress-testing policies and building anti-fraud protections into them as they are developed, rather than waiting until afterwards. I know that the Cabinet Office has made great strides in relation to the sharing of information throughout the Government to track down benefit fraudsters and other financial scammers.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on an excellent speech. I strongly endorse what he has said about Government schemes. He mentioned pensioners earlier, and in recent years, particularly in south Wales, they have been targeted by green deal scams. I agree wholeheartedly that it is important

for the Government to build in safeguards when they are developing policies, to prevent people from being scammed on the back of legitimate Government schemes.

Julian Knight: That is a very good point. I remember the fraud that took place way back when tax credits were launched. The fraudsters cotton on incredibly quickly, and they see the opportunities. They seem to be extremely flexible in that regard. Scam artists are very quick to move on any new opportunity. They cost the Government hundreds of millions of pounds by exploiting the green deal, and, before that, Labour's tax credits proved so vulnerable that the online portal set up to claim them is still closed a decade later.

We also need much clearer warnings for people. Despite the best of intentions, much of the advice on offer is too cautious, and contains too much room for doubt. There is too much reliance on *caveat emptor*. It would be much better to lay out some very clear rules, such as these. If a tradesman knocks on your door to say that you need surprise repairs, just say no. Thank him or her, and, if you are worried, call a reputable professional yourself. If someone tries to convince you that you have won a lottery that you did not enter, just say no: it cannot be made clear enough that that never happens. If someone tries to persuade you to make a risky investment with your pension, just say no: that precious investment has to look after you in your old age. If you want to invest, always take the time to seek proper, independent professional advice.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Is the hon. Gentleman as worried as I am about the number of people who respond to communications? He mentioned the lottery. Once people have responded to one communication, they will receive many more. I heard of one person who received up to 10 or 20 a day. Moreover, the communications are coming from abroad, which means that they cannot be intercepted and stopped. It is causing a great deal of heartache to very vulnerable people.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. Before the hon. Member for Solihull (Julian Knight) responds to that intervention, let me point out that, while I appreciate that he is making some extremely important points and the House is very attentive, a great many other Members wish to speak, not just in the current debate but in the next. I am sure that he will conclude his speech very soon.

Julian Knight: I am actually on my last paragraph, Madam Deputy Speaker, but thank you for the reminder.

The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) is absolutely correct. If the Post Office is alerted to the position, it will stop mail and set up a separate "scam mail box", which is a very good initiative.

Fraud is a detestable crime which preys on our worst fears and best instincts, and I hope that, together with the police and other organisations and across the Government, we can start to stamp it out.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Before I call the co-sponsor of the motion, let me repeat that a great many Members wish to speak in both this debate and

the next one. I must therefore impose a five-minute time limit on Back-Bench speeches. That does not apply to the next speaker, who is deemed to be the spokesman for her party.

1.15 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I am delighted to co-sponsor the motion and this important debate along with the hon. Member for Solihull (Julian Knight), with whom I have sparred in the past but with whom I am in complete agreement today.

The cost of scamming in our society is undoubtedly huge and cannot be counted only in terms of pounds and pence, although the financial cost is significant. Scamming affects the elderly and other vulnerable members of our communities, not exclusively but disproportionately, and the problem is becoming greater with each passing day. The Office for National Statistics predicts that by 2030 the number of elderly people living in our communities will increase by 34%, from 11.6 million to 15.7 million, and the number of people living with dementia will increase from 850,000 to 2.1 million.

The people who perpetrate scams use sophisticated techniques to scam their victims, repeatedly in some cases. Trading standards, although already hard-pressed, is working on the front line to do all that it can to safeguard the vulnerable. The most sinister, cynical and cruel aspect of scamming is that it is criminal activity which targets those who are most vulnerable in their own homes. The one place where any of us should feel safe becomes the setting for people being conned out of their money via sales scripts, data collection and targeted mail. Scams can involve, for instance, pension fraud, bogus equity release schemes, fictitious prize draws, false investment opportunities, upfront payments to release lottery wins, upfront payment for building work that is either never started or never completed, and investment scams. The most common telephone scams are cold calls. I hope that everyone who is in the Chamber today will feel able to support my ten-minute rule Bill on cold calls next week. I do not have time to talk about it now, but it is fascinating.

The impact of scams goes far beyond financial loss. It is emotional and psychological, and has even been shown to have an impact on physical wellbeing. At worst, it can ruin lives and split families, with the consequences lasting long beyond the initial trauma of financial loss. Moreover, even when financial losses are comparatively low, scams lead to a breakdown in consumer confidence. The full effects of the harm caused by them is difficult to estimate, as only about 5% of victims report that they have lost money. We know that the average victim loses about £1,000, but we also know that many lose hundreds of thousands of pounds. We know that victims of scams often feel embarrassed, and are afraid that their families will judge them to be no longer capable of living alone. For that reason, scams may not be reported, which leaves the victims open and vulnerable to repeat scams. Some people find it extremely difficult even to admit that they have been victims of a crime.

We should not forget that the impact of dementia and other impairments makes vulnerability much more pronounced and the ability to target an individual

[Patricia Gibson]

repeatedly much more possible. As we heard from the hon. Member for Solihull, it has been demonstrated that victims of scams are nearly two and a half times more likely to require increased care provision, or to die within two years of being scammed. It has also been reported that victims often experience a rapid drop in their physical health after realising that they have been scammed.

The scale of the problem and its associated costs are absolutely huge. Alongside this growing problem, we all know that trading standards are struggling to cope, although the work they do is worthy of very high praise and demands our respect. I also want to highlight the excellent work carried out by CIFAS, which works to prevent fraud and financial crime through the sharing of confirmed fraud data. Last year, CIFAS prevented more than £1 billion in fraud loss by sharing data across sectors. Its data show that in 2015 in my own constituency of North Ayrshire and Arran, 278 frauds took place and there were 103 victims of fraud. We know that that is a mere snapshot of the true level of fraud, which is likely to be much higher.

I want to single out for particular praise North Ayrshire Citizens Advice Service, which carried out a range of activities to promote Scam Awareness month, which was July, providing training to advisers, raising awareness of scams among clients, and working in partnership with local community groups, the third sector, Police Scotland, and Ayrshire College. It also worked closely with my local Member of the Scottish Parliament, one Kenneth Gibson, whom I mention purely in the interests of domestic harmony.

Scams do so much more than rob people of their money. They rob them of their confidence, their belief in themselves and in their judgment, their self-esteem, their willingness to trust people and the help they may be able to offer them, and ultimately their ability to live full, happy, independent lives. What makes all of us vulnerable to scams is shown by research carried out by Which? All of us are overconfident about our ability to spot a scam. Ironically, that makes us all the more vulnerable. The gap between confidence and ability is dangerous.

So what can we do about this problem? I absolutely agree with the suggestion put forward by trading standards that financial institutions should recognise that clients with dementia are by definition more at risk of being scammed and that measures need to be taken to protect that group as a duty of care. Those who are diagnosed with dementia live with a cognitive impairment and that must be recognised. The sharing of personal details and information with other organisations should require a clear opt-in, as opposed to an opt-out. The normal default position of charities and other organisations should be that personal details are not passed on or shared, except to report a safeguarding concern where there is a suspicion that a person may be at risk of harm from scamming.

In addition, customers should be able to formally notify their bank in writing that they feel at risk and request that all transactions over a certain amount to new payees have a 24-hour delay before being processed.

That will give time for the proposed transaction to be challenged and potentially stop scammed money from leaving a scam victim's account.

Those eminently sensible and fairly straightforward measures would do much to protect those most at risk of scamming—the elderly and the vulnerable in our communities. I urge the Minister to reflect on those proposals to help us to tackle the problem that confronts people who are robbed in their own homes and subsequently find the experience scarring. The effects are far reaching. Let us do more to protect the victims of scams. It is the least we can do.

1.23 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sarah Newton): I wholeheartedly congratulate the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Julian Knight) on securing this important debate. I know they have a long-standing interest in tackling scamming, especially when vulnerable individuals are the intended victims. They have set out the wide range of harm that fraudsters and scammers can cause. I assure the House that tackling scams is a priority for this Government. Scams can have a devastating impact, particularly on the most vulnerable people in society. Mass marketing frauds can affect any one of us, at any time. We are more likely to be a victim of fraud than of any other crime, but when caught out we can sometimes feel ashamed or not want to admit we have been hoodwinked. That, however, can make it hard to get a full sense of the problem. It is really important that we do all we can to understand it and respond, which is why I welcome this debate.

We know that older people are more at risk. The National Trading Standards scams team says that the typical person it provides support to is 74 and living alone. That is why I welcome the work of Bournemouth University and the Chartered Trading Standards Institute to investigate the impacts of scams on older people. Their report on financial scamming earlier this year set out clear recommendations for action by the Government, by charities and by private institutions such as banks. As much of the debate today is focusing on the report's recommendations, and I will address them directly.

The first recommendation was for all agencies, including banks, to recognise their duty of care to those with dementia and to take measures to protect them. The second was to strengthen rules on data protection to reduce the risk of vulnerable people ending up on so-called suckers lists used by criminals to target their scams. The third was to introduce safeguards at banks and building societies to prevent those who feel at risk of scams from losing large amounts of money.

Dr Julian Lewis: I thank the Minister for the interest she has taken in this issue. I know from personal experience that it is difficult to get a bank to take action unless someone has already given power of attorney, as I said in an earlier intervention. When this happened to someone very close to me and I told the bank concerned that I needed to be tipped off if there were any unusual withdrawals, nothing really happened until a particularly alert cashier, on her own initiative, did that. After five years, I eventually got success: the fraudster was forced to repay all the money and to pay the costs of the case. Therefore, will the Minister do everything possible to

persuade banks, if a power of attorney is not in place, to have procedures in place if a worried close relative asks them to monitor irregular or unusual withdrawals and let them know?

Sarah Newton: I thank my right hon. Friend for raising that constituency case. It reflects the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull made that some banks have good procedures in place and some do not, and that some staff have been well trained and some have not. We need to ensure that every person working in the bank is as good as those identified by the Nationwide, which my hon. Friend mentioned. I will come on to address the wider point: what more banks and building societies can do to protect their vulnerable customers.

I am pleased to report that the Government, regulators and private companies are responding strongly to the recommendations that I have outlined. The Government have taken action more widely on nuisance calls, including a new requirement for all direct marketing callers to provide caller line identification. That came into effect on 16 May. The measure increases consumer choice, by making it easier for people to identify direct marketing calls and to choose whether to accept them. It will also increase the Information Commissioner's Office's ability to investigate such calls.

Members may also be aware that, in the Queen's Speech on 18 May, the Government announced their intention to bring forward a Digital Economy Bill. Among other legislative changes, it will introduce a measure making it a requirement for the Information Commissioner to issue a statutory code of practice on direct marketing.

Dr Wollaston: I wonder whether the Minister in the legislation will also address the fines that are meted out when people breach the rules. She may be familiar with the case of Pharmacy2U, which, disgracefully, sold the details of more than 20,000 of its customers, many of them very vulnerable, to marketing companies. The fine of £130,000 is derisory and no meaningful deterrent.

Sarah Newton: As always, the Chairman of the Health Committee makes a powerful point, and I am sure those responsible for drafting these measures will take them into careful consideration, ensuring that the scope of the measures captures some of the very harmful behaviour of scammers and fraudsters and that there is sufficient deterrent to those considering undertaking these crimes from the regime of punishments put in place, including fines.

The overall aims of the new code of practice will be to support a reduction in the number of unwanted direct marketing calls and to make it easier for the Information Commissioner to take action against organisations in breach of the direct marketing rules.

Secondly, the Government-funded national trading standards scams team is working with the British Bankers Association, the Building Society Association and others to produce a new national banking protocol for doorstep crime and other scam issues discovered at branch level. The Financial Conduct Authority is building on this. Its ageing population strategy will consider how older consumers engage in financial services and make

best use of the products and services they use. The FCA intends to release a regulatory strategy and recommendations by 2017.

Justin Tomlinson: My hon. Friend mentions trading standards services, and may I ask her to praise the work of both Poole and Dorset trading standards, which do such a good job in this area? However, they can only do their work if the victims come forward; that is the only way in which successful prosecutions can be secured. So I invite her to continue her work with trading standards and to highlight the important work they do to ensure we get prosecutions.

Sarah Newton: My hon. Friend raises an important point. My own trading standards team in Cornwall, like that in Poole, does an excellent job. In addition to the vital work they do in all our communities, they are supported by national bodies—one for Scotland and one for England and Wales. A lot of this activity is related to organised and serious crime, and these national bodies do make sums of money available for support where we are seeing particular instances of scamming in communities. That national and local working is a very good model.

Following scandals in 2015 that highlighted unacceptable charitable fundraising practices, a new Fundraising Regulator has been established. Chaired by Lord Grade of Yarmouth, this independent regulator is tasked to set high standards of fundraising practice and to deal with public complaints when those standards have been breached. It has a range of sanctions and can refer serious non-compliance or abuse to the relevant statutory regulator.

The scams team has also been working in partnership with Royal Mail and other postal operators, training over 2,000 postmen and women to spot scam letters. Already over 700 vulnerable households have been identified and are getting support. Even more importantly, contracts to carry the mail are being cancelled, stopping the letters from getting to their intended victims in the first place.

Enforcement is important in tackling this crime. That is why the Home Office launched a joint fraud taskforce in February this year. The taskforce includes, among others, the City of London police, the National Crime Agency, Financial Fraud Action UK, the Bank of England, National Trading Standards, CIFAS, as the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran mentioned, and Age UK. The taskforce is a good example of the approach we are taking to crime prevention. This is very much the focus of the modern crime prevention strategy the Government published in March this year. Its key themes are about working together to understand the drivers of crimes—why and how they are committed—and then working together to try to stay one step ahead of the criminals to prevent more crimes from happening in the future. The work of the taskforce oversight board is an excellent example of such collaboration, bringing government, law enforcement and industry together in a focused way to develop a clearer and common understanding about the changing nature of fraud and how we can all take action against it.

In its first few months the taskforce has demonstrated that it works. Improved data sharing has led banks to close hundreds of accounts linked to fraud; bank branches in London, alongside the Met and trading standards,

[Sarah Newton]

are introducing a new fraud intervention, and prolific fraudsters have been arrested since the launch of a new campaign in July.

I can assure hon. Members that the Government regard tackling scamming as a priority, and we will continue to work with national and local partners to address the issues raised today and to do everything we can to prevent the horrendous consequences of the scams we have heard about and to enable more of the good work we have seen.

I want to highlight one extremely good example I came across from Trading Standards Scotland. It funded and co-ordinated a project to install over 200 call-blocking devices in vulnerable consumers' homes. These devices block 95% of nuisance calls. The impact of preventing scammers from reaching vulnerable and elderly people should not be underestimated. Trading Standards Scotland estimates the resulting saving to individuals and the public purse is between £3,000 and £7,000 per call-blocker.

But really what we are here to do today is to think about the effect on people, and I would like to read a quote from one of the beneficiaries of the scheme that illustrates the true human value. She says:

"I have got my life back. I am nearly 70 and I think how did I let people get me like this? My son is ill and cannot protect me. I have had to get police protection in the past for nuisance calls. Now I can protect myself—it is marvellous. I feel in control. We can sit and have a cup of tea without being disturbed. The dog is even less stressed."

In conclusion, I repeat my thanks to the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran and my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull for securing this important debate. I will be listening intently to the contributions of all Members today, and I can assure them of our utter determination to tackle this dreadful criminal activity.

1.36 pm

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) and the hon. Member for Solihull (Julian Knight) on securing this debate on a subject I must confess I did not know nearly enough about. But I do know now that my own constituency is affected by scams in the same way as are many other hon. Members'. One of the local police divisions informs me that the main scam taking place there is one that has been referred to in this debate. Crooks pretend to be from the bank and state that unusual activity is happening on the victim's account. Information is requested, and then a so-called safe account is set up, and the victim is asked to transfer the money to that new account, which, of course, is almost the opposite of safe.

A local officer there, PC Blades, informs me that "we are talking about large sums of money being taken", with an equally large impact on the victim. He also confirms that it seems that "a lot of fraud activity goes unreported as persons feel ashamed at being caught out with such scams."

Tragically, as we have heard, this is the picture all across the country, with the average victim being 74, and the average loss £1,000, but with many losing much more, yet only 5% of victims report being scammed to

the authorities. I have been astonished to learn about the scale of the problem—the number of people losing out, the financial losses resulting, the range of industries affected, the different types of scam, and the techniques and technologies employed, from vishing to phishing and cold calling to copycat websites.

The only thing that is less of a surprise is the personal distress and misery caused, which Members have eloquently described. I, too, was horrified to read that victims of mass marketing-type fraud in particular are often placed on so-called suckers lists and their details are then sold on to other fraudsters, increasing their risk of becoming a repeat victim. So anything that can be done to clamp down on that practice must be done.

This is all rather depressing reading, so how do we set about that task of preventing scams and bringing perpetrators to justice? We all have a responsibility in raising awareness by highlighting ScamSmart or Know Fraud, by supporting Scorpion or Pension Wise, and by backing campaigns such as scam awareness month and the excellent "Avoiding scams" information leaflet from Age UK. I confess that Action Fraud had barely entered my consciousness until a few months ago. By introducing this debate, hon. Members have made me determined to ensure that as many of my constituents know about it as possible.

The messages that we have to promote are not particularly difficult ones, but they are easy to forget under pressure, particularly for vulnerable people. The first message, which other hon. Members have mentioned, is that if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is—certainly if a cold call is involved. I know that we will be returning to that issue next week. Another message is that people should take expert advice, and the local citizens advice bureau will be happy to help. Also, people should not be afraid to doubt someone's honesty when they are being asked to part with cash. Unfortunately, a lot of people find that difficult.

Julian Knight: I appreciate what the hon. Gentleman is saying about the information from the local citizens advice bureau—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. A load of time has been used already and we have an oversubscribed debate next, so it is unfair to use more time making interventions. Does the hon. Gentleman really need to intervene? I think that he was hoping to speak for two minutes at the end anyway.

Stuart C. McDonald: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The point I was making is that we should encourage vulnerable people not to be scared about doubting someone's honesty when they are being asked to part with cash. The fact that they are scared to do that is exactly what makes them vulnerable. We must encourage them to see that there is no downside to challenging someone in that way, because honest people will not be upset by such action. We must also encourage people to report any scams. That could help them to see justice being done and perhaps even to gain some redress. It will also help to prevent other people from falling victim to such crimes.

All this awareness raising can take us only so far, however, when the range and sophistication of scamming activity is increasing all the time. It cannot be relied on

to protect significant numbers of people in those crucial moments when they are being hounded for their cash. Going beyond awareness raising, the proposals from the organisations to which the Minister referred, including Bournemouth University and the Chartered Trading Standards Institute, along with those that we have heard from hon. Members today, all provide powerful pointers for Governments at all levels about what further steps could be taken.

The opt-in procedure that my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran mentioned is an attractive proposition. It could involve placing a 24-hour stop on any significant transaction or group of transactions relating to a vulnerable person's bank account, during which time a nominated representative could be contacted to provide an opportunity to challenge the transaction. In short, it should be as close to impossible as it can be for a vulnerable person to transfer the entire contents of their account to somewhere else without major questions being asked.

We also need to think about considerably increasing the resources that we invest in tackling this problem, using not only public money but the time and money invested by companies to protect their most vulnerable customers and clients. For my own part, I shall happily sign up to be a "scambassador" and I know that many other hon. Members will do so if they have not already. The fight back against these wicked and callous fraudsters deserves all the support it can get.

1.42 pm

Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Julian Knight) for bringing this important debate to the Floor of the House. I am going to focus on scams targeted at the elderly. As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on older people and ageing, I hosted the launch of the first report of the Sussex Elders Commission. This was the first listening exercise of its kind for older people, and it received almost 2,500 responses from elderly residents of Sussex about policing, crime and community safety. It asked them about their concerns and what they feared most about staying safe. Their concerns about scamming were profound.

Based on projections from national data, the commission estimated that there could be as many as 13,000 cases of elder abuse in any given year in Sussex alone—two counties with a combined population of only 1.6 million. For example, the commission heard that one man's elderly brother was dying of cancer and quite frail. He was persuaded to pay £2,000 for essential roof and damp repairs, but the only work completed was some painting over of the damp. A couple aged 85 and 86 were scammed out of £8,000 through a postal scam, and their daughter lost money in the process of trying to recover the funds. Another woman was charged £450 for a minor building repair that was subsequently valued at £30.

Scams targeted at elderly people purposely target vulnerable people. The perpetrators see them as more trusting and less inquisitive. They may be less mobile and more easily cornered. Perhaps they are lonely and isolated, and therefore more welcoming of contact from other people, whether strangers or not. They might just be keener to ensure someone leaves them alone, and therefore more willing to pay a price in order to get rid

of them, just because it is easier. Also, some older people might not have all their faculties and might not be aware that they have become a victim of a scam.

The scammers formulate a scheme designed to prey on those characteristics, particularly the vulnerability and isolation of older people. Even worse, they are able to pull this off while the victim is at their own front door, sitting in their living room using their own phone, opening their own post or responding to what seems like a personal email. As a result of the impact of such scamming, one in five older people in Sussex is afraid to answer the phone in their own home. These scams are carried out not only by strangers in far-flung countries or nearby communities, but by members of the victim's own family, or perhaps by a carer or close friend. An investigation by *The Times* earlier this year found that adult social services had received allegations of 21,935 cases of theft and fraud against elderly victims in the 12 months to March 2016.

I welcome the Home Office's creation of a joint fraud taskforce in February this year to develop better solutions to address the increasingly common nature of these types of crime. Age UK is also doing very good work, including in my own county of East Sussex where the average high-risk victim loses £23,000 over a three-month period. It provides support services to victims, with an individual support plan to address their needs, including advice on handling unexpected calls. But as a society we also need to do more to encourage family members to better protect and look after their elderly relatives. For example, investing in hidden cameras for an elderly relative's home can make it easier for the police to catch regular perpetrators. One of the big issues at the moment is that it is too easy for them to get away with it and repeat the crime. We have heard a lot about call blocking technology, but it is incredibly difficult for older people to install it themselves, so we should urge family members to do that for their elderly relatives.

We have heard about a duty of care, whether on the part of postal workers or of bank staff, and I believe that that should go further. I suggest that scams targeting the elderly be re-categorised as an aggravated crime, because they specifically target a vulnerable person. This could form part of a new type of crime named elder abuse, and I appeal to Members to support my campaign to change the law to recognise this new type of crime. We already treat child abuse as a separate crime, and while I obviously recognise the real differences between physical child abuse and scams against the elderly, both are especially repugnant because they target those least able to defend and protect themselves.

San Diego in America has an official elder abuse prosecution unit. As the Ministry of Justice conducts its review of sentencing, I would strongly encourage it to make elder abuse a priority focus. We should draw on initiatives such as the one in San Diego, where the reporting of elder abuse is mandatory. Referrals follow a checked process which makes it easier to collect evidence and to prosecute, and caseworkers are assigned to any older person who is seen as the victim of abuse or a scam. Anyone who betrays the trust placed in them by the elderly, or who specifically targets the elderly because they are trusting—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. The hon. Lady's time is up.

1.47 pm

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab/Co-op): I want to congratulate and sincerely thank the hon. Members for Solihull (Julian Knight) and for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) for securing this debate today. We have heard already about some atrocious cases of scamming that have affected the most vulnerable in our communities. Scamming in the UK has an average financial detriment per person of more than £1,000, but some victims have been forced to re-mortgage or even sell their homes to cover the cost. I would like to draw the House's attention to the issue in Wales. From April 2015 to May 2016, 8,774 instances of fraud were reported in Wales, but it is estimated that only 5% of scamming victims report being scammed to authorities, so the reality is far worse.

I would like briefly to highlight one scam that has affected a number of my constituents. Residents have been targeted with an automated voicemail message claiming to be from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and warning of an impending lawsuit. After being asked to press 1 to speak to a caseworker, a person then asks for certain personal details such as national insurance numbers, which are then used to commit fraud. Claiming to be from HMRC is a common tactic used by criminals and, unfortunately, it is often successful. I have had constituents contacting my office in tears, ashamed to have been caught out and unclear as to where to go to report what has happened to them.

Many would argue that scamming is at crisis point in some constituencies, and the crisis will only worsen if it is not given the necessary attention. We have an ageing population, many of whom are living with dementia, which is due to increase in the coming years if we believe health experts, and scammers are deplorably exploiting the condition of many elderly people.

Fraudsters also have new avenues to explore. Statistics from Financial Fraud Action UK show that 58% of people have received suspect calls—an increase from 41% in the previous year. It is difficult to assess the exact extent of scamming because so many victims choose not to report such crimes, but we can say with near certainty that it will increase. The Office for National Statistics predicts a 35% increase in elder abuse by 2030. We must recognise this tremendous problem, and I am glad that the House has had the opportunity to highlight it today. It is our duty not only to draw attention to scamming and its effect on individuals, but to look for the solutions.

Sufficient investment in support for those falling foul of such crimes is crucial. Groups such as trading standards continue to do excellent work, but budget cuts mean that they cannot reach their potential. Call blocking projects across the UK have done wonders to tackle the issue, but they can continue only with sufficient funding. It is unacceptable that, according to the Chartered Trading Standards Institute, there has been a 53% cut in front-line officers at trading standards services since 2009. It cannot be denied that that has contributed to the issue and further cuts will only worsen the situation. The Government must invest not only in services to help the victims of the crimes we are discussing today, but in the police to allow them to raise awareness of the problem.

In the scam in my constituency, South Wales Police worked locally to let people know about the issue through

social media, reaching hundreds of thousands of people across the area. The Government must make suggestions about further steps to tackle such criminality and cuts cannot continue without consideration of the consequences. I am glad that Members from both sides of the House are in the Chamber today to discuss the issue, on which there is clearly considerable consensus and common ground, but we cannot ignore the fact that Government cuts have contributed to the dilemma. I urge the Government to examine the issue, in particular the role that cuts are having on the ability of front-line services to tackle the problem.

1.52 pm

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Julian Knight) on securing this important debate. Like all Members, I have experienced constituents at my surgery tearing their hair out, almost in tears, following scams. If time permits, I want to focus on two particular cases. Both were perpetrated against professional people who did all the appropriate checks, and I want to highlight that they feel let down by the investigatory and regulatory authorities. One couple lost £19,000 as a result of an investment in a carbon offset scheme, and the others lost £38,000. The reality is that if those couples had lost such amounts by having their homes burgled, it is fair to say that they would have had a much more positive response from the police and other authorities and would certainly have had an investigating officer whom they could contact personally.

The first case was reported to ActionFraud, but the correspondence that the couple received amounted to this:

"Please find attached a copy of the Crime report as requested. We advise you to keep this information safe".

The letter indicated that further advice can be found on ActionFraud's website and ends:

"Kind regards, Claire".

That does not inspire much confidence. As the investment was US-based, my constituents, in despair, sought support from US authorities. I must congratulate the New York police department, which actually looked into the matter and came back to them. A Lieutenant Phelan emailed the couple, giving his personal contact details, which was at least a positive and helpful response.

I received an email from those constituents, which reads:

"My reason for writing is that there appears to be very little of a practical nature the UK government is doing to support the victims of this crime."

Based on what the Minister said, it is fair to say that we are now getting a more positive response, and I point out that this email was written in 2014. It continues:

"We fell victim to the approach of a Wealth Advisory company based in Switzerland at a time when we had a sum of money to invest and were looking for an ethical investment...I did as much research as I could on the company and on this potential investment and found little to deter us despite my misgivings about the cold calling...When I contacted the FCA, they were polite but disinterested. They said they would be in touch with me and asked if I would be willing to give further information...I have heard nothing further...They advised me to contact the local Police...I submitted a report to Action Fraud."

My constituents were told by the local police that they could not investigate further until ActionFraud referred the matter back to them. They went on to say:

“I appreciate we have been gullible but, if this has happened to us, I have no doubt it has happened and will continue to happen to others.

I wanted you to know about the inadequacies of the support offered to the victims of this particular type of crime.”

The second case involved a familiar scam that used the name of a well-established and reputable organisation, copying its contact details, letterheads and so on, as we heard earlier. Personal contact was made between three supposed investment brokers and my constituents, who became friendly and familiar with them, building up the confidence that they could invest safely and, again, doing all the appropriate checks. However, they were also referred to ActionFraud. I understand from my question at Home Office questions on Monday that ActionFraud is being encouraged to ensure that more referrals go back to the local police force so that action can be taken. I urge the Minister and her colleagues to do what they can to ensure that our police and regulatory authorities take a much more serious approach when people lose their life savings.

To be fair, following my correspondence with ActionFraud, I have been invited to a programme run by the City of London police to inform me of its activities, so I hope that I will be able to report something more positive.

1.57 pm

Philip Boswell (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP): The hon. Member for Solihull (Julian Knight) made mention of the Chartered Trading Standards Institute, and I recommend its website to anyone seeking more information. Victims tend to be elderly and therefore less likely to use the web, so we must ensure that all mediums are used to get the message over. I trust that the Minister will take note.

One of my elderly constituents recently told my senior caseworker about an unsolicited call he received from a company claiming that his property’s council tax banding was incorrect and that it could secure him a rebate for a fee of £69.99. It immediately took payment from his debit card over the phone, but—surprise, surprise—my constituent then received a letter from the company stating that it could not secure a rebate. The Lanarkshire joint valuation board, which is responsible for setting the council tax bands, could have checked whether the banding was correct at no charge. Therefore, the “service” offered in the original, unsolicited telephone call was completely unnecessary. I am deeply concerned and further troubled that other vulnerable constituents may be affected by the company and its questionable practices.

My research staff looked into the history of the company, which hid behind office moves and changes of directorship. I wrote to the company, raising my concerns about its business practices and requested a refund for my constituent, but the response was lamentable. My office then reported the situation to the local trading standards team at North Lanarkshire Council, who were extremely helpful. After chasing the company for a refund, they visited my constituent and, after assessing the situation, fitted a telephone screening device to prevent further unsolicited sales calls—exactly one of

the devices mentioned by the Minister. Unfortunately, because my constituent used a debit card not a credit card to pay the fee, he was unable to get the money back. Many elderly and vulnerable adults do not have a credit card but, as most of us will know, there is enhanced consumer protection when using one.

Through another case, I have been made aware of a company based in my constituency that has a record of dubious sales practices throughout central Scotland. The company came to my attention when the family of a 79-year-old man, whose wife suffers from dementia, contacted me. The company made an unsolicited visit to the vulnerable couple, offering an external cosmetic service for their home. After taking an initial £800 deposit, the company signed the couple up to nearly £6,000-worth of unnecessary cosmetic work to their home. So keen was it to get the money out of this vulnerable couple that the company did not even check whether they owned the property, which they did not.

Further research into this company shows that they claim to offer a 10-year guarantee, but on closer inspection of their company records a pattern becomes clear. The business practice is to have several companies, with similar names, offering exactly the same services. The directors then fold the company when the heat becomes too great, moving their main business over to one of their many other companies, always with the same two directors in charge. The guarantees are therefore not worth the paper they are written on. That sharp business practice also has a knock-on effect within communities, as it creates reputational risk to other bona fide companies. In an increasingly competitive market, it is difficult for consumers to work out which companies are trustworthy and which are untrustworthy. Unfortunately, many consumers believe that a 10-year guarantee shows that a company is trustworthy, but in the case of this company, nothing could be further from the truth. I also feel for the staff employed by such charlatans, as they, too, may be unaware that the business is built on sand.

I therefore fully support the hon. Member for Solihull and my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) on this, and urge the Minister to show the leadership needed to co-ordinate a strong, public service response to these despicable practices.

2.2 pm

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Julian Knight) and the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) on securing this important debate. Financial scamming and fraud has a devastating impact on the elderly and the vulnerable, and we have heard today, from Members on both sides of the House, stories of both financial loss and the incredible mental distress caused to people, many of whom are among the most vulnerable in our society. Each of us will have constituents who have lost significant sums of money to scams, with many falling victim because they are too trusting, because they underestimate the maliciousness of those who perpetrate these crimes or because they are subjected to a continual bombardment of nuisance calls and, in desperation, give in.

Scammers are highly organised, predatory and exploitative. Yesterday the *Stockport Express*, my local paper, reported that so far this year almost 300 people

[Mary Robinson]

have fallen victim to fraud as a result of cyber-fraud, nuisance calls and bogus traders. In my constituency, trading standards have warned of a recent scam where constituents receive a call claiming they have paid excessive council tax and are encouraged to part with personal banking details in order to gain a refund. Victims cannot even trust the numbers on their phones to be genuine any more, as highlighted on last night's BBC1 programme "Rip Off Britain". This shocking new scam allows fraudsters, with the aid of a simple mobile phone app, to phone victims under a number that appears to be genuine—like a bank's—and helps persuade them to part with sometimes large sums of money. This type of crime is becoming even more sophisticated as criminals are able to "ghost" phone numbers and hijack genuine phone numbers, so they appear legitimate. It is important that we continue to take steps to address these new types of fraud, as and when they appear.

People who are ill, isolated or lonely are particularly affected by these types of crimes, as the internet or phone line may be their only link to the outside world. Leaving aside the financial loss, their feeling of safety in their own homes is undermined, and they often become more isolated and distrusting. I welcome the initiatives that have been put in place to tackle this type of crime, such as setting up the joint fraud taskforce earlier this year, and I look forward to hearing about its achievements and the actions that have been taken to identify intelligence gaps and vulnerabilities. I am pleased that there will be a better co-ordinated approach to the sharing of intelligence between banks and law enforcement agencies, which will address areas currently exploited by fraudsters. I look forward to hearing from the Minister in due course what progress has been made in the few months it has been established. It is vital that we raise awareness about this important issue, so that those most at risk can spot scams and protect themselves. I welcome the work of groups such as the Chartered Trading Standards Institute and its "scambassadors" programme, which I support.

I want to take some time to address the language of scams, which was referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull. The word "scam" implies an idea of culpability or negligence on behalf of the victim, and may change how people view the nature of the crime committed against them. We say that people have been "scammed", "conned" and "cheated", but overwhelming these people should be described as what they are: good, honest people who are the victims of the most heartless fraudulent crime. As a result, the probability that the fraud will be reported decreases, as the victim feels embarrassed, ashamed and guilty.

Finally, I just wanted to mention the importance of a long-term strategy. The elderly as a demographic group is increasing in size year on year. That, combined with changes in pensions drawdown handing capital to people earlier, means that the severity of this, and the necessity for greater protection and awareness, is more profound. Therefore, as we prepare for an ageing population that has greater access to capital in an ever-evolving technology-dominated industry, we must ensure that the most vulnerable in society receive the appropriate support and assistance to protect them from falling victim to these devastating crimes.

2.6 pm

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Dishonest individuals have always sought to deceive and to take advantage of the most vulnerable in society. Sadly, as our world has increasingly moved online, transforming the way we communicate, do business and live so much of our lives, many fraudsters have used the same technologies to increase their activity and come up with ever more elaborate ways of defrauding vulnerable people. Action Fraud estimates that about 70% of fraud is either conducted online or is cyber-enabled. For most of us, casework relating to scams probably makes up a relatively small amount of our postbag and email inboxes, but that does not mean that this is not a sizeable problem. Clearly, many of the people most at risk of fraud and scams are also among the least likely to come forward to their MPs or to the police and other agencies.

Sadly, I do not need to speculate on this matter, as shortly before I was elected a member of my family received a letter that was apparently from the Serious Fraud Office and that said—this is ironic—that it needed help to catch some serious fraudsters. There was a telephone number supplied, which, when rung, gave details. Unsurprisingly, what was needed was some money to be transferred into an account, which could then be used as some kind of "trap" for the "fraudster". Unfortunately, my relative wanted to help the authorities and so transferred the money. Of course, there was then another call saying, "Thank you very much for that. We just need that bit more money." This went on until, fortunately, the one time she went into a post office branch the lady behind the counter, who knew my relative and knew that this was not normal conduct, contacted another relative with her concerns. So this was finally stopped, but only after several thousand pounds had been lost—it still cannot be recovered. More importantly, this has left my relative, who has always been a proud, intelligent and independent person, seeing herself as clumsy and being embarrassed; she feels stupid to have been taken in in such a way.

We, as a must society, must play our part in protecting the most vulnerable, and that includes protecting them against fraudsters, online and otherwise; local authorities, the police and politically and technologically savvy members of our communities must be involved in this. I was heartened to hear my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister authorise the expansion of police volunteer roles, so that individuals with digital skills are able to support police digital investigations by providing the technical expertise to cyber and digital units. That scheme has been piloted in Hampshire and Gloucestershire, and I hope to see it expanded much more widely around the country.

There is much more that can be done in partnership with financial services to trace these criminals. We are all familiar with the necessary anti-money laundering regulations. For anyone wanting to set up a current account or to change signatories on a voluntary organisation's bank account, navigating the endless paperwork can feel like an interminable process, and yet it is apparently impossible in many of these cases to trace the bank accounts into which these transfers have been made. It is even less likely that any of those moneys will ever be recovered. Surely, it is not beyond the wit of man or of the people running these financial institutions to do much more to enable those accounts

to be traced. It is simply not acceptable that victims and vulnerable people are left scared in their own homes. Online threats have changed, and the way that we respond to them must change so that we can protect vulnerable people in our communities.

2.11 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): I wish to congratulate the hon. Members for Solihull (Julian Knight) and for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) on securing this most important debate. I also pay tribute to all those who have spoken today as their contributions have helped us to discuss this very important issue.

Scamming is an increasing problem in our communities, mostly targeting the elderly and vulnerable. The average age of a scam victim is 74. Given that the Office for National Statistics predicts that the number of elderly people in our communities will increase considerably to more than 15 million by 2030, the potential number of scamming victims is likely to increase as well.

It is not only the financial loss that causes pain, but the severe psychological and emotional wounds that can take considerable time to heal. Victims will inevitably suffer financial loss, and very often depression or even relationship breakdowns. What is terrifying is that, potentially, a third of all victims of scams will fall prey to another scam within 12 months.

Mass-mail scams alone cost the UK consumer between £1 billion and £5 billion every year, with an average loss per person of £1,000. It has been known for victims to lose up to £1 million of their savings. This week, a gentleman told a drop-in for scam awareness that he had lost his home to a scammer. There are more than 190 trading standards services across the UK, each working to tackle scams in their area. However, cutbacks and budget pressures mean that the number of officers working on the frontline has fallen by 53% since 2009. Some service areas are running with fewer than one professionally trained member of staff.

The current budget for trading standards services across the UK equates to just £1.99 per person per year. These local teams are in place to step in when a victim of a financial scam is identified and to work with the police to help bring justice. However, the fact that only 5% of victims report crimes, often due to embarrassment, means that criminals continue to scam vulnerable people of their savings with little consequence.

The National Trading Standards scams team was founded in 2012 and identifies vulnerable individuals to the local authority teams by using captured criminal databases. The team shares a £13 million target along with other financial crime teams, which is shockingly low when we consider that financial scammers cost UK consumers between £5 billion and £10 billion every year. National Trading Standards could tackle this issue more effectively in partnership with other Government agencies, such as adult social care and the police, by sharing intelligence and safeguarding victims. However, both bodies are experiencing their own limits on resources,

reducing the opportunity for partnership with National Trading Standards. Safeguards against scams, harm and abuse need to be an integral part of care and support. This is a perfect example of this Government cutting funding to vital services, which has a detrimental effect on the public.

A vital tool in combating financial scams is consumer awareness. Many websites sell direct marketing leads to any purchaser without restriction. Many websites allow people to purchase lists of personal details for “market research”. However, those people do not necessarily have to represent a business to use them. One such site that I identified was Targets Located, which has a top 10 of people to be scammed. Disabled car buyers is at No. 1, with 390,000 people receiving the high rate mobility component of DLA—they are ripe for the picking. Second is high-stake shareholders. The third place belongs to people who regularly donate to charity. Such sites are making sure that, for a small fee, people can acquire the personal details of the most vulnerable people in our society. Regulation on the sale of personal data would dramatically reduce the number of vulnerable people falling victim to financial scams.

To tackle the issue of scamming, the Government seriously need to review police funding. Police resources are already suffering as a result of police budgets decreasing year on year. Should that be allowed to continue, we will see more scams being carried out in all our communities. Co-operation between trading standards and the police is vital but it can only happen if both services are given the funding for resources that they so desperately need. We have a moral responsibility to protect the elderly and vulnerable in our society. We must ensure that the resources to do that are made available to the professionals who have the skills to best offer this protection.

2.17 pm

Julian Knight: I thank all Members for their contributions to this debate. The variety of stories and concerns highlights the fact that this subject touches so many of our constituents, and, in some instances, our immediate families. I welcome the Minister to her place and her commitment to focus the Government on tackling this most cruel and silent of crimes. This issue concerns not just Government, but private firms, the third sector and the wider society in general. Fraud will always be there, but we can make it harder for those involved if we act together.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House believes that the elderly and vulnerable are a high-risk group from having harm done to their financial, emotional and psychological wellbeing from criminals who target them with scam calls, post and visits; praises the work that trading standards bodies do to combat scams; calls on financial institutions and the communications industry to put in place mechanisms to protect potential victims from scams; further calls on the Government to recognise the threat from scams to victims’ ability to live independently; draws attention to the measures proposed by Bournemouth University, the Chartered Trading Standards Institute and National Trading Standards Scams Team on financial harm as useful first steps in tackling such scams; and calls on the Government to make suggestions on further steps to tackle such criminality.

Fourth Industrial Revolution

2.18 pm

Mr Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House acknowledges that the UK is in a strong economic position to take advantage of the Fourth Industrial Revolution; welcomes the view of the World Economic Forum that fusing physical, digital and biological technologies can promote further economic growth; notes that small and medium-sized businesses across the country contribute invaluable expertise and market leadership; and calls upon the Government to continue introducing and supporting policies that keep the UK at the forefront of this revolution in the future.

I thank the hon. Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) and other Members across the House for supporting my application for the debate, and the Backbench Business Committee for giving me the opportunity to bring the motion before the House. I believe that this is the first time that the topic has been debated in the Chamber.

Two hundred and fifty years ago, the world's first industrial revolution began here in Britain. New engines driven by coal and steam made manufactured goods and allowed them to be transported across the country on new railways, roads, bridges and viaducts, heralding a new era of British industrial strength.

Now, 250 years later, after two further industrial ages, driven first by electricity and then by electronics and the internet, we stand on the cusp of a new, fourth, industrial revolution. Since the turn of the century, we have witnessed an unprecedented fusion of technologies that blurs the traditional boundaries between the physical, digital and biological spheres. This fourth industrial revolution is now accelerating, characterised by an exponential increase in automation, digital connectivity and technological innovation. Breakthroughs and new products in fields such as artificial intelligence, advanced robotics, the internet of things, driverless cars, drones, 3D printing and nanotechnology, to name but a few, have captured the imagination of the public and the attention of policymakers.

This revolution offers significant economic growth and productivity advantages to the countries that seize those corresponding opportunities, as well as new jobs, lower prices, more competition and greater product choice for consumers. These technological advances will also disrupt almost every industry in every country and pose profound economic, political and social challenges, especially to countries and communities that are unprepared or unresponsive.

At the global level, the World Economic Forum has taken the lead in exploring this issue. Indeed, the 4IR, as it has become known, was the theme at its annual meeting this year in Davos. At a national level, however, we in this House have a key role to play by leading the debate, understanding the opportunities and challenges, and making the 4IR a success for Britain. The fact that we have a new Government Department and new Minister recently in place, and a new industrial strategy, makes today's debate all the more timely and relevant.

My view on the issue is clear. Britain is in a global race for economic success and we must actively seize the opportunities presented by the 4IR to drive economic growth, proactively shaping and harnessing the technological and social changes that it brings for the nation's benefit. Britain can and should develop an

early economic comparative advantage to become a world leader in the new 4IR global economy, but to do this, we must take a proactive, free market approach to policy formulation, and prepare for the impact of disruptive technologies, not just react to them. Put simply, we must make mastering the new 4IR a key part of the Government's industrial strategy. Just as Britain launched the first industrial revolution 250 years ago, it can and must lead the new 4IR in this new century.

To understand the scale of the innovation that is taking place on a practical level, we should consider for a moment some of the new products and services that are already transforming the way we live and work. The 4IR's key technological advances are pervasive digital connectivity, widespread automation, and advanced computer software based on machine learning and artificial intelligence techniques. All these give rise to a range of economically disruptive products and services, including driverless vehicles, robotic manufacturing and 3D printing. This shift from the simple digitisation of information that is so characteristic of the third industrial revolution to a fusion of technologies that will help businesses, streamline production, lower costs and deliver new products is truly revolutionary.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): Well done to my hon. Friend and county colleague for securing the debate. I recognise the technologies that he said underpinned the fourth industrial revolution, but does he agree that other technologies will revolutionise our lives, not least synthetic biology, in which we are a world leader? Will he support me in encouraging the Government and the Minister to revive the vigour that is needed for the eight great technologies policy, which the Government adopted not four years ago?

Mr Mak: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. I know that he has a long record of passionate activity in this field. I certainly support him in his aims, and look forward to working with him on that. I will mention those technologies later in my speech. What he said reflects the transition from the digitisation of information to the real fusion of technologies, whether biological, physical or digital. For example, it is already conceivable that entire factories could become automated, requiring only a constant supply of energy and raw materials in order to operate 24 hours a day. That certainly affects the biotech sector as well.

Similarly, the 4IR is already blurring the lines between manufacturing and the service sector as networked products make life easier for consumers. For example, smart boilers that monitor themselves to detect faults, call an engineer and even pre-order spare parts are already making their way into the consumer market.

This fast-moving and innovative environment to which my hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) referred also presents opportunities for Britain's small and medium-sized enterprises, which are often the most nimble when it comes to job creation and launching new products. An excellent example comes from my Havant constituency, where local start-up Dream 3D is getting a head start in the 4IR economy by selling 3D printers and providing training about how to use them. The founder James Preen and his growing team have seized the opportunities presented by the 4IR to create new jobs in a new industry, selling new products and generating new wealth.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): I praise my hon. Friend for securing this extremely important debate. I suspect that we will come back to this subject many times in the coming decades, if not centuries.

Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the important things that we in the House need to begin to think about is a change to patent law? The UK has the principle that the first to file secures the rights. On that point about SMEs, does he agree that “first to invent” is surely the best way for securing a patent? If there is a wait for the first to file, we give an advantage to large companies that can afford to file many patents.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. Mr Tugendhat, interventions are meant to be short. If you want to make a speech, I will put you on the list, but keep interventions short.

Mr Mak: My hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) makes a strong case. A strong legal regime, especially in respect of intellectual property, is certainly key to making Britain a world leader in the 4IR. I thank him for making that point, which is one that Dream 3D, the business in my constituency, is very well aware of. Its success has been predicated on protecting the work that it has produced. It is no surprise that its clients already include Rolls-Royce, Land Rover and Pinewood Studios. That said, larger businesses of the sort that my hon. Friend also mentioned can bring scale and expertise to innovative processes. Havant-based defence contractor Lockheed Martin, for example, has used its big data expertise to develop a new system called Mailmark that helps Royal Mail to track parcels more efficiently as the e-commerce economy grows.

It is clear that by embracing these new disruptive 4IR technologies, we can create new jobs, deliver new services and generate new economic growth. It is also clear that the countries that are best able to take advantage of the 4IR are those with nimble free market economies, low taxes and a competitive regulatory environment. I hope that the Minister, who I congratulate on his appointment, will confirm that the Government will continue to focus on pro-enterprise policies that will make Britain a world leader when it comes to starting and growing a business, particularly in the new 4IR economy.

I can offer three suggestions as the Minister and his new colleagues develop our new industrial strategy. First, the economic benefits of the 4IR must be shared throughout the country and not just concentrated in London or the south-east. Regional investment funds for 4IR technologies should therefore be made available to promote regional hubs that will stimulate growth and innovation outside the M25. I see local enterprise partnerships as key partners and potential funders in this process.

Secondly, Government should use their procurement power to buy British when it comes to 4IR products. Advanced economies such as Israel already play a key role in helping new sectors to develop, and our Government should do the same. Finally, Britain must continue to invest in its digital infrastructure, which is as essential today for our future economy as railways were in the age of steam. This should include a new phase of the fibre optic broadband rollout and 5G mobile internet. I commend those suggestions to the Minister, and draw

his attention to a forthcoming report from the Institute of Economic Affairs and the Free Enterprise group of Conservative MPs, which will set out more.

We should be clear that, while the 4IR will certainly bring economic benefits, it will also cause societal challenges, but by shaping the way in which the 4IR evolves, we can tackle these issues head on. For example, as automation increasingly substitutes for human labour, the displacement of workers by machines could result in short-term unemployment, especially in low-skill or low-wage sectors of the economy. The Government certainly have a role to play in dampening the downside effects of the 4IR, principally by bridging the gap between short-term unemployment and long-term prosperity, primarily through welfare, education and training policies.

We should be clear that the technology that I have talked about and the disruption that it may bring is not an external force over which we have no control. All of us in this House have a duty to be responsible and to help guide its evolution, so while Britain must grasp the opportunities of the 4IR, we must also shape and direct it to reflect a future and economy that involves our common objectives and shared values.

As the fourth industrial revolution gathers pace, we in Britain should embrace it, encourage its growth, harness its benefits and shape its evolution. We must act now to ensure that our political and economic structures are fit for purpose. From continued investment in digital infrastructure to reform of our welfare and education policies, the Government have a key role to play. At the same time, we must address the 4IR's shortcomings, making sure that no one is left behind as we reshape our economy and society. This new industrial revolution must consist not of changes that happen to us, but changes that work for us all.

Throughout our history, Britain has adopted a pro-innovation approach to technological developments from farming mechanisation to domestic labour-saving devices. We have never allowed fears about the future to stunt our economic or social progress. We soon realised, for example, the folly of requiring early cars to be preceded by a man carrying a red flag, and we must adopt the same forward thinking, pro-innovation approach when it comes to the 4IR because here in Britain we reach for the future rather than just yearn for the past.

Just as before, the new wave of technological change can bring about substantial benefits from greater productivity, new jobs and lower production costs, to more choice for consumers through new goods and services. I hope that the Government will take that proactive and positive approach by placing the fourth industrial revolution at the heart of its new industrial strategy. In doing so, we can usher in a new manufacturing renaissance, launch a new industrial era built on high-quality innovation and, above all, give Britain the head start it deserves in the global race for success.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. May I suggest to Members that they speak for up to 10 minutes? Let us try and ensure that everybody gets the same amount of time.

2.29 pm

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): Being called second to speak in a debate is a new experience for me; it feels like going to the airport and being upgraded.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Havant (Mr Mak) for including me in the discussion that led to this debate and for allowing me to second the motion, which is a privilege. He spoke brilliantly. As we listened to him, we realised how exciting and exhilarating the idea of a fourth industrial revolution is.

There is one aspect of this revolution that should have every decision maker in our economy on high alert: the rapidity with which it is occurring. The fourth industrial revolution will sweep through our economy in a matter of years, rather than the centuries it took the previous industrial revolutions to unfold. Sadly, we have been fed a diet of automated cars and drones to deliver our groceries, which to those of us of a certain age has a certain “Tomorrow’s World” feeling about it. The truth is that this revolution is already under way. Consumers are already controlling their home heating and security with their mobile phones. People’s hand-held devices are controlling real-world events via the cloud. That is happening today, but we have barely crossed the start line in this race.

Microsoft alone is investing £5 billion in capital expenses worldwide to build data centre infrastructure, which gives us an idea of the scale of the transformation that is yet to come. Advances in nanotechnology, 3D printing and renewable energy are opening up a multiplicity of opportunities for medical, academic and industrial research. Our universities are rising to the challenge. Next year, for example, the University of Sussex will open a new £10 million centre for computing, robotic electronics and mechatronics. I would welcome an intervention from the hon. Member for Havant to tell me what “mechatronics” means; perhaps we can visit the University of Sussex and discover that together.

Although many of these new trends will be powerful enough to break through regardless of market conditions, there are several barriers that will need to be dealt with. The private sector will need to tackle the threat of data security. Cyber threats pose a real-world problem to those who have been affected by them and a psychological barrier to those who have not. The private sector must also invest in management skills to ensure that their businesses can be effectively led through this change. They must put aside the territorial needs of their business to ensure that the technologies work across platforms and geographical areas.

There are challenges that Governments must be active in supporting our economy to overcome. One is the infrastructure for the future economy—the internet. Internet speeds are increasing, but consumers and commerce will need reliability as well as speed. The biggest challenge that we must overcome is that of making sure that the next generation is equipped with the skills to contribute collectively to our economy of the future and personally thrive in it. There is a danger that the rate of change in our economy will not be matched by the ability to produce and retain the skills that are needed.

I am a supporter of the Government’s apprenticeship levy, but it is being rolled out too fast to ensure that the benefits reach all parts of our economy. Nowhere is that more acute than in the technology sector. Here, post-16

training is too late. Training needs to happen before 16, and preferably from primary school upwards, if we are to develop the programming skills and high levels of creative thinking that are needed by cutting-edge technology firms. Forcing large technology companies to pay for post-16 skills development could have the perverse effect of forcing them to divert funding away from pre-16 investment in schools and to end up recruiting from abroad.

The key goal is to equip our students and young people with the social, creative and academic skills that they will need in a fast-evolving economy. To date, this has not been achieved. I agree with the former Tory Minister, Lord Baker, when he says that the back-to-basics approach to the curriculum is preventing the social and creative development that we need. In a report for the Edge Foundation, which he chairs, he says:

“The government’s White Paper has a firm commitment for students to focus on seven academic subjects at GCSE – English language, English literature, maths, two sciences, a modern or ancient language, geography or history, plus probably a third science. This is word-for-word the curriculum laid down by the Education Act of 1904, though it added three subjects – drawing, cooking for girls, and carpentry or metalwork for boys.”

I have no doubt that had the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) remained as Education Secretary for just one more week, we would have had those three subjects on the curriculum as well.

The report goes on to say:

“We should not go back to a 19th century diet of academic subjects for all. All young people should make and do things as part of a broad and balanced curriculum.”

Emotional intelligence will be as important to the future economy of our country as academic intelligence has been in the past. According to the Manufacturers Organisation, the EEF, staff skills are the No. 1 need of manufacturers. It is important to remember that the fourth industrial revolution is not only about the digital; it is also about manufacturing. Britain must have confidence as we move into this next stage of our economic life, and accept that we have the same potential to “make things” as we did in the first industrial revolution.

It was 30 years ago today that Margaret Thatcher opened the Nissan factory in Sunderland. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”] I pause to allow those on the Government Benches to celebrate. Back then, people thought our automotive industry was on its last legs. Now we know that it is one of the most advanced and successful in the world. Thirty years ago car doors closed with a loud clunk; today they do so with a soft click. That is because of the huge effort and expense that go into innovation and material design in our country and explains why this part of our economy can and must work in tandem with, not apart from, the revolution that is unfolding.

The manufacturing sector will contribute to and benefit from the fourth industrial revolution. It has a lot to offer and a lot to gain. The progress made by Jaguar Land Rover and Nissan since the 1980s shows what can be achieved in Britain’s foundation industries, including the use of metals and materials. This has the potential to benefit our new economy massively. From steel to ceramics, coatings and Graphene, this £200 billion sector has the potential to provide the innovation and materials that are strong and light enough to make the robotic dreams of tomorrow a reality. I sense my hon. Friend

the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) twitching at the mention of ceramics, and I will be listening out for her contribution shortly.

However, this sector is omitted from the Government's catapult centres, even though the potential for them to integrate with the technology sector is enormous. I hope the Minister will listen to the voices in this sector and play an active part in bridging any gaps there may be between the manufacturing and the technological sectors of the fourth industrial revolution. The benefits to this sector from the unfolding revolution are clear. Supply chains and production lines will move towards a system with end-to-end autonomous decision making by machines, continuous demand sensing, and better use of resources. In short, there will be less error, more efficiency and higher productivity.

Finally, I move to the other end of our economy, because this revolution will impact on the self-employed as well as the tech giants and the manufacturers. Between 2000 and 2015, the number of British people working alone rose by 73%. The largest growth has been in the service sector, primarily supplying education, health and business services. The fourth industrial revolution will transform these people's connection, virtualisation, and cloud computing experiences. Huge power that has been available only to large companies and public sector departments will now be readily available to individuals. One person with the right skills and imagination will have the power and capacity to make a transformational impact in the economy of the future.

The challenge that we face is to make sure that this power is available to everyone from whatever background. I do not believe that entrepreneurial spirit was a gift to the middle classes; I believe it was a gift to humanity. But unless we equip every young person with the right skills, many will find the door to modern life and all its wonders slammed in their face. The time to ensure that that does not happen is now.

2.39 pm

Chris White (Warwick and Leamington) (Con): May I, too, start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr Mak) on securing this important debate? May I also say how delighted I am to follow the hon. Member for Hove (Peter Kyle)? I thank him, as a colleague on the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, for yet another excellent contribution.

Industry 4.0—we all call it different things—is an extremely dynamic prospect and something that the UK must fully embrace in the years to come. I do not know whether we can talk about centuries to come, as my hon. Friend did earlier, but I know what he was trying to say. As the co-chair of the all-party group on manufacturing, I appreciate the importance of raising awareness of this topic, and this debate gives us a great opportunity to do so.

In my intervention in business questions this morning, I was pleased to be encouraged by the Leader of the House to raise the issue of industrial strategy with the Backbench Business Committee, and I hope my hon. Friend will join me in making that application.

Using technology to aid production is clearly not a new idea, but the advancement of digital and machinery in the last decade has brought to light the concept of this industrial revolution. The first saw the Victorians

rapidly improving their wealth and their economic outlook, and we must not underestimate the ability of state-of-the-art systems to change and have a similar impact on the way we do things now. A particular point to stress is that other nations are advancing on this issue, and that is why we must keep up. Countries such as Japan and Germany are already understanding the benefits of these technologies, and we cannot allow them to have this window to themselves.

Through-life engineering services are one way in which we can help innovation to flourish in the UK. The aims of TES are to improve the availability, predictability and reliability of complex engineering products, to deliver the lowest possible whole-life cost. This is an area where we can take the lead. I recently spoke at the launch of the new TES national strategy, and such a focus on improving the design of systems is an important way forward.

More broadly, we need to act now to compete internationally. The adoption of cyber-physical systems that are able to collect data, provide insights and be used on a large scale in heavy industries is vital for the UK manufacturing sector moving forward. Machines using self-optimisation and self-configuration allow complex tasks to be completed in a way that dramatically increases cost efficiencies and delivers better quality.

The potential is obviously immense. Businesses will be able to streamline production, reduce waste, conduct rapid prototyping, exploit new business models and dynamically engage with customers in real time. A European Parliament briefing paper estimates that improvements in efficiencies of between 6% and 8% can be achieved and that, in Germany alone, industry 4.0 will add 1% of GDP to the economy.

One of the recurring themes from meetings of the all-party group is the need to plug the skills gap. As mentioned in the group's submission to the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee's inquiry into the productivity plan, the current level of skills in the UK is inadequate for the future success of manufacturing. Satisfying this need for high-level skills is vital for productivity and can be done in a number of ways. Firms need to invest in increasing capacity, and the flow of talented individuals into the workforce must be continuous, with apprenticeships a notable factor in making that difference. Industry 4.0 and its associated benefits are a way of speeding up that process and improving the outlook in terms of our skills shortage. I hope the Government can enhance their support in that regard.

The backing of the UK catapult centres is proving extremely successful. The Digital Economy Bill, which seeks to improve our digital infrastructure, is an encouraging indication of the Government's commitment, but we should continue to look at all possibilities to secure the UK's role as a leading research nation. Investment in R and D will encourage new production in the UK, as well as further reshoring. R and D tax credits have been a major boost, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises.

Another recurring theme in discussing the future of manufacturing is the reshoring of production and the significant impact this has on the sector and the national economy as a whole. In enhancing our efforts, an increase in intelligent automation can be a significant driver of economic growth. With such a significant change, new

[Chris White]

business models should be analysed, and the adoption of the concept of industry 4.0 fully considered. The significant investment needed may hinder small and medium-sized businesses in the medium term, considering the high level of funding needed to pursue such systems.

There are also issues of data protection. With such technologies, the large volume of data used in production will obviously be sensitive. If competitors were to access the information gathered by smart machinery, profits could be squeezed. It is therefore imperative that legislation around data protection is tight before businesses can be confident about changing their business models.

To name just one more challenge that I see in the digitisation of the market, there is a concern that our talent pool will lack the necessary skills to operate machinery encompassed by the concept of industry 4.0. It is generally accepted that there is a shortage of experts in information and communications technology, and that may be more pronounced in terms of the need for cyber-security and the transfer of big data.

If we are to push forward with industry 4.0, we need to ensure that the whole system, including education and apprenticeships, works in harmony to provide the necessary skills. The industrial strategy is particularly relevant in that respect.

It is therefore clear that we have an incredible opportunity to rapidly advance manufacturing in the UK, and this debate is an excellent way of kick-starting the discussion around how we go about embracing these new technologies and how we overcome the challenges involved in doing so.

2.46 pm

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): It is impossible to be from Inverclyde and not to reference the lessons of history when talking about how we can best implement new technologies in our economy. I hope other Members will forgive me for indulging in a short history lesson, but without Greenock-born James Watt we would not be talking about a first industrial revolution, never mind a fourth.

Many Members will be aware that Inverclyde was once a world leader in technological innovation. For hundreds of years we led the way in shipbuilding innovation, with ships such as the Port Glasgow-built PS Comet, which operated the first commercially successful steamboat service in Europe. That technological innovation created thousands of jobs and led to a massive increase in manufacturing production.

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries Inverclyde's shipyards remained world-leading innovators, building the advanced warships of the day and the most cost-effective merchant vessels, which expanded our influence in the world. It was an imperfect industry, but people could take pride in their work, and we can declare without hesitation that this was an integral part of Scotland's story as a nation.

In the 1980s the UK Government withdrew public funding for shipbuilding. The subsequent collapse of the industry meant that, by 1986, Greenock and Port Glasgow's male unemployment rate had risen to 26%. The UK Government told us the private sector would create jobs where publicly supported industries had

failed. I will concede they were partially correct about that—a McDonald's restaurant is now situated where the walls of the Scott Lithgow shipyard once stood.

In 1988 Margaret Thatcher visited Greenock's IBM plant to highlight how we would transition to new industries and lead the way in an electronics revolution. However, the revolution has been short-lived, and IBM will permanently end its involvement with the Spango Valley site in Greenock later this month. The first three industrial revolutions brought success to Inverclyde, yet they ultimately ended with periods of rapid decline. These eras created wealth for factory owners and multinational technology companies, but too often the workers were left to pick up the pieces when these industries ended. As a result, Inverclyde now suffers from a high rate of depopulation, and the remaining local businesses and public services are struggling to survive under the long shadow of those historical failures.

The point of that history lesson is this: Inverclyde shows us that technological innovation will never reach its full potential if it lacks a social conscience. The motion before us states that

"the UK is in a strong economic position to take advantage of the Fourth Industrial Revolution".

In my constituency, we have not yet resolved the issues arising from the decline of the previous technological ages. Undoubtedly the fourth industrial revolution can be part of the solution, as long as constituencies such as mine receive adequate levels of support; otherwise, this innovation will only reinforce inequality as the more developed parts of the economy continue to benefit the most from rapid technological advances. The UK Government have an obligation to offer more assistance to Inverclyde, given their catastrophic failures of the past. The Government took extraordinary measures to destroy industry in Inverclyde; I would now like them to take extraordinary measures to help us take advantage of the fourth industrial revolution.

Renewable energy will be a major component of Scotland's future technological innovation. Inverclyde would be well placed to take advantage of these developments. Inverclyde is one of the few areas with the geography to utilise nearly all forms of renewable energy. We have a coastline and can therefore contribute to tidal power, and we have enough rural space and hills to facilitate wind farms. The burns that run off those hills can power hydro schemes, as they did in the past, and while solar will never fulfil all our requirements, it could be a valuable contributor. Further, we are already a producer of biomass fuels, and wood chips produced in Inverclyde are being used all over Scotland. Inverclyde has a large amount of unused industrial land, and these sites could be centres of manufacturing once again, while our port facilities mean that we are able easily to export the completed products to their required destinations. Every renewables business that we establish would result in associated benefits for suppliers and other local businesses.

While I welcome the UK Government's decision to bring industry strategy back on to the policy-making agenda, I fear they will not prioritise the needs of constituencies such as Inverclyde. Where the UK Government do have power, we are witnessing a lack of vision. Renewables could transform Inverclyde, yet policy decisions made here in London are stifling the industry's potential. The UK Government have shown a complete

lack of foresight in withdrawing much of the financial support that was available for the renewables sector, so not only are the UK Government the chief architect of a social and economic disaster in the west of Scotland, but they are actively damaging industries that could make the area vibrant once again. The fourth industrial revolution promises us so much—“smart” manufacturing, increasingly integrated technologies, and even white goods and household appliances that connect to the internet—but what my constituents are really asking for is employment: not low-level, poorly paid jobs, but skilled, high-value employment that will boost other businesses and educational institutions in the area.

The industrial revolution failed to lift the landed poor out of poverty. It created vast amounts of wealth, but increasingly that wealth is being accumulated in a smaller and smaller section of society. I want the UK Government to demonstrate two things: first, how they plan on driving forward the fourth industrial revolution; and secondly, how this technology will be used to benefit the social and economic situation of everyone in society. With an astute eye for the future, the fourth industrial revolution could lead to a period of unrivalled prosperity for this country, but without the Government's stewardship, these new technologies will only reinforce social, gender and regional inequalities.

James Heapey (Wells) (Con): The hon. Gentleman was not in the Chamber yesterday afternoon when I spoke in the climate change debate, so I thought I would inform him that through employing some of these new technologies, Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust in London has been able to install in a hospital a combined heat and power system that saves it £2 million a year on its operating costs. It has done that not through Government promotion but because the technology is there and it has sought to adopt it, and it is doing immediate good for that public service.

Ronnie Cowan: I have wonderful examples of the same thing in my own constituency. Biomass fuel heating is a fantastic innovation if used properly. At the same time, the Government are reducing tariffs on various sorts of wind energy and solar power. It is part of the whole mix if we are going to get this right.

I want to see a fairer and more prosperous society that has employment and opportunities for our young people. Without this sense of progress and social justice, technological advancement will only work against those that need the most assistance. It is time for the UK Government to show how their industrial strategy will benefit working people—and if they are unwilling to do so, transfer the powers to Scotland and let us get on with the job.

2.54 pm

James Heapey (Wells) (Con): Speaking twice in 25 hours is a record for me, and I am grateful for the opportunity. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr Mak), who has secured a worthwhile debate and opened it brilliantly. I apologise for being late, but I was working on the Energy and Climate Change Committee's paper on renewable heat and transport targets, which will be released this evening. I commend it to the House: it is probably one of the most insightful Select Committee reports that Members will read all year. Indeed, all of our Committee's reports are insightful.

In summing up yesterday's debate, the Minister used some fantastic theatrical references, which I hope will become a tradition of his summing-up speeches. He has an encyclopaedic knowledge of the theatre, so we look forward to that. Today, I present, to use my own theatrical reference, the second part of my play in two parts, in which I will talk about the energy opportunities provided by the collision of emerging technologies and our existing energy infrastructure.

There is some dispute over whether this is the third or fourth industrial revolution. A book by Professor Jeremy Rifkin has become a bit of a bible for me, as I have sought to develop my thinking on how energy policy might evolve. He thinks that this is the third industrial revolution, but none the less it is an excellent read that very much pulls in the same direction as those who are advocating the fourth industrial revolution.

Ministers will already have looked in great detail at the National Infrastructure Commission's "Smart Power" report, which is a fantastic publication setting out how we can harness all these wonderful technologies as we digitise the energy system. The reality, as the report observes, is that we could save £8 billion a year for the UK economy if we digitise our energy system and harness those technologies. That figure represents not just immediate savings on our energy bills, but gains in productivity.

Nicola Shaw, the head of National Grid, told the BBC "Today" programme last week that we are seeing "a smart energy revolution across the country with consumption adjustments reflecting when energy is cheapest".

The idea that we have to change our consumption habits to meet a changing energy market sounds like a nightmare to most people, but the reality is that we already have many of the technologies in our homes. Most major white goods manufacturers are producing smart appliances already: they are in our shops and, probably unknowingly, we already have them in our homes. Through the internet of things, they will all start to speak to one another to make sure that they operate at the most efficient and cost-effective time. They also report faults, so people will not have to carry on for years with a fridge that uses more power than it should, because it will already have flagged up its fault to whoever manufactured it. These are exciting times and the technologies already exist. It is not, in my view, going to be a case of opting into them, because manufacturers are building them as standard and they will increasingly do so.

The Government face a challenge in preparing our homes, businesses and society for the internet of things from an energy perspective, so I will give my thoughts on our system preparedness before moving on to examples of where we are already seeing the huge economic advantages.

As Ministers know only too well, the smart meter programme is the keystone in achieving the digitisation of our energy system, and I know that they will be keen to push on with that roll-out at best speed. Everything that we seek to do in bringing technological innovation into the energy space depends on those smart meters being in place to digitise the system. Similarly, on the way in which our grid is put together, we want all our generational capacity—from the smallest to the largest—to be able to speak in real time about what it is producing,

[James Heapey]

so that we can have a more dynamic generation system. We also need to sort out the regulatory framework for storage, because at the moment people have, in effect, to pay for their energy twice: first when it is generated, and secondly when it is released from storage. Surely, that cannot continue for much longer.

We also have to make sure that our distribution networks—the substations in our communities—are capable of dealing with more dynamic demand and clustered demand, particularly overnight, when people might be taking advantage of cheap energy to charge cars, run the washing machine and tumble dryer, and heat immersion tanks. None of that will happen automatically without the Government paving the way. Thereafter, however, I am sure that these technologies will find their place in the market by themselves. They will make life better, and people will buy them as a result. The Government do not need to encourage people every year or so to change their mobile phone, because people just want to have the latest technology at their disposal. I am sure that that will be the case in this area if the Government create the right regulatory framework with energy policy.

I turn to storage. The price of storage has already come down from \$3,000 per kWh to about \$200 today, and it will come down even more quickly still. We saw over the summer reports about the Tesla Panasonic factory in Colorado, the construction of which is being accelerated quite rapidly given the increase in demand. These are exciting times, because storage is the key to flattening the energy supply curve and unlocking the real potential of renewables.

The real technological wizardry, however, is demand-side response. That may be a combination of words that many in the Chamber have not heard before, but it needs to be at the forefront of the way in which we discuss energy. Flattening the supply curve through the availability of storage deals with only half the problem; flattening the demand curve through demand-side management is equally important.

I have been hugely impressed as I have become enthused about DSR, and as I have gone around various companies that are delivering it, by the scale of the savings that it is bringing to businesses. Marriott hotels have signed up to a DSR contract that saves them hundreds of thousands of dollars a year. Workers at Aggregate Industries' bitumen plants used to just turn up in the morning and fire up the boilers to get the bitumen tanks up to heat. They would operate over the course of the day, and then they would be switched off. Aggregate Industries now employs technologies that allow it to say, "Our tolerance is that we need to keep these tanks at a certain temperature, and provided that they are at that temperature, we can release energy back to the grid." It does so, and it gets money for nothing as a result. By employing those technologies, it can sell back energy that it does not need, which it would otherwise just have paid for and wasted. That creates a huge saving.

Similarly, refrigeration is a massive cost for supermarkets and the food industry in general. Sainsbury's has employed demand-side response, and the store in my constituency in Street, Somerset has released 20 kW of capacity back to the grid simply from DSR. That is extraordinary.

The other area that I want to touch on was the electrification of the transport system. I had to check very carefully with the Clerk of the Energy and Climate

Change Committee about when I would find myself in contempt of Parliament, but I understand that if I draw on the evidence rather than on the report itself, it is fine. This is a hugely exciting opportunity for us to employ electric cars and electric haulage systems in the UK. The problem is that I am not sure that we yet have the infrastructure in place to support them, and I am not sure that we have the right fiscal structure to support them either.

I tried to buy an electric car over the summer, and sadly I found that their range was probably not quite enough to allow me to do my duties around my rural Somerset constituency. They are getting there, however, and we just need to incentivise the acceleration of the technology, so that we get beyond the 100-mile range to a range of 200 or 300 miles. If that happens, I think that people will, all of a sudden, go for electric cars quite quickly. All the incentives that the Government have in place—the £4,500 that they contribute towards the car and the contribution they make towards a charging point at the buyer's home—are fantastic. The Government's emphasis on establishing a charging infrastructure at motorway service stations and on main roads is also fantastic, but we really need to grow the infrastructure much more if people are to buy the cars and make the saving that we hope they will. The argument is that electric cars will make us more productive as well, particularly when we go beyond merely electric cars to electric autonomous cars, and we find that we can move around our towns and cities much more freely.

Interestingly, in the United States, Coca-Cola has employed hydrogen-electric hybrid vehicles for its entire fleet, and it has made a 20% reduction on its fuel costs. It made that huge saving by employing those technologies and electrifying its transport fleet, which is very exciting. We should look across at that and realise that this is not just something that people do if they are green and they want to be environmentally sensitive. It is something that an individual or a business can do if they want to reduce their operating costs—technology colliding with energy generation and energy consumption to make us more efficient and more cost-effective, and to make all our operating costs that bit cheaper.

Mr Deputy Speaker, you encouraged us to keep within 10 minutes, so I will summarise, rather than go into the many more examples that I am itching to provide. The bottom line is that, while we will focus very much on our digital infrastructure with broadband and 5G mobile phones and we will worry very much about the preparedness of our airports and air routes, as well as of our roads and rail, the energy infrastructure is just as important. In my view, alongside the broadband and mobile phone networks, the three sets of infrastructure of telecoms, broadband and energy will drive the fourth—or third—industrial revolution and allow us to harness all these fantastic technologies. We should seek to do so not just because we are seeking to arrest climate change, but because it is cost-effective, makes business sense, will increase productivity and, ultimately, will be great for our economy.

3.5 pm

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Havant (Mr Mak) and my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) on securing this crucial debate.

I am proud to represent the greatest city of the first industrial revolution. [*Interruption.*] I thought I was going to get away with that. In Stoke-on-Trent, we pioneered the modern ceramics industry, as visionaries such as Josiah Wedgwood and Thomas Minton transformed the very landscape, with the pot banks and factories of a world-conquering industry. The clay and coal beneath our feet fuelled a vast, dynamic economy and funded the great civic buildings and canal networks that still stand in testament to that industry. With last week's news that Churchill China is planning to invest in new jobs and machinery in the city, building on the additional investment at Steelite, that legacy is very much alive to this day.

For my city and my constituents, who have worked the clay for generations, the path to prosperity lies in the renewal of British industry and in the creation of a prosperous, balanced economy that utilises all of our country's strengths—our creativity, technical acumen and the knowledge gained from hundreds of years of craftsmanship. Advances in modern technology and material engineering present an opportunity to rebuild a local economy and to celebrate a city far too often overlooked. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hove mentioned, such new horizons are already visible in the ceramics industry, in which advances in material transformation mean that ceramic technology could and should be utilised in new and extraordinary ways, from bone transplants and hip replacements to mobile transmitters and energy conductors. Trials have even been done on lightweight ceramic body armour to protect the next generation of British armed forces.

We now need to make these ambitions a reality for my constituents, and to lay the groundwork for a truly 21st-century ceramics industry in the city that has led it since the 19th century. Plans for a new hub for materials research in the city—the applied materials research and innovation centre—are already under way, supported by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Imperial College London and Cambridge University, which demonstrates that Stoke-on-Trent and the UK really are leading the way.

This revolution has the potential to unleash extraordinary economic growth and to improve our quality of life greatly, and we must seize this opportunity to create an economy that works for everyone. We must harness these new technologies to breathe new life into traditional industries and lead a renaissance in British manufacturing. Let us be clear that this, and no less than this, is required. The fourth industrial revolution has the power to drive our country and our communities forward to a brave new world of scientific discovery, material comfort and sustained economic growth.

I wish, however, to sound a note of caution to those who assume that greater prosperity and opportunity are a foregone conclusion. We should not fear change, but we must support our communities to adapt to new industries and new opportunities, because with great change can come great upheaval and economies can develop and adapt in ways we cannot always predict. There can be unforeseen consequences from an economic boom pursued without care. The true mark of a strong economy is that it allows each of us to live comfortably and well, without hunger or want. Losing sight of that aim results in ever greater disparities in wealth and opportunity, to the detriment of us all. Progress may be

inevitable, but prosperity is not. Our own actions will determine whether the promise of this fourth industrial revolution is realised, and whether its opportunities will be accessible to the many or the few.

The fourth industrial revolution needs to be guided in such a way as to provide equality of opportunity and balanced regional investment. Communities such as mine in the post-industrial regions, long neglected by successive Governments and lacking the resources to retrain and upskill our workforce, could be hit hardest if we get that wrong. The challenge we face is not only to capitalise on the new technologies but to ensure that the rewards are distributed equitably and that everyone has the chance to get ahead. That is why we need a Government who provide businesses, workers and entrepreneurs with the support they need.

For Stoke-on-Trent, that means a coherent industrial strategy that plays to our strengths in ceramic manufacturing and engineering, and supports us to develop the associated industries that any successful city regeneration is built on. During my first year in Parliament, I have been working with local employers, businesses and universities to do just that. Supported by the Staffordshire chamber of commerce, we are working to develop a clear industrial strategy for our city, with a set of achievable goals to improve our infrastructure, tackle our skills shortages and secure the inward investment that we desperately need.

Throughout our city, there is recognition that a piecemeal approach to economic renewal is not enough. We need a long-term plan that sets out to tackle the particular obstacles we face. That means overcoming the challenges in skills and education and offering greater opportunities for our young people, not just in traditional trades but in digital technology, coding and advanced materials. I welcome the Government's decision to lift the age cap on apprenticeships to allow more people to learn new skills and trades, but we must also work to open people's eyes to the many new industries that are being thrown open by the digital revolution.

We also need a fresh commitment to lifelong learning, so that people can learn new skills throughout their lives and adapt to an ever more fluid labour market. So much potential is wasted because people are not being granted the opportunity to develop themselves throughout their working lives.

Cities such as Stoke-on-Trent also need investment in the critical infrastructure needed to grow our local economy, whether that be transport links or superfast broadband. Projects such as the ceramic valley enterprise zone are a very welcome boost, but I fear that they are not sufficient in isolation to deliver a strong local economy. A full infrastructure evaluation of our northern and midland cities would show that the Government are committed to building an economy that works for every nation and region, and help to put flesh on the bones of the so-called northern powerhouse. We need an industrial strategy that supports businesses that want to expand or to invest in new technologies—especially new ceramic technology—and supports R and D into those new technologies, as we saw with the breakthrough in graphene technology at Manchester University.

Britain can and must lead the way in this revolution, but we must also ensure that opportunity and rewards are spread fairly. We must understand that the faster our society changes, the more people are at risk of

[Ruth Smeeth]

being left behind. By investing now in skills and infrastructure to give everyone the chance to excel, we can overcome those challenges. That is why I urge the Government not to sit back and let events take their course but to invest in the skills, training and infrastructure that we need right now, right across the country, to ensure that everyone has the chance to fulfil their potential. We need to ensure that the opportunities presented by the fourth industrial revolution are open to all, not just a few. We need a commitment from the Government that they will invest in skills and education—in particular, in adult education—so that those whose jobs are at risk can find new, better and better-paid employment in new industries, and we need a genuine industrial strategy that supports the manufacturing and technology industries the length and breadth of our country.

3.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Jesse Norman): It is a pleasure to speak with you in the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr Mak) and the hon. Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) on securing a debate on this very important topic.

According to the World Economic Forum, the fourth industrial revolution is characterised by a range of new technologies that are fusing the physical, digital and biological worlds. As my hon. Friend reminded us, it has, they say, the potential to transform and to integrate products and services to reshape radically the way in which things are made, the factories in which we make them, and the ever more personal and customised uses to which they are put. This can take many forms, be they new web applications, micro robots, peer-to-peer services, advanced manufacturing, personalised medicines and cyber-medical technologies. They, in turn, can be leveraged by big data, and better and more widespread digital connectivity.

I want to speak briefly about what I think the fourth industrial revolution is or might be, why it matters and what the UK is doing to promote these developments. Let me start by saying that I am quite sceptical about the language of the fourth industrial revolution. I share some of the scepticism of my hon. Friend the Member for Wells (James Heapey). Voltaire once rather sardonically remarked that the Holy Roman empire was neither holy nor Roman nor an empire. I worry that the fourth industrial revolution is neither the fourth nor particularly industrial, and not a revolution.

The natures and causes of the original industrial revolution are still, may I remind the House, rather contested. Was it the result of access to coal and high thermic value coal in particular? Was it the result of spreading trade? Was it the result of the bourgeois virtues of thrift and hard work, of tolerance and openness to other countries, or of science and technology? These are still contested matters among historians. What we can say is that it was based on steam, and that something like 150 years later there was one based on electricity.

Where does that leave us now? I think we need to go to the fons et origo, the foundation of all economic discussion: Adam Smith. I was particularly glad that

the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) highlighted the importance of Glasgow, since Smith was Glasgow University's greatest professor at a time when it was, along with other Scottish universities, one of the greatest universities in the world. Smith was wise on many fronts. He was, alongside David Hume, a Unionist above all. He said:

“The Union was a measure from which infinite good has been derived”

to Scotland. He was wise in economics, by pointing to the importance of the division of labour. He pointed out in particular that the capacity for specialisation was limited by the size of the market. He said that we did not get porters in villages. These days we might say that we do not get Uber in towns—the market simply is not big enough.

I would suggest that change today has been powered by the same things it has always been powered by: bigger markets; technological innovation; better materials and access to materials; and, above all, the human appetite for risk and the questing nature of the human imagination. It was one my predecessors, Lord Willetts, who pointed out the eight technologies on which the previous Government founded their industrial strategy, ranging from satellites to agri-science. I think that that marks a better approach to thinking about these issues than talking airily in terms of revolutions.

There is a contrary view, which has been very well articulated by Robert Gordon in his book “The Rise and Fall of American Growth”. He argued that there was a golden century of innovation between 1870 and 1970, a time of genuine transformation through innovative technologies. As John Kay has said, someone who was born when Benjamin Disraeli was Prime Minister and lived to see Edward Heath would have witnessed horse-drawn transport give way to cars and aircraft, medical services that were non-existent replaced by cures for infectious diseases, as well as the introduction of electric light, indoor plumbing and colour television. Each of them was a transformative technology. Paul Volcker has pointed out that the greatest technological change of the past few decades in finance has been the ATM. Anyone who knows anything about finance has a great deal of sympathy with that viewpoint.

These technologies reshape. Gordon's suggestion is that the capacity for transformative innovation has slowed. We have upgrades but we do not have the same life-transforming breakthroughs—breakthroughs such as the washing machine, which even more perhaps than the internet has shaped people's lives—and the result is low growth and low productivity. I do not share that pessimism; for me, the things that matter are imagination, energy, the capacity for risk and the ability to work.

At this point, I should declare an interest by mentioning two projects with which I have been associated. One is the New Model in Technology & Engineering, which will be the first wholly new university for three decades. It will be based in Hereford, and is creating a curriculum along the lines of liberal engineering, tying the liberal imagination of the arts and sciences to the engineering discipline required to create genuine innovation. Its approach will be problem-based rather than curricular, and students will be taught in three-week blocks rather than attending specific lectures. There will be a 46-week curriculum. The university has links with Olin College in America, and with the universities of Warwick and

Bristol in this country. It is not just a very important local institution in embryo, but a potentially national—disruptively national—institution in higher education, and I think that it will do an enormous amount to assist the technologies about which we have talked today.

The other project is, if anything, even more personal. It is a not-for-profit car that my father has designed—a flat-pack vehicle. Even you, Mr Deputy Speaker, with your astonishing breadth of understanding and knowledge, may be surprised to learn that the vehicle can be assembled by three people in a day. It costs a third of the price of a luxury 4x4, and it carries three times the weight. Its target price is under £20,000. It is astonishingly simple, and, of course, achieving such simplicity requires terrific design and terrific engineering. What the project shows is that great innovation does not require high technology; it can come through simplification, or a sense of the possibility that simplification can change manufacturing processes. This is a vehicle that has potentially revolutionary implications for developing countries.

Let me now deal with our own situation more widely. My hon. Friend the Member for Havant rightly highlighted the importance of policies that support enterprise, as did the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth), and I very much share that view, but manufacturing companies in this country are overwhelmingly employers of 50 people or fewer, and those small firms account for more than 50% of manufacturing employment. Small and medium-sized enterprises will be the lifeblood of change over the next few decades, as they are today, because they are versatile in their manufacturing and light on their feet. They are also able to respond quickly as customers demand more customised, bespoke and niche products, using new materials and revolutionary production techniques such as 3D printing, intelligent machines and sophisticated computer design.

I hope that Members are already aware of Innovate UK, which brings together entrepreneurs and innovators with great ideas. It runs funding competitions to identify the strongest opportunities, and connects with the best partners to get their products market-ready, be they digital or solid-state. The High Value Manufacturing catapult, enabled by Innovate UK, helps small manufacturers to adopt and use those technologies. In its first five years of operation, about £300 million has been invested in high-value manufacturing by that means. Over the past year, the HVM Catapult has worked with more than 1,650 private sector clients on more than 1,300 projects and 1,800 small and medium-sized enterprise engagements. It has the right equipment to support the adoption of advanced technologies. Its use of virtual modelling enables businesses to understand what technology could do for them, and to plan and remove risks. Through Innovate UK, we are supporting the £9 million CityVerve internet of things smart city demonstrator in Manchester. The Future Cities catapult is collaborating with Microsoft and Guide Dogs for the Blind to develop tools to make moving through cities easier and more enjoyable for partially sighted people.

Those are just some of the very interesting collaborations that this model of support between the private and public sectors is operating and offering. It is a virtuous circle, and the Government want it to be replicated many times. We need to increase awareness of and access to these catapults. We need to increase the number

of catapults so that more small businesses can test out how to transform what they do and open up new market opportunities.

Peter Kyle: I cannot help but make the observation that only someone who has never shopped at Ikea would ever think it was possible to buy a flat-pack car and assemble it in a day.

Catapult centres are a fantastic idea. Does the Minister think there is merit in linking them more to some of the industrial materials, products and services that are being developed in parts of the heartlands that my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) mentioned?

Jesse Norman: I very much take the point. There is only one way to think of this flat-pack car: it is the product of three years' development by the former chief designer at McLaren. That is the only way one could get a vehicle that would meet the criteria set out by the hon. Gentleman. On the issue of linking to industry, he is right. One of the things that is interesting about catapults is that they have proved to be quite flexible. There is no reason why that flexibility, as they grow in number and extend themselves, cannot be used to create even closer links. As he knows, there is what Lord Willetts used to call a "valley of death" between research and development. The tie-in to employers in education and to businesses in development is vital to stop that problem.

I thank colleagues and congratulate them on the debate, which has been extremely wise and intelligent. The Government want to be at the forefront of the changes that are being discussed here—the dramatic transformations in the landscape of our industry and commerce. We want to lead this revolution—whether it be the third or the fourth—as we led the first, and we plan to do so through the new Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the industrial strategy, which will be unveiled in the next few months.

3.26 pm

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): I join colleagues in thanking the hon. Member for Havant (Mr Mak) and my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) for all their work to secure the debate. I declare an interest: for three years, from 2009 and 2012, I worked at the World Economic Forum.

The subject of today's debate was the subject of this year's Davos meeting: the fourth industrial revolution, an industrial revolution that will be characterised by new forms of renewable energy and the exponential outward expansion of technological innovations, driven by the internet. It is a revolution that will take place as we face severe challenges to our economic future: seemingly ever-increasing inequality; the worst productivity crisis and trade deficit in our country's history; greatly reduced job security; over-concentration on London as the predominant source of wealth and growth, at the expense of other regions; and over-reliance on the services industries, with manufacturing accounting for an unprecedentedly low share of GDP. Manufacturing is crucial to broadly shared wealth, but we have seen manufacturing as a share of GDP drop from over 30% 40 years ago to under 10% now. That lies at the heart of many of the difficulties—the unbalanced nature of the British economy.

[Stephen Kinnock]

In the aftermath of the EU referendum, each of those challenges is exacerbated by the uncertainty that our economy faces as we negotiate Brexit, given that we do not know what our trading relationship with our largest market will be, and likely will not know for some time. In that difficult context, the fourth industrial revolution, which will completely transform the way we live, will be a defining period for our economy. Will the technology at its heart, left unfettered, entrench the challenges we face, threatening jobs, driving inequality and reducing exportable products as the economy is further limited to services, and further place all the risks and insecurity of the economy on the worker; or will we use the fourth industrial revolution to transform and brighten our economic future for all our people? Can its fusion of digital technology, intelligence and connectivity shape a new economy, with new models of manufacturing, labour relations and skills development that create jobs, raise living standards and allow us to trade with the world in new ways?

Can creating this new economy help us realise our values in society and in our everyday lives?

The answer to those questions is what we make it. We must shape and lead the fourth industrial revolution so that it delivers the society and economy we want for people all across our country. That requires a Government with a vision of what a fourth industrial revolution must look like in order to deliver the outcomes we need and a Government who have an industrial strategy that helps us get there. It requires a Government who take action and take control of our future.

This will require a strategy and plan that rebuilds a new manufacturing sector based on the internet of things, and that creates world-leading products but also delivers a more sustainable form of labour relations. It will require us to take long-term decisions that back British ingenuity and ideas. It will require us matching or exceeding OECD levels of investment in research and development, which is the source of future growth and industry.

As part of this, we must continue Horizon 2020 funding, which does so much to catalyse university research and innovation and transform it into market products. The Government have currently promised to match Horizon funding until 2020, yet even in a fastest possible Brexit scenario that is only one year of matched funding. We must commit for much longer to give universities and innovators the confidence they need, especially in the face of Brexit-fuelled uncertainty, to develop the ideas and intellectual property that will inspire and drive our future in the fourth industrial revolution.

As well as providing this foundation for the catalysts of the fourth industrial revolution, Government must also protect its fruits: British IP, business, manufacturing and supply chains. We simply cannot afford to be hands-off and allow a world-class tech business such as ARM Holdings to be sold to the Japanese. We cannot run a successful, growing economy and secure the investment it needs if we allow our crown jewels to be sold off.

Just in the last year, I have seen the huge difference in impact between a hands-off approach to government and one that is active. The British steel industry, so

important to my constituency, has been failed time again by our Government. The Government did not act to block the dumping of state-subsidised Chinese steel, when they could have done. The Government did not encourage investment or profitability by keeping a regressive business rates regime and uncompetitive energy prices. Yet when the Government and the state do step up to shape our future and provide a foundation for our success, British talent can deliver great results.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): The hon. Gentleman mentioned the sale of ARM Holdings to SoftBank. Yesterday we saw the announcement of Micro Focus, a UK business, buying a significant business of Hewlett Packard. Does he think that we should be able to buy businesses internationally, but not be able to sell them internationally?

Stephen Kinnock: In my view, we need to reform the Companies Act, placing a clear national interest clause and a method of monitoring and executing that clause, so that we move away from situations such as we saw with Pfizer attempting to take AstraZeneca. I am very thankful that the previous Leader of the Opposition did a great job in preventing that from happening, but it is very ad hoc and we need a national strategy to protect our national assets, particularly where they play such a key role in the research and development that drives the entire economy, and indeed the fourth industrial revolution.

In Aberavon, we have a remarkable company called SPECIFIC that works to turn buildings into power stations. It is developing steel-based coatings for buildings—roofs, walls, glass and so on—which can generate and store their own electricity, and it works. We already have an industrial site in Port Talbot that has been generating all its heat through solar power like this for three years. All of this is done thanks to a partnership between business, universities, industry and, yes, the state. The SPECIFIC project is a living, breathing example of the fourth industrial revolution in action, and it required the proactive support of Government. Without the support of Innovate UK, the EU and the Welsh Assembly Government, this project would not have got off the ground. We will be able to make every region of the UK a leader in the fourth industrial revolution only if the Government see building launch pads for our people and businesses as part of their role, in order to allow them to succeed.

I close by quoting my old boss at the World Economic Forum, Professor Klaus Schwab. He said:

“In its most pessimistic, dehumanized form, the Fourth Industrial Revolution may indeed have the potential to ‘robotize’ humanity and thus to deprive us of our heart and soul. But as a complement to the best parts of human nature—creativity, empathy, stewardship—it can also lift humanity into a new collective and moral consciousness based on a shared sense of destiny.”

That is the prize of the fourth industrial revolution, but only if we make it so.

3.35 pm

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Vielen Dank, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am delighted to be here and I thank you very much for making time for me to speak. I had intended to make only a brief comment, but the conversation this afternoon has inspired me to speak for a little longer. Many elements have been

touched on, some of which took the theme from Voltaire that the Minister raised, and many of them are Panglossian. There is, however, a darker side to the fourth industrial revolution, and it relates to the element of protection.

I want to cover two areas of protection. The first is a legal one that will be obvious to many Members of the House, and it relates to the nature of patent law. The point of a patent is to do what Newton told us he did—namely, to stand on the shoulders of giants. It is to allow people to create ideas, to enjoy a monopoly on them for a brief period and to allow others, through knowing that secret, to build on it, thereby benefiting the whole of society. Patents are really important, and they will therefore be extraordinarily important in inspiring this next phase, the fourth industrial revolution. However, they will work only if they inspire those people who are actually coming up with the ideas to continue to do so.

The current system of patent law, not only in the UK but, sadly, in the United States, Europe and many other parts of the world, states that we will guarantee that monopoly for whatever the period is—it is usually about 20 years around the world—to the first person who hires a lawyer, goes to the patent office and registers his or her claim, thereby guaranteeing their rights for the future. I am afraid, however, that that is an error, and it is one that many countries make. We have done this because it sounds logical. It sounds sensible that the first person to register their claim should be the one to benefit, but it should be the first person to invent who benefits.

This might sound as though I am being casuistic. What is the difference, after all, between invention and filing, when all the inventor has to do is to hire a lawyer? Well, that is easy if you are a large company that has lawyers on tap and can afford these procedures. But what about the small companies? What about Google, when it started out in a garage a number of years ago? What about Apple, which started out in a garage 30-odd years ago? What about a small company such as Sir Torquil Norman's vehicle company? Such companies come up with many ideas, but they do not know which will be of any value so they do not invest in the legal protection that their ideas deserve.

Instead, those small companies start talking about an idea to people who understand the industry and to potential investors. They try to attract interest in their idea. In doing so, without even thinking about it, they put their own rights at risk, because if someone else takes that idea and registers it, it is then theirs. The fact that the small company came up with it a day, a month, a year or 10 years beforehand—and can even prove that it did so—does not guarantee its claim. It is, after all, the first to file who gets the patent, not the first to invent. Given that we are now discussing technology that can be invented, as pointed out by the hon. Member for Hove (Peter Kyle), by those under-16—let alone by older apprentices—it is important to remember that their rights should not be diminished simply because they do not understand the finer points of patent law. I urge Her Majesty's Government to look hard to see how we can adjust the law to protect all.

My second point is one that I wish I did not have to touch on and one on which this Government have rightly already done much: the protection of our nation's right to develop ideas and not have them stolen by foreign companies or Governments or by those who

simply seek to use commercial espionage—or state espionage—for commercial gain. I am pleased to see that the Government have already gone some way on this matter, but I urge them to go further.

The position that GCHQ holds today in the UK is essential, but it is not the position that it has held for the past 100 years. Over the past century, GCHQ has quite rightly guaranteed the signals intelligence of Her Majesty's Government. It has protected our communications to our armed forces, our embassies and our friends. It has perhaps done something to ensure that we know a little bit about what is going on elsewhere. Now, however, GCHQ's role is different or, rather, has expanded.

It would be right today not to think of GCHQ as an intelligence agency in the traditional sense, but rather more like the Royal Navy between the 18th and 20th centuries. Today, it is GCHQ that guarantees the economic routes of communication in exactly the same way as our battleships once did while guarding the strait of Malacca, ensuring that the coast of Africa was free of pirates, and keeping the Mediterranean free for trade from all nations. Today, those sea lanes are electronic highways and those ships are concrete and based in Cheltenham. The sailors, who are now coders, are no less essential to our economic future. As we talk about this fourth industrial revolution, it is vital to remember that we must think about the protection of ideas in all senses both legal and, sadly, through intelligence.

Thank you for giving me the time to speak, Madam Deputy Speaker. I must also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr Mak) and the hon. Member for Hove for arranging this debate.

3.42 pm

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): It is a pleasure to speak today in this interesting and far-reaching debate that was brought forward by the hon. Members for Havant (Mr Mak) and for Hove (Peter Kyle). The debate is fundamentally about technological change.

There is a proud industrial past across my constituency. In fact, the town of Bo'ness can justifiably claim to be the birthplace of the first industrial revolution—I suspect that many other constituencies are staking such a claim today.

Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con): The hon. Gentleman has just claimed to be the representative of the birthplace of British industry, but I must confess that I am the representative of the birthplace of British industry. I hope that he will agree.

Martyn Day: I thank the hon. Lady for proving my point.

James Watt, who hailed from Greenock in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan), constructed his first steam engine for Dr John Roebuck of Kinneil in 1768, and the rest as they say is history.

My constituency has not been a stranger to the changes brought about by subsequent industrial revolutions—or to decline. Indeed, much of the 20th century was marked by the demise of heavy industry and the loss of jobs. For many people, the name Bathgate still to this day conjures images of large-scale closures

[*Martyn Day*]

at British Leyland in 1984 and more recently at Motorola in 2001. We must learn from those experiences and ensure that the legacy of the coming revolution is not another round of job losses and increased inequality.

With that in mind, let me say that I welcome the UK Government's decision to put industrial strategy back on the policy-making agenda. I also support the introduction of programmes that assist businesses in delivering greater economic growth. That said, I am concerned by the uncertainty caused by the UK's decision to leave the EU, which affects firms' planning for key investment decisions. Any such delays may weaken an industrial strategy.

In Scotland, the SNP Government have put forward ambitious policies, such as the action plan for manufacturing, to fully realise Scotland's manufacturing potential, encouraging innovation and skills development, while promoting inclusive growth. As industries evolve, so, too, must the firms that support them. One good example from my constituency is Sibbald Limited, at Blackridge, a firm that has continued to move with the times and is one of the leading providers of training in the construction sector in the country—indeed, it provides construction industry and plant training worldwide. As the fourth revolution develops and processes become increasingly sophisticated, specialist training becomes ever more crucial.

When I grew up as child in West Lothian, not all that long ago, the landscape was littered with shale bings and scenes of industrial decay. What is now being achieved technologically was the stuff of sci-fi shows such as “Star Trek”, which is 50 years old today; there will be a free screening of “The Wrath of Khan” in Linlithgow on Saturday, with Linlithgow being the future birth place of Scotty. The growth of phone apps and world interconnectivity take things to an entirely new level, with personally tailored solutions designed to fit individual user needs. One such modern solution has been developed by another local firm, Silent Seminars in Grangemouth, which has an assistive listening system technology. When that was used during the Edinburgh Hogmanay party last year, it was the first time this tailored service solution had been used at an outdoor music event in the UK, and it allows people with hearing impairments, who may not usually be able to attend live concerts and such, to enjoy shared social experiences with their partners, friends and families.

I am fairly certain that we have arrived at the early stages of the fourth industrial revolution, but large parts of the world have still to experience the second industrial revolution; about 1.3 billion people still lack access to electricity. One thing is certain: we will be in the thick of this revolution for decades to come, and the pace of change will be like nothing before. Where society ends up is anyone's guess. We need to ensure that such a pace of technological advances reduces, and not magnifies, social and gender inequalities, both locally and globally. Indeed, a long-term comprehensive strategy must be developed to tackle that.

It is predicted that we are witnessing an internet of things, and it is suggested that 30 billion devices or more, covering all aspects of our lives, will be connected to the internet by 2020. This, in turn, will be opening up an unprecedented level of remote control management. Unlike James Watt, whose work at Bo'ness required the

nearby Gil Burn to provide a plentiful supply of water, today's engineers will be able to work remotely, but let us make sure people are not isolated and left behind. We live in exciting times, filled with many challenges and opportunities, so let us make the most of them.

3.47 pm

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): It is always a pleasure to speak with you in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr Mak) on securing this very important debate and on his motion, which notes the importance of small and medium-sized businesses, the huge contribution they make and their expertise. The motion also calls on the Government to

“continue introducing and supporting policies that keep the UK at the forefront of this revolution”.

I wish to add to that, as I think we will need policies that support small businesses and let them take advantage of these opportunities in the future.

I welcome the opportunities that this industrial revolution will bring, but I have niggling concerns. I will always be a champion in this Chamber for small business, having set up my own business in 1992 and then several technology businesses later on, with varying degrees of success. Business is a huge opportunity for this nation and for individuals, and it can transform the lives of people right across this land, whatever their background. There is also an opportunity for the consumer here, of course, as this technology revolution in particular is transforming the way in which consumers shop and travel, and how they can socialise. We need to look at how some of these channels will be dominated by huge businesses and at the potential opportunities—or even the lack of opportunities, which I am most concerned about—within their supply chains for small business.

Let me touch briefly on the pipes that we need. My hon. Friend the Member for Wells (James Heapey) talked about ensuring that the country has the right infrastructure, and this is about mobile phone communication—not just 4G but 5G—and our broadband. We do not want a sticking-plaster approach, because we need to get fibre not just to cabinets, but right through to premises. Only 2% of premises in the UK have a fibre-to-the-premises connection, which is the futureproof solution that we need. In Spain, the figure is 60%. I have welcomed the Government's £1.7 billion investment in this area in the past, particularly for rural areas, as it has made life much easier for many of my constituents and businesses. Nevertheless, I fear that we will hit the same bottlenecks in five and 10 years' time unless we step up our investment.

Jesse Norman: Did my hon. Friend note the brilliant report on broadband that the Culture, Media and Sport Committee published in July, which highlighted the underinvestment by BT in the national broadband network that independent experts estimate to be in the region of hundreds of millions of pounds a year? That is directly attributable to the way in which BT's investment policy is carried out, and it is to the detriment of shareholders.

Kevin Hollinrake: My hon. Friend hits on one of my favourite topics: the culture of corporate obfuscation that we get from BT and its willingness to underinvest to maximise profitability. We absolutely need to get BT

to up its game. I agree with Ofcom, which says that one solution is to open up the ducts and poles to other operators. Perhaps in future, when there are bidding rounds for Government investment, local authorities or the delivery authorities should themselves be held responsible for ensuring that third-party operators—smaller operators—get access to those ducts and poles in the local areas for which money has been committed.

The Government are supporting small businesses and innovations in many ways. As the Minister mentioned, there has been a 38% increase in investment in Innovate UK since 2010. Research and development tax credits have a hugely beneficial effect on companies that want to invest in new technologies. The enterprise investment scheme has unlocked investor capital for new start-up businesses and made such businesses possible on the back of these tax concessions. I support the retention and perhaps expansion of the concessions to make sure that we get new businesses to take advantage of these opportunities.

The failure rate for high-tech businesses is very high, but investors will countenance that because the rewards are also very high. Investors know that it is almost a winner-takes-all bet. They know that if they get it right, they can land themselves with an Amazon, a Google, an Uber, an Apple, or even a Rightmove or a Zoopla. In many sectors, there is either no competition or competition from just one other body, which puts those businesses in a hugely advantageous position.

In some areas of technology, business inevitably wins, and the other thing that will inevitably win is the machine. I spent my summer holidays reading a very interesting book by Matt Richtel called “A Deadly Wandering”, which talks about the ability of machines to multi-task. Richtel talks about the cocktail party effect. He describes a person in a conversation at a cocktail party. He says that it is not possible for them to listen to another conversation if they are truly engaged in their own conversation, as they can only do one thing at a time. Apparently, they can recognise their name being mentioned, but that is about it. Computers, on the other hand, can do millions of things at the same time, and they can do them better. A new computer called AlphaGo was built to try to beat the world champion of the game Go. That is not just a game of logic, but a game of intuition, yet the computer beat the world champion Lee Sedol five times in a row. The computer hones its own skills. So machines will win and big business will win.

The biggest worry I have about some of the businesses that will win in the future is their ability to dominate the entire supply chain. Uber is a good example. When it first came along, we saw it as just something that connected people who wanted a taxi with people who were taxi drivers. Uber has been clear that in the future it wants to be the taxi driver as well. In fact, it does not want any taxi drivers; it will have autonomous vehicles, and will no doubt link up with huge car manufacturers. Toyota, Nissan and other companies are looking at this. Uber will be end to end, taking away small business opportunities from taxi drivers, delivery drivers and HGV drivers.

Tom Tugendhat: My hon. Friend is making a persuasive point. There will be a challenge to not only small businesses, but large businesses. After all, if someone can hail a cab for nothing at all, why would they own a car?

Kevin Hollinrake: There are huge challenges ahead.

The situation is similar with Amazon, of course. Small businesses used to engage on the Amazon platform. A small business driver would pick up goods and take them to their destination; in future that will be done by autonomous vehicles and drones. Amazon will completely dominate the supply chain, so where is a small business opportunity there?

In previous industrial revolutions, opportunities were created for small businesses—people repaired the looms and sold clothes to the people who had new well-paid jobs. I must disagree with the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan), who said that people had not benefited from the industrial revolution. Clearly living standards today are much higher than before the industrial revolution. Nevertheless, future opportunities for small businesses are a concern.

James Heappey: My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Does he agree that both for private residents and for businesses, if one of the characteristics of this industrial revolution is the pursuit of a zero marginal cost for energy, communications and transport, the reduction of those costs could give small businesses, large businesses and private citizens alike a great opportunity to enter a marketplace without those barriers to entry?

Kevin Hollinrake: My hon. Friend makes a good case. In California, people are experimenting with something called a digital dividend. The money that is being made is paid back to people in the form of a dividend for which they do not have to work, but work is important. We want the opportunities; we want the work. We do not want to be redundant, sitting at home while machines do all the work for us. We must make sure that we make the most of the opportunities.

These advantages are locked in, as are tax advantages. The businesses that dominate these technologies are multinational companies that know how to work their way through the system. They circumvent corporation tax and also, arguably, circumvent employment laws. They also circumvent existing businesses and supply chains.

I am not King Canute trying to hold back the tide—this is an inevitability. We cannot resist this change, but the House must develop policies that create a level playing field and also opportunities. We must ensure that our tax system is fit for purpose for the challenges ahead and as we deal with multinational corporations. We must also support the growth of other industries that may spring up on the back of new opportunities that will inevitably be created. We must make sure that we use the opportunities available to us to keep opportunities open for small business.

3.58 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Havant (Mr Mak) and my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) on securing an important debate that has been very informative so far. I hope that it is a subject to which we will return many times in the future.

Before I talk a little about the future, I want to talk a little about the past. The title of this debate, the “Fourth Industrial Revolution”, evokes images of previous industrial

[Justin Madders]

revolutions, and of course the first, which began—whereabouts exactly has been the subject of some debate today. It has been romanticised. We should not forget the child labour, the decline in life expectancy, the exploitation and the unsafe practices that were all huge features of the early years of the industrial revolution. I am not suggesting for a minute that we are going to return to the days of the poorhouse, but history should act as a warning that change of the magnitude we saw in the first industrial revolution is not all positive, and we should be considering now how best to mitigate the negative impacts that a fourth industrial revolution may bring.

For as long as there have been technological innovations to ease the burden of physical labour, there have been dire warnings about the impact on jobs. Although the short-term impact of early automation was severe enough to lead to the Luddite riots of the early 1800s, in the main the dire predictions of what people such as John Maynard Keynes termed “technological unemployment” have proved to be unfounded. In the long run, technological innovation has always delivered more employment opportunities to the economy than it has taken away, but these processes have created winners as well as losers in the short term.

I for one am not prepared to take a chance that things will sort themselves out in 30 or 40 years. Unlike previous waves of industrial progress, this new wave of automation threatens jobs across the entire spectrum at a pace that is unprecedented and may well be impossible to keep up with. Studies by analysts such as Deloitte have predicted that 2.1 million jobs in wholesale and retail have a high chance of being automated in the next 20 years, and another 1.5 million jobs could be replaced in transport and storage in the same period. These sectors have seen considerable growth in the past few decades, but that now looks as though it could be dramatically reversed.

These predictions refer to the next 20 years, but change in some sectors will happen more quickly. For some, it has started already. There are plenty of examples, as we have heard in the debate today. We have also heard about trials by companies where the movement of all goods in a warehouse is performed by robots. We hear of driverless cars and of drones making deliveries, and in supermarkets the number of automated checkouts continues to increase.

Tom Tugendhat: The hon. Gentleman’s points are well made, but does he recognise that automation has lowered costs, which for so many of our constituents has been a blessing? The cost of television sets, food and any number of items in the home has dropped dramatically, meaning that people can enjoy so many more benefits of modern living than would have been possible even 50 years ago.

Justin Madders: Of course automation has increased people’s ability to purchase high-spec goods and has led to higher living standards and greater comfort, but we have to remember that to buy those goods, people need an income. That is where my concerns lie.

Not only are jobs at risk in retail and logistics, but the professions are in trouble as well. A raft of new legal tools has been launched which automate functions that were once the preserve of clerks and paralegals. Further

analysis by Deloitte has shown that the UK has already lost 31,000 jobs in the legal sector to automation, with a further 114,000 jobs set to go in the next 20 years. One futurist predicts that accountancy and law will go from being respectable, well-paid professions to barely existing in a generation. Although many will no doubt view a reduction in the number of lawyers as a good thing, it is difficult to see how there will be anything other than a loss of skilled professional jobs over the coming decades, which will limit opportunity for future generations.

This is in line with some economists’ predictions of an increasing polarisation in the job market, with the gap between high-skilled and high-wage jobs and everyone else continuing to grow. This is a trend that we are already seeing, and it is likely to accelerate as a result of automation and the development of artificial intelligence. Now that we have a pretty good idea of what is coming down the track, it is time for an honest appraisal of whether enough new opportunities can be created to bridge what could be a gaping chasm in the job market, and how we prepare our children for what will be a markedly different economy from that of today.

These are questions that need to be answered sooner rather than later if we are to avoid unemployment rates that would make the 1980s seem like a golden age. I am sure some will say that that is a rather dramatic statement, but I fear that unless we start to ask ourselves some fundamental questions about how we organise our society, we risk the creation of an unbalanced and unsustainable economy where the majority will face a struggle just to survive, and the insecurity that many feel today will become chronic.

The rise in zero-hours contracts, which we have heard about again today, is another example of the increasing casualisation and disposability of the workforce. What about pensions? How will people save for their old age if the insecurity of their whole working life is such that they cannot be sure they will earn enough to put food on the table each week? Not having the certainty or sufficiency of income to enable people to plan for the future is only storing up problems for us all in the long term. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) who said that there need to be clear regional strategies for investment if we are not to risk an unequal distribution of revolution and investment in our industries.

There are many ways these challenges could be tackled. In many ways, the availability of technology has already allowed us to change the way we work. We have seen a seeping of family life into work activity—the blurring of the lines between home and work life has already occurred. That could be a positive development, allowing people to work more flexibly, although there is a tendency at the moment for it to become a more convenient way of extending the working week. We are also going to see an increase in the flexibility of employment arrangements, as well as flexibility in the way we actually work. That will not necessarily be a good thing; it can lead to more exploitation, and I want this place to be challenging that exploitation now, rather than years down the line. A good start would be for the Government to start looking at implementing the Deane review on self-employment.

There are many ways we can look at this issue. A universal income has been talked about. We can reduce the number of working hours. We can change the way

we view the world of work. This should be seen as a great opportunity to liberate people from their workplaces. Doing more of the same is not the way ahead for this country. I know that politicians tend to think in terms of four and five-year cycles, but if we can look beyond that, articulate a vision of what a fair and prosperous society would look like and then actually deliver that, we will have shown leadership that our country will benefit from for decades come.

4.6 pm

Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow so many excellent speeches and some particularly enlightening ones. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr Mak) and the hon. Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) for bringing the debate to the House today.

There has been a bit of debate about where the first industrial revolution originated, so I thought I would take the opportunity to talk briefly about my constituency and why I consider it the birthplace of the first industrial revolution—I am never one to miss an opportunity to talk about Telford. It was in fact in Coalbrookdale, in my constituency, where the father of the first industrial revolution—the ironmaster Abraham Darby—developed the first blast furnace in 1709, using coke as his fuel, and the furnace is still there today, forming a key part of the Ironbridge Gorge industrial heritage museum. That was a major innovation, securing a transition to a new manufacturing process enabling the production of iron by a means we would today call smart manufacturing—of course, iron was the raw material on which the industrial revolution was built. Other revolutionary innovators, such as Thomas Telford, a civil engineer and architect of the local canals, bridges, railways and churches, followed in the ironmaster's footsteps.

Today, Telford is a symbol of innovation and change, energy and optimism, and it is once again undergoing a revolution—once again leading the way with cutting-edge technology and advanced manufacturing. Today, we have Enterprise Telford, an innovative initiative that is successfully securing inward investment to a corridor of advanced technology and smart manufacturing processes. At the heart of Enterprise Telford is T54, a flagship site situated on the M54, just 12 miles from Jaguar Land Rover, in the west midlands. This site is successfully securing inward international investment. The Canadian-owned giant Magna's subsidiary Cosma recently confirmed it would be investing in a high-tech car parts plant, creating 300 new jobs. Swedish-owned Filtermist opened its brand-new global headquarters on the same site recently.

The value of the fourth industrial revolution to Telford's economy cannot be overstated. It is bringing high-skilled jobs, renewed optimism and record levels of employment—and all to an area that has never had it easy. The last blast furnaces blew out in the 1960s. The last of the mines were closed in the 1970s. Then Telford was hit hard by the recession in the 1980s and 1990s, becoming an unemployment blackspot, and it once again suffered in the recession of 2008-09.

Telford has a proven ability to adapt, innovate and evolve. The Telford spirit first shown by the ironmasters is ensuring that Telford continues to overcome obstacles, find solutions to problems, and never give up. Once again, Telford is leading the way. I pay tribute to the

excellent work of council officers at Telford and Wrekin Council and to the Marches local enterprise partnership, which has worked so hard to make this possible. It is currently in the process of submitting a very fine growth fund bid to the Department for Communities and Local Government to further improve Telford's ability to take advantage of the fourth industrial revolution through the Enterprise Telford initiative.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid), who visited Telford on many occasions when he was Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, has always paid tribute to its success and potential for growth in taking advantage of the new economy. He very kindly told this House in June that he will work with me in every way to secure Telford's bright future. I mention this now because in his new role at the Department for Communities and Local Government he will be considering the bids for growth fund money. I will be reminding him of the fantastic work being done in Telford, and particularly the merits of the Enterprise Telford bid.

Revolution is all about new opportunity: the opportunity to press a reset button and start all over again. In any revolution, as the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) eloquently said, there will be winners and losers, but in the fourth industrial revolution, as with the first, Telford is a winner.

4.11 pm

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Havant (Mr Mak) and my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) on securing this Back-Bench business debate on this very important subject, and expressing my own personal pleasure in having the opportunity to respond on behalf of the Opposition on a subject that, as we have heard, we will no doubt return to many times over the coming years. I welcome the Minister to his place. I am sure that his time leading the Culture, Media and Sport Committee has imbued him with enthusiasm for all things digital. I look forward to hearing about the digital industrial strategy that he has promised us. I am sure that as well as being informed by the past, as his speech was, it will look to the future.

There has been some debate about the origins and the location of the first industrial revolution. Let me just say that it was growing up in the powerhouse of that industrial revolution, the north-east, that inspired me to become an electrical engineer before moving to this place. It is therefore with some pride that I have heard so many hon. Members describe how information technology is at the heart of the fourth industrial revolution. I have been hugely impressed by the technological insight and understanding displayed by so many Members in all parts of the Chamber. That is something that this House will increasingly have need of as we move into the fourth, and fifth, industrial revolutions. It reflects well on the House that we can have such a well-informed and wide-ranging debate on the drivers of that revolution.

Hon. Members have spoken about the incredible technological changes that we are witnessing and how they herald astounding new opportunities: increased connectivity, boosting productivity and social reach; open data, inspiring creativity, bringing together previously separate areas of the economy and empowering citizens;

[*Chi Onwurah*]

smart meters in our homes, putting us in charge of our energy usage, as well as smart networks and smart grids, improving energy consumption; the use of 3D printers, enabling manufacturing at home; increased automation in industrial manufacturing; and machine learning, making us work faster and create more, which is vital for the UK to stay competitive in the 21st century.

My constituents in Newcastle have seen local government lead on embracing those opportunities. Just last week, Newcastle City Council launched free outdoor wi-fi across the city, benefiting consumers, citizens and businesses and enabling them to reach out to new and improved markets.

As many Members have said, those opportunities also bring challenges. We have a new set of intermediaries, such as Uber and Deliveroo, whose workers are disempowered and to whom they are unaccountable. How much real power does the Uber driver have in relation to Uber? This informal gig economy gives workers little security and few rights. These new business models can also put downward pressure on wages and move business risk on to ordinary people, causing stress and a lack of security, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) has said.

In addition, citizens and consumers face threats to their identity and data. For example, to download an application from the Google Play store, people must first have a Google account, which is used to identify and control their device. How many consumers know that? Indeed, how many MPs in this Chamber right now know who has their data and what they are doing with them? How can we give citizens the skills, as well as the necessary connectivity, to participate fully in the digital economy?

The rise of the algorithmic software application brings many of those challenges to the fore. I have been told that a well-known web-dating application has optimised its match-making algorithm for short-term relationships. That maximises its revenues but leaves consumers entirely powerless to verify where the interests of that algorithm lie.

I am proud that I was the first MP to mention the internet of things in this House. I did so more than five years ago and I believe that it can change our lives more than any technology since electricity, but its lifeblood is data and we have no legislative framework for that. All those challenges have huge implications for the economy and our society, as Members have said. Low, unstable wages prevent people from participating fully in the economy, and they remove demand from it. They also bring higher costs to the public sector, either through a larger demand on benefits or increased reliance on public services. Vulnerability to hacking destroys businesses and livelihoods; it creates instability, which is exactly the opposite of what we want for the economy in the years ahead. In addition, if citizens lack confidence in what happens to their data when the entire economy is digital and based on data, they will lack confidence in our economy.

On skills and connectivity, the digital divide means that whole groups could find the new economy inaccessible. The ever-expanding digital world should be designed not only for a small segment of the population.

I am a digiphile and proud of it, but digital power has not even begun to be distributed fairly. We need more women in technology and better representation of working people and ethnic minorities, so that the fourth industrial revolution represents us all. In fact, the fourth industrial revolution needs a Labour movement to go with it, to create a truly progressive digital economy and to protect those who work in it. Harold Wilson said in his famous 1960s “white heat of technology” speech that innovation is driving us in a new direction, but we need leadership to embrace the changes and to ensure that that direction is for the benefit of us all. The Government’s Digital Economy Bill would be the perfect opportunity to provide such leadership, but it is a squandered opportunity. The Government are managing simultaneously to bury their head in the sand and to jump on any passing bandwagon; that is quite an achievement.

On broadband infrastructure, the Government tendered for failure, designing a process heaped with delays that managed to pay BT to create a new monopoly, which still does not meet the needs of the British people. On data rights and fraud, the Government refuse to deliver a legislative framework that people can understand and rely on. The new digital age needs a new set of digital rights. Who owns my data? Who owns my identity? That requires active participation by digitally savvy citizens, consumers and workers.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) has said, while the Government should be setting out a vision for our digital future—one that encompasses the new Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Innovate UK, the research councils, the manufacturing catapult, which the Minister mentioned, and the digital catapult, which I do not think he mentioned—they are instead squabbling over their un-plan for Brexit. We have been told that “Brexit means Brexit”, but we have been given no details about what that will look like.

On immigration, the Prime Minister has ruled out a points-based system, but she has given no indication of how the UK’s flourishing technical sector, which is part of the basis for the fourth industrial revolution, will be able to employ or retain people with the skills that it needs. The Government are also failing to make plans to bring the benefits of the digital single market to the UK. The Government need to focus on the new economy. They must respond to the challenges of identity, data, algorithms, labour rights and digital inclusion.

We must not suffer from the faults of the first industrial revolution, which my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) highlighted. We do not want the modern-day equivalent of nine-year-olds going down mines, or of limbs being lost in the unguarded looms of the workplace. Labour Members will work to bring about a progressive industrial revolution, and we hope that Conservative Members will see the future and want to be part of it.

4.23 pm

Mr Mak: We have had a positive, insightful and wide-ranging debate, and I thank the hon. Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) for co-sponsoring the motion. He gave an eloquent and impressive speech, and I was particularly pleased to hear references in it to Margaret Thatcher. The hon. Gentleman is a great credit to his party.

I thank the Minister for his full response. I was heartened by his commitment to ensuring that the fourth industrial revolution has an important place at the heart of the Government's new industrial strategy. As the Government move forward with their proposals, it is important to make sure that the fourth industrial revolution is built in, and not bolted on, to their strategy. I was particularly heartened to hear about the Minister's personal involvement in the fourth industrial revolution, including his flat-pack car, which I look forward to seeing in action.

I thank all hon. Members who have spoken, from across the House, for their speeches and for the time and thought that they have put into preparing for today's debate. It was good to hear about the excellent examples—whether local businesses, universities, research centres, enterprise zones or other forms of engagement—from constituencies across the country of engagement in the fourth industrial revolution. This must be a national success, not just a regional one. I thank the Opposition Front-Bench representatives for their contributions, because this is an important cross-party issue.

Britain is in a strong position to become a world leader in the fourth industrial revolution. We must adopt the pro-free enterprise, pro-innovation approach that has given the country success in the past. I thank the House for the opportunity to debate this important issue.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House acknowledges that the UK is in a strong economic position to take advantage of the Fourth Industrial Revolution; welcomes the view of the World Economic Forum that fusing physical, digital and biological technologies can promote further economic growth; notes that small and medium-sized businesses across the country contribute invaluable expertise and market leadership; and calls upon the Government to continue introducing and supporting policies that keep the UK at the forefront of this revolution in the future.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. As you will be aware, very important concerns have been raised in House about the leaking of a draft report from the Committees on Arms Export Controls, of which I am a member. I share the deep concerns about the leaks and their ability to frustrate our proceedings. May I ask you, first, to provide us with an update on that process?

I wish secondly to raise a separate matter relating to the Committees on Arms Export Controls. Madam Deputy Speaker, you will be aware that the Committees

are formed of four constituent Committees—the Defence Committee, the Foreign Affairs Committee, the International Development Committee and the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, which I am sure will be replaced by the new Committee. Members of all those Committees are allowed to attend the Committees on Arms Export Controls, to take part in their proceedings and to vote. Given the very serious matters that the Committees are investigating at the moment, is it in order for their members to withdraw from the proceedings at a crucial moment to frustrate other members moving on to formal consideration of such matters in the Committees—they declared that they were withdrawing with the express intent to prevent such proceedings from taking place—with the knock-on effect that other members of the constituent Committees were not therefore able to speak, vote or take part in the further proceedings of the Committees? Is that in order, because it seems to me that it is not? These are very important matters, and Parliament should be able to proceed in holding the Government to account.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): I thank the hon. Gentleman for notice of his point of order. I am aware that he has spoken to the Clerk of the House and the Speaker's Office. The hon. Gentleman is aware that this point of order was raised both yesterday and earlier today, and the Speaker gave a very full response on both matters the hon. Gentleman raises.

On the first matter, there has not been an update, other than what the Speaker said during points of order today. He was very clear to say that this is not actually a matter for the Chair. It is not for the Speaker of the House of Commons to decide what is proper conduct or what is disorderly in Select Committees. Individual members of Committees are certainly allowed to leave whenever they want to. Again, whether the timing of that has been decided elsewhere is not a matter for the Chair—either me or, indeed, the Speaker.

The Speaker has said very clearly that it is for the Liaison Committee to look at this matter and then for the Committee concerned to decide whether it is serious enough for it to make a special report which would be referred to the Privileges Committee. That is the proper way to proceed. If the hon. Gentleman looks at *Hansard*, he will see a very full exchange between the Chairs of the Foreign Affairs Committee and of the Defence Committee and Mr Speaker during points of order today. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answers that the Speaker has given. I thank him for advance notice of his point of order.

Bangladesh (Religious Minorities)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Mark Spencer.*)

4.28 pm

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I thank Mr Speaker for granting me the opportunity to raise the plight of religious minorities in Bangladesh. It is apposite that this debate is being held today, because it is exactly the first anniversary of the visit to Bangladesh by the UN special rapporteur Heiner Bielefeldt.

I welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Reading West (Alok Sharma) as the newly appointed Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister with responsibility for the Indian subcontinent. It is clearly a very well-deserved appointment, and I look forward to working with him over the coming years to further good relations between the UK and the countries of the Indian subcontinent.

I am chairman of the all-party group on British Hindus, and I have chaired a number of meetings at which the plight of Hindus and other religious minorities has been raised. I have also had the opportunity to visit Bangladesh on two occasions to participate in social action projects, as well as to meet the leaders of all political parties in Bangladesh and the President. At every opportunity, I have raised the plight of religious minorities and requested further action by the Government of Bangladesh to safeguard those minorities. I have seen at first hand the challenge of assisting some of the poorest people in the world to achieve their full potential, but also the determination of those people to do so.

I recently tabled early-day motion 351 on the plight of religious minorities in Bangladesh, which has so far been supported by 31 hon. Members. The UK has a very long history of assisting Bangladesh, stretching back to the battle for independence and attempts to combat the atrocities that were committed.

The widespread and persistent violations of human rights and the persecution of minority religious groups—Hindus, Christians, Buddhists and other tribal communities in Bangladesh—by the extremist armed groups are deeply worrying to all concerned within the country and in this country. Holding this debate today will highlight the deteriorating human rights situation in Bangladesh.

Religious extremism and terrorism exploit multiple societal failures in the middle east, south Asia, east Asia and the Russian Federation, but they also rely on ideologies that reject secular governance as illegitimate. The atrocities of 9/11, the Madrid bombings, the London attacks, the Bali bombings and a large number of other acts of religious violence pose a dire and unique challenge to peace and security throughout the world. The recent ISIL-inspired jihadi attack in Bangladesh's capital of Dhaka against innocent diners at the Holey Artisan Bakery, which I had the opportunity of visiting in the past, highlights the seriousness of an enduring threat to the peace and security of the country.

The terrorists who commit such dreadful crimes are not organised as a single worldwide hierarchical group; they are small autonomous clusters or cells, whose principal common link is a millenarian ideology. They are dedicated to the destruction of secular government and the advent of a society based on an imagined model of the early 7th century. Local problems everywhere are

exploited as one means to attract people to that world view, aided by funding from wealthy patrons and the Governments of certain Islamic countries. It enables extremists to recruit devout members of society, who are discontented for various reasons, to participate in acts of terrorist violence to attain martyrdom.

The world cannot forget the scale of the suffering of the people of Bangladesh and especially the grim fate of its Hindu minority during the war of liberation in 1971. That ranks with the worst mass killings of the 20th century, alongside the holocaust, the Armenian genocide during world war one and Rwanda. Indeed, assaults on minority communities have been rife in Bangladesh since before the partition of India in 1947. The Bangladesh Government estimate that during the independence struggle of 1970-71 up to 3 million people were killed and 200,000 to 400,000 individual rapes occurred, in which even the most senior Pakistani officer of the province, Lieutenant General Niazi, participated without restraint.

According to one report the mass murder of boys and young men denuded entire communities and was the world's worst gendercide in half a millennium. To quote from a report at the time, Robert Payne wrote:

“For month after month in all the regions of East Pakistan the massacres went on. They were not the small casual killings of young officers who wanted to demonstrate their efficiency, but organized massacres conducted by sophisticated staff officers, who knew exactly what they were doing...soldiers...went about their work mechanically and efficiently, until killing defenceless people became a habit like smoking cigarettes or drinking wine...Not since Hitler invaded Russia had there been so vast a massacre.”

Terrorism in contemporary Bangladesh is motivated not only by the aim of exterminating or expelling its minorities and creating an unsullied theocracy at home, but by a global agenda. That is why events in Bangladesh are of grave concern to the wider global community, and to us in the UK. Bangladesh is the fourth largest Islamic society in the world, and the deepening roots of religiously motivated terrorism there pose a significant challenge to peace and security in a world already besieged by terrorism from other sources. A handful of determined killers, influenced by intensifying extremist ideology in their country of origin and the right to visa-free travel as EU or US nationals, will create an additional nightmare for national security agencies.

I would like to put on record some key statistics relating to Bangladeshi minorities. The number of religious minorities in Bangladesh, including Hindus, has been declining rapidly. In 1947, religious minorities accounted for 34% of the population. By 1971, that figure had been reduced to 19.8%. Two years ago, it had reduced to 9%. The political parties of Bangladesh are not committed to restoring the original spirit of the liberation war of 1971 and the Bangladesh constitution of 1972. The Enemy Properties Act 1965 is still in force in the name of the Vested Property Act, enabling the seizure of Hindu properties in a blatantly discriminatory way. Since independence, Governments have failed to protect places of worship of minorities in Bangladesh. The restoration of the important religious sites of Ramna Kalibari Temple and Ma Anandamoyi Ashram is still pending. The Debottar land of Shree Shree Dhakeshwari national temple has been “grabbed” and reduced from 6.75 acres to 2.75 acres—a drastic and unjustified reduction.

Demographic changes are clearly being instigated to reduce Hindu-Buddhist-dominated districts, particularly

in Chittagong Hill Tracts. Cases relating to persecution and oppression inflicted upon minorities are not being investigated by the authorities. No one is being brought to justice. There is no minority Ministry or Department to oversee the interests of religious minorities and regulate policy matters to redress sufferings and issues related to them. There is no budgetary allocation for religious minorities in the national budget and no special law to protect their specific interests. Secular political parties are under threat and secular Bangladesh is gradually turning into a land of political thugs and religious extremists. I regard the first duty of any Government to protect their own borders. The second duty is to protect the rights of the minorities who live within those borders.

I want to highlight some of the key findings of the UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion and beliefs, Heiner Bielefeldt, who visited Bangladesh from 31 August to 9 September 2015. He said:

“The religious demography in Bangladesh has changed considerably in recent decades, mostly as a result of migration. When the demography changes rapidly, this can pose some challenges to the religious harmony in the country. This risk is even higher, if certain minorities feel vulnerable and insecure.”

Islamic radicalisation has been on the rise in Bangladesh and has caused a mass migration of Bangladeshi minority communities, including Hindus, Christians and Buddhists, who believe their lives are in danger if they do not convert to Islam. It is a huge challenge that the Government of Bangladesh are battling every day, as the unfortunate incidents of persecution continue to be on the rise. The UN special rapporteur attributes the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the country to the growing influence of ultra-conservative interpretations of Islam stemming from the Gulf region. The atrocities carried out on the minorities, particularly on Hindus, come in many forms. It may be useful to look at the history of them in Bangladesh. The UN special rapporteur’s report says:

“Unsettled property disputes constitute challenges in many societies, including in Bangladesh. In various ways, they are closely linked with problems concerning freedom of religion or belief. One link is the salient decline of the Hindu population in Bangladesh, which has shrunk significantly since the time of independence. The Government of Pakistan initially instituted the designation of minority owned land as ‘enemy property’ under the provisions of the Enemy Property Act of 1965. That Act encompassed a series of discriminatory property laws targeting primarily Hindus and tribal communities in the eastern portion of the country (Bangladesh). After achieving independence from Pakistan in 1971, the newly formed Bangladesh retained the inequitable provisions of the Enemy Property Act through the 1974 Vested Property Act. Hindus remained the main target, and the Vested Property Act caused many Hindu families to emigrate to India and other countries. As in many instances, when a person left the country for any reason, whether temporarily or permanently, they were designated as an ‘enemy’ under the Vested Property Act and their property was ‘vested’ or seized by the State. Frequently, when one Hindu member of a family left the country, the family’s entire property was confiscated. In reality, much of the confiscations carried out amounted to sheer land grabbing.”

The increasing influence of Daesh, or ISIL, is known to us here in the UK, and our Home Office has reported as follows:

“There is a high threat from terrorism in Bangladesh. Since September 2015, Daesh has claimed responsibility for a number of terrorist attacks in Bangladesh.

In late September and early October 2015 two foreign nationals were shot and killed. Since then and as recently as July 2016, attacks against religious minority groups including the Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, Shia and Ahmadiyya communities, have

killed several people and injured many more. Previous methods of attack have included crude explosives, grenades, shootings and knife attacks.

On 1 July, a terrorist attack at the Holey Artisan Bakery in the Gulshan 2 district of Dhaka resulted in the death of 20 hostages, mainly foreign nationals and 2 police officers. Daesh has claimed responsibility for this attack.

Groups affiliated to Al Qaeda in the Indian Sub-continent...are also active and have claimed responsibility for the murder of a number of people who they consider to have views and lifestyles contrary to Islam. Online activists, including secular bloggers and two members of the LGBTI community, have been murdered most recently in April 2016.”

The global community has a stake in engaging with the Government and people of Bangladesh to combat religious extremism, which is a serious threat to our own citizens as well as those of Bangladesh. Attacks by such extremists against minorities are only the first step in intimidating and imposing their authority on communities. That is why it is vital to encourage and assist the Government of Bangladesh to act by investigating and prosecuting heinous crimes such as gang rape, frequent seizures of private property and desecration of religious places. A permanent haemorrhage of the minority population, fleeing abroad to escape grim oppression, only weakens the moral standing of established authority, and eliminates voters who support politicians committed to human rights. The final stage of the triumph of extremism is likely to be the empowerment of political authority that has a benign attitude towards it because extremists have sunk deep roots in society and can mobilise to demand acceptance of their views. That scenario will be familiar from recent experience elsewhere in the world.

Just this year, a large number of priests, preachers and followers of minority religions have been killed by Islamist militants in a series of acts, and have gone missing.

Hindu priest Jogeshwar Roy Adhikari in the Panchagarh district, Hindu priest Ananda Gopal Ganguly in the Jhenaidah district, Nityaranjan Pande in the Pabna district, Nikhil Chandra Joarder in the Gopalganj district, Sulal Chowdhury, and Hindu priest Shyamananda Das were all hacked to death. They were literally cut up before people’s eyes. The veteran saint Sadhu Paramananda was murdered, and a Hindu businessman, Tarun Dutta, was beheaded in the Gaibandha district. Hindu devotee Pankaj Sarkar, of the ISKCON temple in the Satkhira district, was brutally stabbed. College lecturer Ripan Chakraborty, of the Madaripur district, was chopped to pieces in front of his class.

Several bloggers, human rights activists, atheists and authors, including foreign nationals, have been hacked to death in the past two years. I will not go through the list of those individuals but I will make it available to the House for its consideration. All those people have been murdered for a simple reason: their religious beliefs or way of life do not fit with this extremist ideology.

Hindu shrines, temples, monasteries, congregation and cremation lands in Bangladesh are now the prime targets of Islamist extremists in Bangladesh. It is apparent that all the Islamic outfits based on radicalism and onslaught, particularly those I have mentioned, in districts throughout Bangladesh are growing fast and operating armed camps to propagate hatred against non-Muslims. Their ultimate goal is to transform Bangladesh from the secular state that it was always intended to be into an

[Bob Blackman]

ultra-conservative Islamic state. That is set out by the writer Bertil Lintner. I will not go into his report, but it is available for the Minister, should he wish to have some light reading; it is only about 500 pages long.

I therefore ask the Minister to raise the following key recommendations from the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist & Christian Unity Council with the Government of Bangladesh. Laws for the protection of minorities, such as a human rights Act and a minority protection Act, and for the protection of places of worship need to be implemented as fast as possible. A minorities rights commission should be created to safeguard minorities' rights. The discriminatory laws that exist, especially the Vested Properties Act, should be repealed. The UK Government should make a recommendation to the Bangladeshi Government for a United Nations special taskforce to investigate the disappearance between 2001 and 2011 of over 900,000 Hindus from Bangladesh, as noted in the European Parliament resolution on the situation in Bangladesh in 2013.

The Government should also publicly condemn attacks against members of the Hindu community and other minorities. Decisive action is required to protect members of minority communities against these attacks. A full, impartial and independent investigation of all such attacks should be initiated and the results of the investigation made public. All the perpetrators of the attacks should be brought to justice, regardless of their position in society or membership of a particular political party. The victims of the attacks and their families should be provided with compensation.

There should also be a crackdown by the Bangladeshi Government on all Islamist terrorist organisations in the country. An independent inquiry commission should be set up to investigate the incidents and to bring the perpetrators to justice. Action is still required to ensure representation of these minorities in every sphere of the Government and in the Bangladeshi Parliament. The UK Government should give careful consideration to minorities who are already in United Kingdom who have applied for asylum on the basis that they are seeking refugee status for their protection.

A wealth of information is available backing up what I have said in the House today—evidence of the attempt literally to purge Bangladesh of all religious minorities other than the Islamic majority. It is incumbent on us as parliamentarians to protect religious minorities, wherever they are in the world, but particularly those in Bangladesh, which has so much potential. We have had a unique relationship with Bangladesh over the years. I look forward to the Minister giving a positive answer to the points I have made.

4.49 pm

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) for securing this debate and for the sensitive way in which he has presented some very traumatic information. While Bangladesh rarely makes the headlines in this country's national press, my hon. Friend has had a long-running concern about the welfare of the people of that country and their freedom to express minority views of both religious and political sentiment.

I am speaking first as a member of the International Development Committee, which had hoped to visit Bangladesh during the past year, but unfortunately we were advised not to do so due to security concerns. Secondly, I speak as chair of the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission. I am currently conducting an inquiry into the shrinking space of civil society across many countries in which DFID is providing UK aid. That inquiry has taken evidence from both politicians and human rights activists from Bangladesh, who have confirmed the overall picture that my hon. Friend has painted of escalating violence and increasing concern about the protection offered to religious and political minorities, including by the state authorities.

I have been assisted in preparing for the debate by the all-party group on international freedom of religion or belief and by Christian Solidarity Worldwide, which has recently completed a fact-finding mission to Bangladesh. I will not go into all the detail, which would largely echo my hon. Friend's evidence today, but I invite colleagues to look at the website at csw.org.uk as it contains more information.

I want to reflect on two background aspects to the concerns my hon. Friend has raised. First, there is concern about freedom of the press in Bangladesh. As we know, protection of religious minorities is often greatly enhanced by the protection of a free press. Therefore, it should appropriately be of concern to this House that a number of high profile editors and journalists in Bangladesh have been arrested over the last few years. Earlier this year, Mahfuz Anam, editor of *The Daily Star*, Bangladesh's most popular newspaper in English, was arrested. He currently faces no fewer than 79 cases against him, 62 for defamation and 17 for the very serious charge of sedition. There is a real logistical challenge for him to defend himself because all his trials are being held in different parts of the country, and even appearing for them is a major logistical problem.

Mr Anam is reported to be the victim of a campaign that has allegedly been encouraged, if not orchestrated, by the current Government of Bangladesh over his printing of allegations of corruption. Reports tell of the Government putting pressure on his newspaper's advertisers to withdraw their money and pressure being put on other press institutions to refrain from criticising the Government.

I also want to reflect on the political context of the concerns raised by my hon. Friend. In January 2009, Sheikh Hasina and her party, the Bangladesh Awami League, took power through controversial general elections held in December 2008 and were re-elected in 2014, but DFID commissioned an independent expert report on those elections and their legitimacy was questioned. The report states:

"Recent election processes have had escalating levels of shortcomings, relating to the election commission's ability to provide for neutrality, integrity, and freedom from undue influence, intimidation and violence."

We all recognise that often in the context of religious persecution where there is intimidation against the press or political opposition, it paves the way for broader persecution against a range of minority groups, as the rule of law is increasingly undermined in favour of protecting the interests of a ruling party. Prime Minister Sheikh promised in her 2014 manifesto that the

“religious rights of every people would be ensured and the state would treat equally with every citizen irrespective of their religion, culture, gender and social status.”

Sadly, subsequent events do not appear to bear out this manifesto pledge.

I should like to turn now to the persecution of atheists. Some Members might be surprised at my wanting to defend those who have no religious belief, but it is essential in defending the rights of those who have a religious belief we should also defend those who choose to have none at all. This is particularly important in Bangladesh. Unfortunately, violence against atheists has led to an increase in confidence among those who are attacking non-Islamic communities, whether of any belief or none. Since 2013, Islamic extremists have regularly called for violence against atheist writers and bloggers. Killings have occurred with disturbing frequency, and there was a string of high profile murders in 2015.

I highlight the following case to the House. There are a number of others which bear striking similarities. Mr Avijit Roy was a well-known champion of secularism through his blog *Mukto-Mona*. On the evening of 26 February 2015, Mr Roy and his wife were returning home from a fair by rickshaw. At around 8.30 pm, they were attacked near Dhaka University by assailants. Mr Roy was struck and stabbed in the head with sharp weapons. Mrs Roy was slashed on her shoulders and the fingers of her left hand were severed. Both of them were rushed to Dhaka Medical College hospital. Sadly, Mr Roy died at 11.30 that night.

Mr Roy’s wife survived, and she has openly criticised the lack of response from the Government to the murder, as have others. Strikingly, even the Prime Minister’s son, Sajeeb Wazed, has acknowledged that the Prime Minister is unwilling to show public support for Mr Roy’s widow due, we are told, to a fear that the Government would be accused of siding with the atheists. The lack of faith among the atheist community that the Government will protect them is unsurprising when we reflect that Inspector General A. K. M. Shahidul Hoque and Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan have warned atheist bloggers against expressing their views online. The first warned them not to “cross the line”, and the latter stated that the Government themselves would take action against those

“who defame religion in blogs and on social media”.

I want to turn now to reports relating to the persecution of Christians. Last year, a 57-year-old Catholic priest, Father Piero Arolari, was shot in Dhaka by three assailants as he cycled to church. Rosaline Costa, the 67-year-old Catholic editor of *Hotline Bangladesh*, has recently had to leave the country due to concern for her life. *Hotline Bangladesh* is a monthly newsletter that chronicles corruption, crime, terror and religious violence in the nation. Due to her reporting of the harassment of Christians in the country, Rosaline has been subjected to frequent phone calls intimidating her and telling her to “be careful”. A number of her relatives have also had to leave the country after they were followed at university and told to convert to Islam “under the fear of death”. An attempt was made to coerce one of her female relatives into a forced marriage with a Muslim. Rosaline reports that her and her family’s experiences are not isolated and that they represent a microcosm of the wider persecution that many Christians face in the country, with continuous intimidation in an atmosphere of hostility.

I endorse the evidence given by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East regarding the persecution of Hindus. Buddhists and Hindus are deeply concerned about persecution. Advocate Rana Dasgupta, secretary-general of the Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council of Bangladesh is quoted as saying:

“The entire community has been terrorised and is feeling very insecure. We are not seeing any active role by the political parties to find solutions to these problems that we are facing.”

Christian Solidarity Worldwide continues to receive reports of attacks on Hindus and Buddhists, as shown in evidence on its website.

5 pm

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Mark Spencer.)

Fiona Bruce: In conclusion and in light of such concerns, I have several questions for the Minister. I pay tribute to DFID representatives in Bangladesh. What work is being done by DFID in that country to address both religious persecution and the reported absence of steps by the Government there to satisfactorily address them?

What representations have been made by our Ministers to their Bangladeshi counterparts to express concern about the abuse of human rights in Bangladesh, about which we have heard today?

Has there been any exploration of bans on the entry to the UK of law enforcement personnel who may be involved in attacks on activists in Bangladesh on religious or political grounds?

Finally, has a review been proposed of the UK’s business involvement in Bangladesh to ensure that no UK funds are being used to support systems that oppress religious minorities?

5.1 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Alok Sharma): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) on securing this incredibly important debate and thank him for his kind words about my appointment. I commend the commitment he has shown, as chair of the all-party group for British Hindus, towards the protection of religious minorities in Bangladesh and elsewhere. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) on a powerful speech. From the day she arrived in this place, she has always championed and spoken up for minorities and the vulnerable wherever they may be. I commend her for that. They are both real champions for human rights and have raised several important issues and questions, which I will try to address in my remarks. If they do not feel that I have sufficiently answered them, I will be delighted to answer more substantially if they write to me.

The UK and Bangladesh are long-standing and close friends. We were the first European country to recognise Bangladesh’s independence in 1971 and we continue to support its economic development. We have the largest Bangladeshi diaspora in Europe. The half a million British people with Bangladeshi heritage have made an immensely positive contribution to every aspect of British

[Alok Sharma]

life. The UK cares deeply about what happens in Bangladesh. We want it to be economically successful and to maintain its rich tradition of accepting people of all religions and beliefs, and all backgrounds and cultures.

Religious tolerance is not just an end in itself; it goes hand in hand with economic prosperity. A country will reach its full potential only if it values and harnesses the power of all its people. As my hon. Friends have noted, however, the situation seems sadly to be moving away from, not drawing closer to, that aspiration for tolerance. The threat against minority groups and foreign nationals has intensified. My hon. Friends mentioned Hindus, who have suffered the largest number of attacks, but there has also been a rise in attacks against Sufi, Shi'a and Ahmadiyya Muslims, as well as Christians, as was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton. Such attacks run counter to Bangladeshi traditions of mutual respect and peaceful coexistence.

When Bangladesh was last debated in the House at the end of June, hon. Members raised concerns about the political situation, about freedom of expression, and about the number of attacks against those whose views and lifestyles appear contrary to the teachings of Islam. Since then, we have seen further shocking incidents of extremist violence against minorities and foreign nationals across Bangladesh. As my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East noted, on 1 July, 22 people died in the appalling attack on the Holey Bakery café in Dhaka's diplomatic zone. Also in July, the Sholakia Eid congregation was targeted and there were separate attacks on Hindus, including a deadly attack on a Hindu priest. On behalf of the UK Government, I utterly condemn all these attacks. Many have been claimed by Daesh or groups affiliated to al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent—that is a clear demonstration of the global and shared threat posed by these extremist groups.

Terrorism is a global threat that faces all of us, and we stand shoulder to shoulder with Bangladesh and all our partners in the fight against terrorism, but it is clear that extremism flourishes where there is a culture of intolerance and impunity, or where space for democratic challenge and debate is lacking. I of course welcome Prime Minister Hasina's "zero-tolerance" stated approach to countering extremism and terrorism, yet it is vital that the Government of Bangladesh also make it clear that they will uphold and protect the fundamental rights of all their citizens: the right to life; the right to religious freedom or belief; and the right to freedom of expression. Underpinning and guaranteeing all of those is the right to justice for all. Mass arrests, suspicious "crossfire" deaths and enforced disappearances at the hands of the police undermine confidence in the judicial system. Investigations must be conducted transparently and impartially, irrespective of the identity of either victim or alleged perpetrator. Anyone arrested should be treated in full accordance with Bangladeshi law—there must be no impunity.

When the former Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr Cameron), met Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh in May at the G7 meeting, he expressed concern that extremist attacks risked undermining stability and investor confidence in Bangladesh. While in Dhaka at the end of last month, the Minister of State, Department for International Development, my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith

and The Border (Rory Stewart), also raised the issues of countering extremism and gaining access to British nationals in detention in Bangladesh in his meetings with Government representatives. I urge the Bangladesh Government to do everything they can to tackle this scourge of violence, to bring the perpetrators of these heinous crimes to justice, and to explore the root causes of these attacks.

The UK Government are supporting organisations that work to protect minorities in Bangladesh and that ensure that their rights are protected, both in law and through Government policy. Since 2010, the non-governmental organisations we support have defended the rights of more than 200,000 people in Bangladesh. This work ranges from advocacy at a national level to helping Dalit communities secure access to Government land meant for landless people.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East mentioned the Chittagong hill tract. The advocacy that has been supported by the British Government has also persuaded the Bangladesh Government to establish a land commission to resolve land disputes in areas with a high proportion of ethnic and religious minorities, such as the Chittagong hill tracts. UK support for civil society organisations promoting human rights and free speech in Bangladesh will continue under a new programme funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Magna Carta fund for human rights and democracy.

Outside this House, a number of people have raised the issue of whether we should be imposing sanctions on Bangladesh to make it adhere to civil and political rights. With respect, I disagree with such an approach—let me explain why. Extremism and terrorism is a global threat, and one that countries must face together. Our development programme in Bangladesh, which is still one of our largest in the world, enables us to provide broad-ranging support to address some of the root causes of extremism, including poverty and economic marginalisation. Sanctions would hamper our ability to do that. We believe that the right approach is to engage with the Government of Bangladesh on areas of shared concern, such as countering terrorism and extremism, and promoting human rights for all. We will continue to do that. The UK Government have prioritised counter-extremism support for Bangladesh and we will identify areas where we can work with the Government of Bangladesh better to understand the problems of extremist views and to help counter them.

In their powerful speeches, my hon. Friends raised a number of points, which I will try to address. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East asked about the new laws being enacted in Bangladesh. As I have already noted, we have consistently called on the Bangladesh Government to protect religious minorities in the country. We continue to support advocacy to ensure that the rights of minorities are protected in Bangladeshi law and in Government policy.

My hon. Friend raised the issue of compensation. Compensation for the victims of attacks in the country is a matter for the Bangladesh Government to address. I urge them to ensure that all attacks are investigated transparently and impartially and to consider carefully the need to provide remedy to victims.

My hon. Friend also raised the issue of refugee status. Of course immigration status is a matter for the Home Office, and I refer him to that Department for its

consideration. He mentioned the United Nations in this regard. As he pointed out in his own speech last September, the UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief visited Bangladesh. We urge the Bangladesh Government to implement the recommendations in the rapporteur's report, which includes a call for the Government to

“protect the vibrant civil society and pluralistic society in Bangladesh.” That is the right approach to take.

My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton talked about the press. I absolutely agree that a vibrant civil society and media, with the ability to discuss and debate freely, are fundamental to building democracy. Indeed, the charges brought against newspaper editors, even if they are eventually dismissed by the courts, can be seen as a form of harassment and intimidation. She talked about what we are doing to support bloggers and others who find themselves under attack. I can tell her that, in addition to ongoing public and private diplomacy, we have funded safety training for bloggers in Bangladesh. We have supported a review of its Information and Communication Technology Act to bring it into line with international standards and help lawmakers to develop a better understanding of international standards on hate speech. I have already mentioned that the new programme funded by the Magna Carta fund for human rights and democracy is promoting freedom of expression and aims to protect those who exercise it.

Finally, my hon. Friend talked about the work that is being done by the Department for International Development. We are the largest grant aid donor in Bangladesh, allocating in this financial year of 2016-17 around £162 million. Our support focuses on improving

the provision of basic services, supporting private sector development skills, and reducing the risks to development, especially those related to governance and natural disasters. I wish to make it clear that no UK aid is paid as direct budget support for the Government of Bangladesh. About one third of UK aid to Bangladesh goes to the Government as reimbursement for agreed activities or results and, as we all know, we are very clearly focused on that.

I hope that I have been able to address many of the issues that have been raised by my hon. Friends but, as I have said, if they wish to write to me on any particular issue, I will of course respond to them in a substantive manner.

As I have already outlined, the UK and Bangladesh share a set of values—they are core Commonwealth values—and they include a commitment to parliamentary democracy, inclusive communities, free speech and tolerance. As Bangladesh progresses from least-developed country status towards middle-income country status, it will need more than ever to promote and defend its people's rights—the right to an effective justice system, the right to a vibrant civil society, the right to a free media and the freedom to hold authority to account. The British Government will continue to encourage Prime Minister Hasina to deliver on those commitments and to uphold the international human rights standards that Bangladesh has pledged to uphold as a member of the UN Human Rights Council.

Question put and agreed to.

5.14 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 8 September 2016

[PHILIP DAVIES *in the Chair*]

Chibok Schoolgirls

[*Relevant document: Second Report from the International Development Committee, Session 2016-17, DFID's programme in Nigeria, HC 110.*]

1.30 pm

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the missing Chibok schoolgirls in Nigeria.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. Earlier this year the Select Committee on International Development, which I chair, visited Nigeria as part of an inquiry into the work of the British Government, including both the Department for International Development and the Foreign Office, in that country. As part of our visit, in Abuja, the capital of Nigeria, we joined the regular vigil conducted by campaigners seeking to highlight the plight of the girls kidnapped by Boko Haram.

As Committee members—I am glad to see so many of them here, as well as other Members from all parts of the House—we made a pledge that we would not forget about the girls or those campaigning to highlight their plight. We have taken opportunities since our visit to raise that with Ministers in both DFID and the Foreign Office. I am delighted—I give my thanks to the Backbench Business Committee for this—that we have this opportunity to address this important issue once again.

Let me start by setting out some of the background. As colleagues may know, Boko Haram is roughly translated as “western education is forbidden” or “western education is a sin.” Among other things, we can take western education to mean girls getting an education. On 14 April 2014, Boko Haram militants attacked a government school in Chibok in the early hours and kidnapped 276 girls. At the time, other schools in that part of Nigeria were closed precisely because of the difficult security situation. The reason that the Chibok government school was open and the girls were there was to enable them to take their examinations, and that village was assumed to be a place of safety and security.

Some of the girls managed to escape during the night, but the total number of kidnapped girls was still 219. It is thought that they were taken to the Sambisa forest in the north-east of Nigeria. The forest has been considered by Boko Haram to be a safe haven: it is difficult for the Nigerian military to monitor the whole of this vast area of land. We understand that non-Muslim students who had been kidnapped were forced to convert to Islam and that many of the girls were married off—effectively enslaved to Boko Haram fighters.

It was not until 2 May that year that Boko Haram officially accepted responsibility for the kidnappings. Its former leader made its argument that the girls should not have been in school; they should instead have been

married. Later that month, on 26 May, Nigerian forces claimed that they had located the girls but that a rescue operation was impossible due to the risk of collateral damage.

There was then a long period in which very little happened. Very little news came through from Boko Haram, the Nigerian Government or indeed other sources. Then in May this year—more than two years after the kidnapping—one of the girls was found in the Sambisa forest. Amina Ali Nkeki, aged 19, was found with a baby and a suspected Boko Haram fighter who claimed to be her husband. In August, Boko Haram released a video that appeared to show about 50 of the Chibok girls, and a masked fighter said that many had been killed in air strikes and many others had been married off.

The kidnapping of the girls sparked a global campaign: Bring Back Our Girls. I am wearing the badge that I was given when we were in Abuja earlier this year. There was a big social media campaign with the hashtag #BringBackOurGirls on Twitter. The campaign was started by a lawyer in Abuja but it quickly trended on Twitter and became prominent. The official movement was started by Obiageli Ezekwesili, a former Federal Minister of Education in Nigeria and president of the African division of the World Bank. She said:

“The way our Government handled the Chibok girls’ case goes beyond an election matter.”

This was in the run-up to elections in Nigeria. She continued:

“This is not a one-time issue we discuss over elections. We need to have a deeper conversation about what kind of a nation we want to be.”

This was early on, following the kidnapping. She went on:

“Today is day 241 and the girls are still not back. If some people want to move on, it’s their right... But they should remember we moved on when 69 secondary schoolboys were killed, and nothing changed. Do our children now have to choose between getting an education and dying? Some of us cannot move on and accept that kind of society.”

The hashtag was promoted and propagated by celebrities, politicians and others across the world, including our former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr Cameron), the Pope and the actress Julia Roberts. Perhaps most prominent was the First Lady of the United States of America, Michelle Obama, who said in 2014:

“This unconscionable act was committed by a terrorist group determined to keep these girls from getting an education—grown men attempting to snuff out the aspirations of young girls.”

She went on to say:

“Why, two years ago, would terrorists be so threatened by the prospect of girls going to school that they would break into a dormitory in the middle of the night?”

She also said:

“What happened in Nigeria was not an isolated incident. It’s a story we see every day as girls around the world risk their lives to pursue their ambitions.”

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): The Chair of the Select Committee is making a powerful speech. I well recall being at that meeting in Abuja with the supporters of the girls, who are dedicated and tireless campaigners. It was deeply moving. He mentioned that this has

[Fiona Bruce]

happened to countless children across the world and that these girls are still missing. Does he agree that it is very concerning that the Department for International Development does not focus more closely on human trafficking, particularly given that we hear reports of girls being trafficked, perhaps for prostitution or servitude, into this country from Nigeria, the very country about which he is speaking?

Stephen Twigg: I am grateful to my friend, the hon. Lady, who is an assiduous and hard-working member of our Select Committee. I pay tribute to her for her consistency in raising these issues in the Committee and the House and with the wider public. I absolutely agree with her. We have seen a greater focus by Her Majesty's Government on issues around human trafficking, but it is vital that all the different Departments join up their efforts to maximise the impact of that commitment.

The organisation that has been campaigning has aimed to raise awareness of the plight of the girls and to encourage the Nigerian Government to do all within their power to bring the girls back. The United Kingdom Government, along with other Governments including the United States, France, China and Israel, have all contributed significant military and economic resources to the region to support the attempt to find and rescue the girls. A regional taskforce was launched with Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria, amassing almost 9,000 regional troops to force Boko Haram out of the Chad Basin National Park. There has been concern among parliamentarians globally. For example, the European Parliament passed a resolution two years ago calling for the

“immediate and unconditional release of the abducted schoolgirls”.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the UK Government's role in seeking to find the girls. Last year, the UK sent around 130 military personnel to Nigeria to assist in training the Nigerian military. The UK and the US have provided counter-terrorism support and advice and, importantly, support and advice on hostage negotiation and victim support capabilities for Nigeria. Additionally, the UK has invested around £5 million in supporting the multinational joint taskforce set up by Nigeria and its neighbours to combat Boko Haram. From our point of view on the International Development Committee, we welcome the UK's role in humanitarian relief for those most affected by the insurgency, which we set out in a report published earlier in the summer. That money is being used to provide food, water, sanitation and emergency healthcare for up to 7 million people across Nigeria.

I will also mention, in particular, the safe schools initiative in Nigeria, which has helped more than 90,000 displaced children return to school and provided them with the learning materials and teachers needed, including those giving psychosocial support. DFID has played a role in supporting that project as well, and we welcome the support that DFID and other parts of the UK Government have given.

The United Nations appeal for Nigeria is not fully funded and we urge the Government to do all they can to ensure that it is, including by other countries. At the world humanitarian summit in Turkey in May, commitments were made to address education in

emergencies. We think it is crucial for the UK Government, and for DFID in particular, to use their resources and influence on other donors to ensure that the “Education Cannot Wait” fund is properly supported and quickly operationalised so that interruptions to education caused by conflict are minimised to no more than 30 days.

We know that in Nigeria, in that region and in other parts of Africa and the middle east, increasing numbers of children are spending a large part of their childhood, or their entire childhood, as refugees or internally displaced people. It is vital they get that access to education as they grow up, and we therefore recommend that DFID scale up its support for the safe schools initiative, as well as engaging with and supporting the special investigative committee appointed by President Buhari of Nigeria to assess the safety of schools in that country. Our recent report also recommended that DFID continue its support for work to address the drivers of conflict through the Nigerian stability and reconciliation programme.

Since the kidnapping, the Nigerian Government have pursued a military campaign against Boko Haram. They have been able to free other women and girls who have been held by Boko Haram, but none were the Chibok girls. We know that Boko Haram has continued to kidnap women and girls in the north-east of Nigeria. We also know that it has been affected by internal strife and a leadership struggle following its pledge of allegiance to Daesh last year, which resulted in an internal division in the movement. It remains the case that only one girl has escaped from the original 219. There have been sightings of the girls, including by a former clergyman, Stephen Davis, as well as by citizens in Cameroon and Chad.

During his inaugural speech, President Buhari committed to redoubling the Nigerian Government's efforts to find the girls, saying Nigeria will not have “defeated Boko Haram without rescuing the Chibok girls”.

We know that, because of the conflict in Nigeria, nearly 1 million school-aged children have been forced to flee their homes. According to the Human Rights Watch report, “‘They Set the Classrooms on Fire’: Attacks on Education in Northeast Nigeria”, 600,000 children have lost access to learning altogether. We know that teachers have been killed and have had to flee, and that attacks in the north-east of Nigeria have destroyed more than 900 schools and forced a further 1,500 to close.

Today's debate is an opportunity for us to demonstrate the strength of cross-party commitment in the House to this important movement and campaign. Last year at the United Nations, the countries of the world came together and adopted the sustainable development goals—the “global goals”, as they have become known. Among those goals are commitments to global education, gender equality and, in goal 16, to

“Peace, justice and strong institutions”.

There can be no better way of demonstrating our commitment to those goals than maintaining the campaign to ensure that we “bring back our girls”.

1.45 pm

Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. As the chair of the Select Committee on International Development, the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), set out so eloquently, on

an International Development Committee trip to Nigeria in March, we had the honour of meeting a small team of dedicated, passionate campaigners. On arrival at the hot and dusty venue I could hear them chanting and singing. Every day, the small group of mainly women, but with some men, meet at Unity Fountain in Abuja. They campaign for the return of the 276 girls taken from their school by Boko Haram on 14 April 2014. Shortly after the abduction, 57 of the girls escaped. As we have heard, one more escaped in recent weeks, but 218 girls are still missing.

The girls from Chibok were just like our girls. They were daughters, they were granddaughters, they were sisters, they were cousins and they were nieces, and they were loved by their families. They had been encouraged to embrace education, and they had, and their families had. They were preparing for their final school certificate when disaster struck. Notwithstanding world condemnation, and the support of Michelle Obama, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr Cameron) and a host of others, the girls have still not been returned. It is believed that many are likely still to be held by Boko Haram. Many will be pregnant as a result of rape, often by different men, and we know that many have been forced into marriage. Some have been used as suicide bombers. Some are very ill. Some are HIV-positive, and some 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 communities. Some fear that the girls have been radicalised. Others believe that the children who have been conceived will be the next generation of fighters because they carry the violent characteristics of their biological fathers. As a result, children, babies and mothers face stigma, rejection and further violence when, as victims, they should be getting all the help and support they need and deserve to move on with their lives and reintegrate.

For the families of these girls, the pain is hard to imagine. With every reported sighting and every video released, hopes are raised for something positive to hold on to, but then quickly dashed. One father described it as

“like being beaten and being stopped from crying”.

One mother, who had identified her daughter in the most recent video, sent a video message back. She said:

“From birth, I have been planning for you—your life, your education, your health...Until now, I have not seen or heard anything from you. But I believe that one day, I will fulfil that, my promise to you, and I will see you again, and my happiness, my joy, my life will be complete with you.”

I stand in this great hall as a mother, a daughter, a sister and a politician. I can actually still hear the chants of those Nigerian women at Unity Fountain. I can still hear them saying, “Bring back our girls now and alive. Bring them back now,” over and over and over again. Rarely have I witnessed such strength and determination.

Now, with the second anniversary of the girls’ abduction having passed, the families and campaigners need world support. They must raise awareness further and keep the issue in the spotlight. They want people everywhere to write, email, tweet with the hashtag #BBOG and hold rallies, vigils, talks and Google chats. We need Governments and agencies around the world to share

credible intelligence and all the latest eye-in-the-sky technologies to find these girls and to bring them back home. Time is running out. Every single day, there is more suffering. Decisive action is needed now, and terrorism cannot be allowed to succeed.

1.52 pm

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I thank the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) for securing this extremely important debate. He is a fine Chair of the International Development Committee, and it is a pleasure to serve on that cross-party Committee with him and other colleagues. I would particularly like to thank the hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Mrs Grant), who has just given an extremely poignant speech that almost brought me to tears.

I have a strong interest in this matter. As colleagues have described, earlier this year I visited Nigeria with the International Development Committee, where we met with the Bring Back Our Girls campaigners, whose tireless work keeps the Chibok girls’ memory alive. It has been now more than two years since the Chibok girls were abducted by Boko Haram from their school in northern Nigeria. Other than a few who escaped, they have not been rescued or returned. It is not fathomable for those of us living in the west that our child could be abducted from school for the proposed crime of seeking an education, or that girls, by sole virtue of their gender, should be denied that education. The pain suffered by the parents, who wanted the best for their girls and sent them to school, never to return, is unimaginable. What has become of the Chibok girls during the past two years remains largely unknown.

We visited schools that have bravely dared to reopen since this atrocity occurred, and we spoke with Nigerian politicians about the current status of girls’ education in Nigeria and the continued fight against the brutal extremism of Boko Haram. Arriving in northern Nigeria was daunting, to say the least. I have never been anywhere where the security was intensified so significantly for myself and the group. We were given security briefings, transported in armoured vehicles, had body armour fitted and were protected by armed guards. That shows just how difficult and risky the situation remains for citizens in Nigeria and particularly for young girls at school.

We visited two schools in Kano, one a state school and the other run by the local church. Both were co-educational, although it was difficult to fathom whether the curriculum differed for boys and girls. We were told that early marriage remains the norm for girls in the north of the country, due to both cultural and religious beliefs, which interferes with the length of girls’ education and therefore the intrinsic value for parents of sending them to school at all. Millions of children are still not recorded as being in school, and those who are experience overcrowded classrooms of 100-plus children.

There are significant problems for the Government in providing quality education, due to a lack of teacher training and resources. Cultural beliefs, security issues and lack of future opportunity present ongoing barriers to sending girls to school in Nigeria. The girls we met, from primary to secondary level, wanted to learn, had

[Dr Lisa Cameron]

aspirations and voiced ambitions to become hairdressers, nurses, teachers and doctors. It was depressing that despite their ability, ambition and motivation, they were unlikely to realise their dreams.

Meeting with the Bring Back Our Girls campaigners in Abuja was one of those moments in life that grounds you. They have been campaigning for the return of the Chibok girls for more than two years and have pledged to keep the girls' memory alive outside Parliament until they return. Realistically, hopes have become slim. The Government have reported no new leads, and we were told that it is highly likely that many of the girls have been married to Boko Haram soldiers, incurred sexual violence or even been killed. As we heard, one of the girls was recently located with a child. Given cultural beliefs, it is difficult for her to reintegrate into society, such is the stigma of her situation.

Meeting Government officials in Nigeria was equally sobering. A new Government have heralded renewed efforts to tackle the country's problems, including corruption going up to the highest levels of society and inequality. They should be commended for that. However, the lack of female representation in Parliament is stark and has actually reduced since the current Government came to power. Equality issues do not appear to be high on the agenda, and without concerted efforts to increase women's representation at all levels of society, it is difficult to see how culture will shift and the lot of young girls within Nigeria be significantly altered.

The Chibok girls who were abducted hold the same value as girls across the world. It is hard for me to believe that if this had happened elsewhere in the west, more would not have been done to bring them back at an earlier stage. The new Government have reportedly increased efforts to improve security and to tackle Boko Haram, with limited success—but some success—so far. People we spoke to said that they now feel more able to go out after 6 o'clock, though security issues remain paramount. Some parts of north-eastern Nigeria were completely off limits due to security issues. The population remains displaced and the schools in those areas closed. There is a long road to tackle extremism in those areas, to offer alternative hope and to support the population out of poverty.

I urge the Minister to keep these girls at the forefront of our minds. Pressure from international Governments appears to have dissipated over time, and it must be resurrected to give hope to the Chibok girls and to girls across Nigeria and the developing world. The parents we met despair, but they will never give up hope for the return of their girls.

1.59 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. Let me start by congratulating the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) on securing this debate, which is very timely and on an issue that we should not forget. I am very grateful to him. I thank too all those who have contributed so far and made valuable points. I do not want to say anything that might diminish their points, which I fully support. The situation is tragic not just for the girls, important though that is, but for their families.

Some speakers have given weight to the fact that we are talking about girls who are daughters, cousins and members of larger family groups. That is an important feature of Nigeria.

In my short contribution, I want to widen the debate, pick up some of the points about the underlying cause of the situation and try to give some guidance on how it might be prevented from continuing. I do that in my role as the Prime Minister's trade envoy to Nigeria. I have just come back from a visit there when I was able to raise this on several occasions with Ministers and businessmen operating there. First, I want to echo the comments of the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby about the success the Nigerian Government are beginning to have against Boko Haram. The hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) pointed out the large area that it still covers, principally because Nigeria is a very big country, but Boko Haram is being contained. I like to believe that our advice on counter-terrorism and our practical assistance to the armed forces in Nigeria are helping to do that.

All that is good, but it is not enough and the underlying causes of Boko Haram need to be examined. It seems from conversations that Boko Haram's terrorist threat is linked to the economic situation in the country. The hon. Lady mentioned some of the issues that contribute to that, one being the extent of corruption in a country where 40% of oil revenues are stolen before they reach the Revenue. That is a phenomenal amount of lost revenue that the country could use in the fight against Boko Haram by making conditions much better for people. We must give all the support we can to President Buhari and his Government who, after all, came to power on an agenda to tackle corruption. He is doing that effectively as far he can.

Hon. Members have mentioned peace and justice and I want to pick up on the justice elements because the British judiciary is participating in projects to toughen up the Nigerian judiciary and to give it the ability to tackle these problems in its courtrooms. All that is an important contribution to the work of President Buhari and his Government to try to increase the extent to which the country is tackling underlying causes.

Secondly, the problems in Nigeria will not go away until the currency has been sorted out. Earlier in the year, the Central Bank of Nigeria stated that it would introduce a flexible currency for the future, but we are still waiting for details of exactly what that means. Until then, British companies will resist going into the country. This market will have 400 million people by 2050 and has enormous opportunities for British companies that want to go there. Dealing with the currency problem will have the enormous advantage of ensuring that companies go in sooner rather than later, and by going in sooner they will exert influence over the Buhari Government and their successors and start to take action themselves.

My third point is about the prosperity agenda, which goes across Government and includes the Department for International Development and the Foreign Office. Its purpose is to increase the country's prosperity. All trade envoys are looking out for opportunities to encourage the use of the prosperity agenda, particularly for training.

All that leads to stability in the local marketplace and that too helps the situation. But it is really important

that we concentrate on ensuring that the prosperity does not go to just a few rich Nigerians. Boko Haram has such success in the north of the country because it is one of the poorest areas. If that wealth is spread more effectively, we will begin to see the erosion of Boko Haram and, I hope, release of the girls.

Dr Cameron: I am enjoying listening to the hon. Gentleman's expertise in the area. It was marked during our visit that there is little electronic transfer of money in Nigeria. I am wondering whether progress been made on that because the Government were unable to collect many of the taxes that were due because money was being bartered and there was no record of it.

John Howell: I thank the hon. Lady for her question and I wish I could answer yes, but I cannot. The situation is confused and in the last few weeks it has got worse for electronic transfer of money. That, too, is something the Buhari Government must concentrate on to make sure there is a free-flowing money system that will tackle directly the Boko Haram challenge and hopefully lead to release of the girls.

I want to pick up on a point that the hon. Lady made about equality. During one of my visits I went to LADOL, a deep-water offshore oil and gas company run by a woman who trained as a surgeon in Oxford. Although she has two brothers, she was invited back by her father to run the company because of her undoubted ability to do so. It was a great pleasure to see her. She set us up with a long line of inspections of the army, the police, customs officials and taxmen, all of whom were stationed on her free trade island in the lagoon at Lagos. Believe it or not, I had to take the salute. It was fascinating.

At a dinner with Nigerian businessmen afterwards, I asked why this woman was not in the Nigerian Parliament and the answer was simply because she is a woman. It was as bold and as simple as that and came from prominent businessmen in Nigeria. I do not think they approved of that and I think they took the view that it was bad, but that the fact that she was there—admittedly she was an exception—was a move in the right direction towards more equality.

There is a trend for the middle classes in Nigeria to come to London. While I am a trade envoy, I want to take London to Nigeria because I firmly believe that will build a stronger middle class in Nigeria which will help to press for release of the girls and the ending of the Boko Haram menace.

Also, to the extent that I have not had the opportunity to do this so far, I would like to have discussions with the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby offline, because anything that I can do when I go out there to push this agenda forward, I will very happily do to ensure that this issue is taken up and pursued with equal vigour by President Buhari and his Government and the British Government.

DFID does and has done a number of things in Nigeria that I want to pick up. One is that, since 2011, the incomes of 1.1 million people have been raised by up to 50%; 200,000 of them were women. That is a very good targeted use of our money in that country. Similarly, in terms of the focus that there has been on state budgets, looking at both education and health, that money has been extremely well spent. It is useful to

reflect that the work being done on privatisation of the power sector also has an effect. It, too, leads to a much broader and more secure economy that helps tackle Boko Haram and this whole issue. I understand that DFID now spends more than 60% of its funds in Nigeria in six northern states, which I think is a very good move. It is one that I am sure we all, across the House, will support and, hopefully, enjoy.

2.11 pm

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell), the trade envoy to Nigeria. He is absolutely right to highlight the important point that the new Government were elected to deal with corruption and the economic situation in an oil-rich nation that does not distribute its wealth among its own people.

As a member of the International Development Committee, I want to return to our visit to Nigeria, when we met, in the country's capital city, the campaigners for the release—the freedom—of the Chibok children. It was a very emotional meeting. Like many colleagues, I have had the pleasure over the years of listening to some prominent speakers, but the tone that those campaigners set and the words that they uttered will remain with me for an awfully long time. I stood there listening to my colleagues speaking alongside the campaigners, and I did so as an uncle and a father, not as a visiting Member of Parliament. I listened to the chanting for the release of these children.

The British Government have a proud record of investing in the human development, through education, of people across the globe, including in Nigeria. On the International Development Committee visit, we visited many educationists. We met politicians, including the vice-president. We met a number of people, and it was stark that there were very few young people under the age of 35 in Parliament—I believe that the constitution does not allow those people to represent their country. There were also very few women in either House of Parliament. We met people from both Houses while we were there.

Education is so important. It is vital that we get educated young people in Nigeria, including women, coming through to represent their people, so it was hard to take the situation in. These young girls had committed no offence whatever other than to attend school to educate themselves. Their brave parents had sent them to the dormitories and have never seen them again. Hundreds of children were abducted by a terrorist organisation. There is no nice way of putting it—it is a terrorist organisation.

I would be abdicating my duty as a parliamentarian if I did not repeat something that some of the fathers said to me: “When you return to your Parliament”—we made this pledge and are honouring it today—“think about this. If there had been children there from the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Israel or other countries that have been involved in working hard on this, would there have been extra effort by the Nigerian Government to release these children?” I know that it is not easy—I understand economics and the terrain and the geography—but these are young human beings. We, the international community and the British Parliament, have a proud tradition of working to release people in such circumstances.

[Albert Owen]

I am sure that the Minister will make an eloquent speech when he winds up this important debate and will tell us about the work that is being done behind the scenes. We understand that, and we understand that the expertise is being used in a positive way, but parents are still without their children. That is the fundamental argument in this debate. These young people were not unlike any young person in this country attending their school. I say to anyone who is an uncle, a father, a mother, a niece or an aunt: just think of how the relatives must be feeling, having been without their children for two years. Then there is the indignation at this terrorist organisation releasing videos and using the children as political pawns on TV in their own country. The international community has to do more to work with the Nigerian Government to get them released.

On the issue of corruption, we met the police, and a new unit is being set up. The new President, Buhari, was elected to eliminate corruption, but he pledged swift action to release these children as well, and the campaigners are angry with their own Government. I am not angry with our Government, because we are doing a lot of work in Nigeria, including on education. We must provide not just basic education for children but basic safety, and we must work with the other members of the international community and with the Nigerian Government to provide a setting for children and young people to become the parliamentarians and businesspeople of the future. They need that basic education and that basic safety.

I will not echo the eloquence of other speakers who have given a breakdown of what has happened in Nigeria, but I do want to echo the sentiments of the campaigners we met in Nigeria. They are honest, decent people whose only sin was to send their children to school. Think about that. I say, in the best British tradition, that this Parliament today stands shoulder to shoulder with those campaigners, and we ask for the release of those schoolchildren today.

2.17 pm

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP): I was mightily relieved earlier when I did not have to follow the very moving speech by the hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Mrs Grant)—that was a tough act to follow. I pay tribute to everyone who has spoken today, but particularly to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) and the whole International Development Committee for not forgetting about these parents and children. I have many Nigerian constituents and friends, and I know that it matters so much to them.

It is important to point out that although anyone watching might think that this is an empty Chamber, two debates are going on today and constituency work is also going on. We are not the only people who care about this issue. I have had incredible feedback from members of the Scottish National party group and other groups. I want us to put that message out there to anyone watching: this is just a tiny snapshot of all the people who care about this issue.

I am privileged to be able to contribute to this debate—indeed, to any debate in this place. I am privileged because I am one of an appallingly small number of

women in the world to hold elected office. In fact, it is estimated that only 22% of all parliamentarians globally are women. As a woman, I am also, apparently, privileged to have benefited from education, and from higher education in particular. As we have heard, other women and girls across the world have not been so lucky.

The missing Chibok schoolgirls were brutally torn from their families and their lives for no worse crime than accessing the education that we all take for granted and have done all our lives. They were kidnapped by a group that prioritises the prevention of a secular education but particularly prioritises the prevention of any education at all for girls. That is in a country where opportunities for women to achieve a reasonable standard of living are already scarce.

Any reasonable person would find it difficult to comprehend the motivations of the men who commit such acts. Acts of barbarism struck sufficient terror into the heart of communities that schools were shut down lest their children be kidnapped or murdered. Such acts of terrorism, and this one in particular, would not easily be forgotten had they occurred in this country. Two years on, it is vital that we continue to remember these girls, that we work to ensure that this evil act remains on the news agenda and that Governments across the world continue to exert pressure to target this crime.

I welcome the support of the UK Government and others for the Nigerian military. I call upon the British Government to ask whether, in addition to what we have heard they are already doing—they are doing a lot to help—it is possible to do anything to increase the international pressure, provide assistance to the Nigerian Government and help bring back the girls. If it is, I urge them to do it.

I also ask the Government to consider supporting the Nigerian Government in re-establishing education for the millions of people displaced by terrorism in sub-Saharan Africa. I know they are doing some of that, and clearly the priority in this debate is the missing girls, but female education has become almost non-existent in the areas terrorised by Boko Haram. The thousands who have had to flee—both boys and girls—are also now without an education. But the large-scale displacements of people to areas not affected by Boko Haram mean that there is also the freedom to ensure that those displaced people are allowed to be educated. I wonder whether our Government could do anything more to support them to do that, until those people are safely returned home and can be educated in their own towns and villages.

There are 62 million girls around the world aged between six and 15 who are not in school. We know that educating girls does amazing things for the societies in which they live. It correlates with an increased GDP, it provides better outcomes for girls and women themselves and it leads to healthier children, because a mother who can read instructions on a medicine bottle, for instance, is a mother who is more able to protect the health of her child. It is clearly worthwhile for all Governments to work to support girls' education across the globe as part of their efforts to promote development.

It goes without saying that the pain and anguish that a family go through when a child is missing must be unbearable. “Unimaginable” was the word used by my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron), and that is probably

the best way to describe it, because I bet it is a million times worse than we imagine it to be. I cannot even begin to comprehend the suffering of parents who live every day not knowing whether their children are safe or in danger, dead or alive. It does not matter whether someone lives in a tiny village in rural Nigeria, a penthouse in Paris, a trailer park in the US or a mansion in rural England, everyone would feel the same unbearable pain. The powerful words of the mother mentioned in the moving speech by the hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald could be the words of any parent anywhere.

However, I worry that Nigeria seems so far away, and the lifestyles of the families so far removed from our own, that we are in danger of allowing ourselves to forget what is happening and of putting it out of our minds because we do not relate to the parents in the way that we might relate to someone in Europe or the US. We all remember the terrible, tight knots of dread we had in our stomachs when the news broke of Madeleine McCann's disappearance. When Sarah Payne was kidnapped and murdered in July 2000, our country was shaken with grief and anguish for her and her family. When it transpired that Jaycee Dugard had been kidnapped and held hostage for 18 years in California, shockwaves reverberated around the world—rightly and understandably so. But in this one incident in Chibok in Nigeria, those terrible crimes were repeated over and over and over again, and they continue to be so.

These Nigerian families sent their children to school because they hoped and believed that getting an education would allow their girls to get on in the world. Two hundred and seventy six girls were taken in total. As we have heard, 57 escaped the same day, and one managed to do so two years later. That leaves the families of more than 200 young people utterly devastated. Some of the girls are said to have died at the hands of their kidnappers or in bombing campaigns against Boko Haram, but nobody knows for sure. Despite not knowing where these girls are, we do know that some have been forced to change religion, some have been raped in forced so-called marriages and all have been forced to live transitory lives in forest regions far away from their homes, families and everything that is familiar to them. They are each somebody's child, and they must be terrified. They must wonder whether their families have given up on them or are still looking for them, because who knows what their captors are telling them.

The nightmare goes on for all these people and their families. Let us resolve today to do everything we possibly can to help bring them back to their families and, in their honour, to support education for the displaced people in Nigeria and for girls right around the world.

2.25 pm

Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) on securing this important, timely debate. I thank all my friends here—those who visited Nigeria as Committee members and others from whom we have heard—for their contributions, which were very emotional and touching. People can feel what is involved with this issue only if they have seen it. I saw it when we went to Nigeria: the emotions, the way campaigners presented themselves and the honesty in their moves.

As a grandfather myself, with a 15-year-old granddaughter, let me say this to Members: imagine that your child, your granddaughter, was taken away from you—the child that you love so much—and that you did not know where the child was now. That is what the people were telling us; as a human being—as a father or grandfather—I was imagining what it would be like not to know what was happening to my child and to feel so helpless about their safety. That was the feeling and it is what has given Committee members—those who have spoken in the debate—the commitment to come back to see what else we can do.

Every Member who has spoken has given the details and set the scene: the country, the way the Government operate there, the corruption and the north-south divide. People there are still talking about out-of-date ideologies. They are not talking about the 21st-century society we want to live in, where the whole world is coming together to make sure that everybody has equal rights and where, as we put it, nobody is left behind. There are many slogans and sustainable development goals: all the world leaders have signed up and given the commitment that every child will be protected, and that there should be education for all and the elimination of poverty. Yet in some areas there are still individuals and ideologies that do not want their girls to be educated or to live free from fear of terrorism. We have been fighting inequality for years in the western world, and now we are talking about how best we can improve that—not only here, but throughout the world.

The time has come for the whole world to come together. Those girls must be waiting for someone to release them. The parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters are waiting for someone to bring their children back. Some Members have said that for reasons to do with culture, faith and many other traditions, the girls who come back are badly treated and not accepted. We need to advocate the protection of those who come back and look at how to bring them back into society.

I am proud that we have offered nothing but unwavering support for the families of the girls and aid to the Nigerian Government as we continue to lead the international effort to secure the girls' safe release. I commend DFID for providing consistent aid through development and for working alongside intelligence and military teams that have been key partners of the Nigerian Government.

I am pleased to say that the Government have taken further actions to ensure that schools become a safe place for all children. The safe schools initiative has proved successful in helping more than 90,000 displaced children to return safely to education. However, it is important that we do not stop there. I recommend that we increase our support and aid to this troubled region, as there is still much to be done.

President Buhari has appointed a special investigative committee to evaluate the vulnerability of education facilities. I hope that DFID has already taken steps to communicate effectively with this group in order to influence the Government's policy decisions. Safety in schools is undoubtedly paramount to future regional development. Given the tendency of Boko Haram to target schools, we must be able to ensure that children will be safe in their place of education. Although we will continue to support the Nigerian Government's

[Mr Virendra Sharma]

efforts to bring the girls home, it is key that we stress the importance of education and the protection of women and girls from violence.

While some state governments in Nigeria have been unable to provide adequate schooling for children, I am concerned that the private sector provision is not in keeping with the sustainable development goals' commitment to leave no child behind. I therefore urge DFID to focus on how to help the Nigerian state governments to improve their public sector education provisions. By continuing to offer assistance for the provision of safe and successful schools, we are ensuring that children in Nigeria have access to a proper education. We hope that in our efforts, we will encourage even more Governments to offer their help.

While addressing these appalling acts of terrorism, we must not in any way fuel Islamophobia. It is clear that the actions of such a group lack genuine ties to Islam, which teaches the benefits of an education for women. This group is based on an outdated and cruel ideology, at odds with morality and the modern world. It is our duty to do all that we can to ensure the girls' safe return.

2.34 pm

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I congratulate the International Development Committee, ably led by its Chair, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), on bringing this important issue to the House today.

I want to touch on some of the wider issues, following the line of argument made by the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) on why what happened is a symptom of some of the other challenges in Nigeria. I have a very strong interest in Nigeria. I am proud to represent one of the largest diaspora groups in the UK. I am a former chair of the all-party group on Nigeria, which I chaired for five years, and I had the pleasure of visiting Nigeria on three separate occasions.

In 2014, I hosted an event on the issue of the Chibok schoolgirls; we had a representative from the Nigerian high commission and a lot of diaspora Nigerians present in the room, where there was palpable upset and anger. I will touch on this further, but this was really at the beginning of a rise in feeling from the Nigerians politically against some of the actions of their then Government.

It is also worth highlighting Nigeria's huge importance both to the UK and to the region, as Africa's most populous nation. It is a key player in security and potentially in trade in that region. Our last Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr Cameron), signed a concordat in 2011 with the then President Goodluck Jonathan to double bilateral trade between our countries. Although that seems a bit distant from this tragic kidnapping—218 girls are still missing—it is related and I will go on to explain how.

The hon. Member for Henley, with his vast knowledge and experience, highlighted the issue of companies from Britain seeking to invest in Nigeria. We have heard on a number of visits and in events here how British businesses are put off going out and working with Nigerians and putting their energy into boosting the Nigerian economy because of security and other issues.

My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby set out the detail of the terrible, large-scale kidnap that took place. As so many others have eloquently highlighted, that act rightly shocked the world, but as the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin) rightly said, although this was the most terrible and awful action, it is not the only act of terror against children in Nigeria. Other schools have been attacked and pupils have been brutally murdered and abducted.

That was forcibly brought home to me when I was working with a group who had come to London at the behest of the Tony Blair Faith Foundation. It was a cross-religious group of Muslims and Christians, working for a fortnight to develop skills to try and tackle extremism at its root cause. One of the members who had come over—her nephew had been brutally murdered in his school bed—brought home to us very firmly the human reality of what is going on in Nigeria. In 2014, more than 2,000 people were abducted, so although the Chibok girls are the visible sign of that and rightly attracted international attention, let us not imagine that that is the beginning or the end. Even if they are happily returned to their families, we should not rest there. I think we would all agree that we need to keep vigilant.

The key issue is how to tackle Boko Haram and stem the threat of extremism in Nigeria and the region. I welcome the UK Government's support for military training and the commitment in December last year to increase that. Is the Minister able to give us an update? We know that it is a very challenging arena to work in and, of course, the issue is about collaboration and not about us going and telling the Nigerians what to do. Nigeria is a sovereign nation and it is important that we recognise that, but there is a resource issue and I would be interested to hear from the Minister what more is happening.

I am very pleased that DFID has increased its spending in Nigeria, although my love for Nigeria means I am sad that that is still necessary. However, the decision was made following a needs-based assessment and it is great that DFID is helping to tackle poverty, disease and to improve education, particularly for girls.

On one of my visits, I went to a school in the Kano area, in the days when it was easier for Members of Parliament to travel around the country. There was a training programme there, funded by DFID and delivered partly with Save the Children, to get more girls trained to be teachers, because girls were not going to school in parts of the north of Nigeria as their parents were not keen for them to be taught by male teachers.

The girls were in a compound with barbed wire—not particularly, in those days, because of the security threat from terrorism, but because their husbands and fathers would not have let them come to be trained as teachers if there was any risk to them in cultural terms. It was effectively a brutal chaperoning system—"brutal" in that there was barbed wire—to make sure that those girls were completely protected. They were ambitious young women. I was there with my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah), and we were talking to them as women to women.

We were quite shaken when the woman running the programme said to them, "Remember, when you go back to your village, be yourselves. Don't try to be too ambitious." Part of her role was to get them to go back

and be teachers, and to stay doing that, but when we were talking to them we found that those young women had ambitions to go beyond teacher training and do other things.

As two British female MPs who have worked hard, and had a good education and the opportunities that life in this country has presented to us, we understood but were shocked at the limits being put on women around the world, although in that case, perhaps, that was to give more women opportunities. As the hon. Member for Glasgow North East highlighted, an educated woman—the first educator of her children—can deliver so many things, including knowledge of healthcare.

On my last visit to Nigeria, I went to Minna, and saw parents taking control of the school in their area. They were helping to run the school, a bit like a super parent-teacher association, working with the headteacher to ensure that young women who might be hawkers on the roadside were scooped up, gathered up and put into education. I spoke to parents of three-year-olds who were keen for them to get an education.

Let us not kid ourselves: education is a huge prize in Nigeria. Why do schools in my area do particularly well? We always praise schools in Hackney and we know that lots of things have gone into that, but one factor is that we have a large west African population, who prize education and whose children strive to achieve with great parental support. That is no different in a village in Minna than on an estate in Hackney. I also had had the opportunity to visit some of the human rights policing work. Small scale but important activities are going on with the support of the Department for International Development.

I turn to inequality and sexual exploitation. During a visit to Nigeria with the former Africa Minister, the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge), I heard that perpetrators of sexual offences against young girls were getting off with a fine less than the price of a UK parking ticket because the shame on the family of having a prosecution and evidence that their daughter had been sexually molested was too great. That is some of the backdrop to the attitude and challenges for women in Nigeria, and they are big challenges.

There are other complications, such as security. Nigeria has a large and porous border. I have had security briefings and it is mind-boggling to imagine. It is not just that Nigeria is a huge and populous nation, but that the border with Chad and other countries to the north is long, porous and challenging to police. Will the Minister update us on any work that the UK is doing to support the Nigerian Government in managing those border challenges, as Boko Haram go in and out of the country causing havoc?

There is huge poverty in Nigeria. Most Nigerians live on less than \$1.50 a day. There is a lack of investment in infrastructure because, sadly, so much corruption still exists. In fact, when I was in Minna with my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central, she bartered to buy some juicy mangoes. We worked out that they cost less than 20p each, but by the time people got them in Nigeria—if, for example, sellers got them to Lagos through various police checks by paying bribes—they would cost too much to make it worth the while to transport them.

A mango costs about £1 in Ridley Road market in Hackney and about £1.50 in Sainsbury's. Challenges such as the lack of infrastructure and corruption create difficulties for things such as exports, which would help to boost the economy. I do not want to digress too much, but that is certainly a big element of tackling poverty, and I refer hon. Members to previous reports of the all-party group.

There is now a big north-south divide in Nigeria. The north is much poorer, less well educated and at greater risk from Boko Haram. It has a young population in great need of skills and training. Those girls who were at school to get the skills, training and education they needed to contribute and help to boost the north of Nigeria have still not been returned to their parents.

I mentioned the impact of the Chibok girls on the attitudes of Nigerians. As my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby highlighted, the situation had a big impact on the Nigerian election and was one of a number of factors that influenced the outcome, unseating the People's Democratic party for the first time since the re-establishment of democracy. Yet, as the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) said, women are still woefully under-represented in the Nigerian Parliament. From my visits, I know how much support is still needed to support democracy at all levels.

Women politicians in Nigeria face challenges including open discrimination and physical attacks. While we in the UK are sensitive to this, particularly recently since the death of our colleague, the situation is nowhere near the same. We do not feel that same fear when we walk out of our doors. We do not face the challenges that our female colleagues in Nigeria do. Although changing that would not have solved this issue, it is an important backdrop.

The poorest communities need hope, infrastructure, education and jobs. Although the Nigerian Government are doing their best to tackle the rampant terror in the north and the activities of Boko Haram, they are still some way off resolving it. I suspect it will be years, if not decades, before that is challenged. Perhaps the Minister can give us an update. The terrorists exploit poverty and it is important that the international community fights poverty with the same vigour as it fights the military might.

It is important that we unite to tackle Boko Haram. Think of the poor Chibok schoolgirls and the anguish their families are facing: there is a real risk that such things will continue to happen unless the root causes—poverty and terrorism—are tackled. I look forward to the Minister's response.

2.45 pm

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I rise, as the third party representative, to sum up this debate, which is a hard task. I congratulate everyone, especially the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg)—the Chair of the International Development Committee—and all the members of his Committee who have given such eloquent and heartfelt updates on their experiences of visiting Nigeria. I apologise if I miss out anything significant. I got so involved in the debate that I forgot to take as many notes as I normally would.

[Marion Fellows]

The work that Governments here do to support countries abroad is a great credit to them and to this House. However, today we are here to talk about the missing Chibok schoolgirls who were brutally kidnapped by Boko Haram. As all hon. Members have said, it is almost inconceivable and unimaginable to think about what those parents and families are suffering, and about what has happened to those girls—girls who are the same age as the granddaughter of the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr Sharma). I have grandchildren. In fact, I only have granddaughters, and it tears my heart to think that they could have been in such a position. As a developed country, we must and should do everything we can to support any country that has to go through this.

The Chair of the International Development Committee gave a full and heart-rending explanation of the Committee's visit and of all the things that have happened. On the "Bring Back Our Girls" campaign, I confess that I simply tweeted, retweeted and did not know enough about what had happened. Rest assured, I will become more involved. As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin) said, the representation in this room is not representative of what this Parliament wants to do and the support it wants to provide. We need to think about how the situation affects us, but we must understand and address the basic concerns of what has happened in Nigeria and the reasons why. We are talking about poverty, cultural issues and the role of women and girls in society, which we really must push forward.

I will briefly mention those who have spoken. The hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Mrs Grant) gave an emotional account of what happened to her when she went to Nigeria. She focused on the families' suffering, as did many other hon. Members. It is really important that the girls are not forgotten and that the issue keeps getting raised so that more can be done nationally and internationally, and that it never leaves the public imagination here and abroad. It is only with continuous pressure and real hard work, which has already been done by the members of the International Development Committee, that the girls may have the possibility of being returned.

I return to the status of some of the girls who have come back from similar incidents and how the culture and society in Nigeria work against them. They are seen not as victims but as tarnished people who cannot take back their full place in society. That is an abomination in any country, and we need to fight against it.

The hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) gave a good overview of his role as trade envoy and of how by having more trade with Nigeria, and by dealing with the trade issues there, we could produce more prosperity, which might help culturally and even educationally. If people have more money, they are likely to be more educated, which will also change cultural attitudes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East spoke more generally about the role of educating mothers. My parents were told many, many years ago, "If you educate your daughter, you educate the family." That is so true. She gave the simple, illuminating example of a

mother being able to read the instructions on a medicine bottle. What a difference it makes to a family if the mother can do that.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron), who is a member of the IDC, gave a full and heart-rending account of her visit and the security issues involved in making even a simple visit to northern Nigeria. All Committee members are to be commended for their bravery and dedication. To go through that and to come back with a burning desire to help even more is commendable.

It is also important that all those who have spoken have congratulated the UK Government on what they have done so far while appealing to them to do even more to help. We understand that forces have been sent to help, to train and to try to find and rescue these girls, but the girls have not been rescued because of the terrain and all sorts of other reasons. We must not give up on these girls.

Once again, I commend everyone who has spoken in this debate for substantially raising awareness. Two years on, these girls must not be forgotten.

2.52 pm

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I will be brief so that the Minister has time to respond to the specific points that have been raised. I am grateful to the Chairman of the International Development Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), for securing this debate. As ever in Westminster Hall, this has been a cross-party and collegial debate.

I will press the Minister on a couple of points about the assistance that the Government are giving to Nigeria. Will he comment briefly on the larger number of 276? Is he aware of the services on offer to the girls who have returned, particularly post-traumatic services? Does he believe that the services funded through the DFID budget are of high quality? Will he briefly touch on both the Defence and Foreign and Commonwealth Office budgets being spent on assisting with the logistics of finding the girls who are still missing in this huge terrain?

Will the Minister comment on the sensitive matter of returned girls who want to terminate their pregnancies? What choice of healthcare is on offer? Will he comment on those who, through ostracism in society, are sadly facing destitution? What sort of basic welfare is available to these girls? Some of those who have returned are being ostracised. That information comes from House of Commons Library research and the *Guardian* article by Chitra Nagarajan, who has underlined that although some girls have been returned, and we hope more will, those crucial services must be in place. High-quality, long-term, ongoing care, in which the UK has expertise and which we are in a good position to offer, would be valuable. By providing such care we could rest assured that excellent services are available when more and more of these girls are returned.

I address my other short point not to the Minister but to our Government's trade envoy, the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell). He has an important role to

play, and I am pleased that he has emphasised that the Nigerian judiciary has a role to play in strengthening the effectiveness of the rule of law. Will the Minister outline how the roles of the trade envoy and the FCO will be co-ordinated so that we strengthen our messaging when officials and envoys are in Nigeria so that these issues are discussed at every single opportunity, not just Government to Government or military to military, but in a genuinely co-operative and co-ordinated response?

John Howell: It depends on the cheekiness of whoever is the trade envoy. In my case, I take everything under my own banner and I do a bit of the co-ordination myself. If I can continue to do that, so much the better.

Catherine West: I encourage the hon. Gentleman to be as cheeky as possible.

Once again, I thank all Members who have taken part in this debate. I apologise for not having a chance to mention everyone, but I particularly thank the three Members who were there and who heard the chanting. They are wearing their badges today. Listening to their speeches was very emotional.

2.56 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): I congratulate the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) on securing this important debate. He does incredible work as Chair of the International Development Committee. He raises the interesting concept—I do not know whether we can formalise it—that when the Committee makes such a visit perhaps there should be a more formal opportunity to present its findings, rather than simply producing a standard report. Members on both sides of the House have articulated a sense of knowledge and expertise, as well as a commitment to really understand these issues and to press the Government, and indeed the international community, to see what more we can do. Hearing people say that is more powerful than any report, even though the report is valuable, too.

I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on leading the Committee's visit in March. It was clearly very productive. I join him and other hon. Members, some of whom are wearing their "Bring Back Our Girls" campaign badges with pride to raise the campaign's profile—as has been mentioned, the campaign has reached the White House and elsewhere—in reminding people that it has now been a couple of years since the horrible abduction of these missing children. I am pleased that we have this opportunity to debate the matter, which allows me, as the Minister with responsibility for Africa, to place on the record what the Government are doing.

There has been a huge number of questions, as there always is. I will do my best to answer them in the time provided but, as usual, I will write to Members in detail if I am not able to provide the necessary full answers here today. We were all very moved by the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Mrs Grant). She has a powerful understanding of what is going on, and she provides a level of expertise and a forthright understanding of what is actually happening there, not least the power of the campaign. I pay tribute to her for raising this matter again and again. We all owe her tribute for her work.

The hon. Member for East Kirkbride (Dr Cameron) made it clear that we know very little about—*[Interruption.]* Sorry, do I have the constituency wrong? You are laughing at me, but that could be for a myriad reasons.

Dr Cameron: It is East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow.

Mr Ellwood: I now realise why I missed off the last part. The hon. Lady made the astute point that we do not really know what has happened to these girls in the past two years. We absolutely do not know. Anybody who is a parent or who has a sister can only guess what these people are going through and enduring. We need to provide mental support when the girls return because there is no doubt that they have been mentally scarred by what they are going through. That is very important.

[MR GRAHAM BRADY *in the Chair*]

My hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) and I had the opportunity to discuss Nigeria only a couple of days ago, when we had our first meeting in the capacity of inviting trade envoys for Africa to the Foreign Office. It was timely for us to engage on that matter. I join others in paying tribute to his work. He reminded us of some of the underlying causes that must be dealt with, not least the economy. We can try to defeat insurgencies militarily, but ultimately, we must give the people and communities something better to look forward to. They need a way of life that is successful and more attractive than that offered by an extremist organisation. The detailed knowledge that he brings is much appreciated.

My hon. Friend mentioned the huge challenge that the size of the country presents. I will touch on that a little later. The scale for the military combing through the various parts of Borno and east Nigeria is immense, which is why the international community must work together. Once we have done that and created an umbrella of security, that is when an economic strategy needs to kick in. The ingredients are there. Nigeria is a powerful country in Africa. As he highlighted, there is much that we can do on bilateral relationships. He has illustrated clearly that he is the right person for the job, and we will continue to work with him.

The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen), if I have pronounced that correctly, spoke about the value of the Committee's visit in March. I have underlined why I appreciate its work. He emphasised that there are parents out there who are missing their children. We are debating the issue and highlighting it, and there are people watching and discussing it, but there are also parents who are aware every single moment of the day that their loved ones are missing, and we should be conscious of that.

The hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin) underlined the value of this debate. She is right that Thursday afternoon is not always the busiest—there are other things going on across the estate—but it is important that we debate such matters, and I hope that we will have a regular opportunity to discuss the wider issues to do with this part of Africa as well as the plight of these schoolgirls. She is right to remind us of that.

[Mr Ellwood]

The hon. Lady also discussed the call for increased international assistance. At the UN General Assembly in a couple of weeks, we will hold an event to rally further support for what we are doing to assist Nigerians in defeating extremism and freeing the girls. She also highlighted the importance and value of education. If I may, I will write to her in more detail about the DFID programme that is in place and how we are making huge efforts to provide education, particularly to girls, so they can have the best opportunities in life. I will be in touch with her.

Albert Owen: The Minister is making an important point. I am sure that Committee members will join me in paying tribute to the DFID and Foreign Office staff in Nigeria, who took us to meet the campaigners. No stone was left unturned; we saw at first hand exactly what the campaign is about and the programmes to make things better.

Mr Ellwood: I absolutely concur. I am grateful that that could happen. Looking through my notes, I can see that we have provided support for more than 300,000 additional girls to attend primary school in Nigeria and that more than 50,000 girls have benefited from safe space interventions, which provide training and support to help their confidence and improve their skills, as well as the opportunity to seek work. DFID is providing a package of measures. The Under-Secretary of State for International Development visited Nigeria only a couple of weeks ago, I understand. I must catch up with him before my own visit there in the next month or so. This debate has been timely, as I will need to raise these matters when I visit the country.

The hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr Sharma) spoke of the international community's wider requirement to work together. Members have been generous in supporting the Government's initiatives, but ultimately, the more we can lead by example and encourage other countries to join us, the more leverage we have, not just in the military component but in all the other aspects that we have been discussing.

The hon. Member for Hackney South—I have probably missed a bit of that constituency as well. Have I?

Meg Hillier: And Shoreditch.

Mr Ellwood: I only learn the first bits; it is easier. The hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) gave another great example of the expertise that she brings to the house as chair of the all-party parliamentary group. She was also the first speaker to touch on the importance of the diaspora in this country and the relationships associated with it, separate from the bilateral relationship, the prosperity agenda and so forth. I pay tribute to the pioneering work that she does to ensure that those relationships are strong.

The SNP spokesperson, the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows)—have I got that right?

Marion Fellows *indicated assent.*

Mr Ellwood: I am getting better at this, clearly. She spoke about the underlying problems. I will come to that in a second, because it is important to dealing with areas of instability and conflict, which are an incubator

for extremism. She gave an important list, including poverty, cultural issues and the role of women and girls in society. In the 21st century, it is important that we can articulate that from an early age, which is exactly what some DFID programmes are doing.

Finally, I turn to some of the questions raised by the Labour spokesperson. Her speech was quite short; she caught me off guard a little by stepping back, but she clearly wanted to give me the most time possible to answer the points. She spoke about post-traumatic services, which must be considered. I do not have the details, but the former Foreign Secretary, now the Chancellor of the Exchequer, raised with President Buhari our concern to ensure that that package of measures is in place. Again, when I go on my visit there, it will be on my list.

Catherine West: I understood that the debate would finish at 3 o'clock, but we now have loads of time for interventions. Will the Minister write to the Committee members and to me about the exact provision for women, particularly in relation to some of the healthcare issues that I mentioned, including post-traumatic support and counselling and the depth of those services? It has been highlighted in press reports that some of that provision is not necessarily reaching the ground, and it should be ready in case other girls return who have been abducted or radicalised. We would like the detail.

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Lady has explained why she made an uncharacteristically short speech, thinking that the debate would be curtailed at 3 when we actually have more time. I will certainly be able to discuss other things, if there are more that she was hoping to present.

The hon. Lady raises some important questions about post-traumatic services and the role of the envoy. If I may explain, when I invited a number of the Africa envoys to meet me as the Minister for Africa, I wanted to know what the formalities were and how we could utilise them. In his own way, my hon. Friend the Member for Henley put his finger on the point: it varies incredibly according to the enthusiasm of the individual tasked with the job of envoy. I would like to elevate it to a much more formal role, so that envoys are tasked by the Prime Minister, occasionally get access to the Prime Minister at No. 10 to share their thoughts and have to write reports. I understand that none of them has to do so. We have not only a gifted but a committed envoy, who has attended this debate, but there is no requirement for any of the trade envoys actually to produce any work. I think that that is wrong.

We are considering ways we can work together on a more formal footing to leverage the role, because it is important. As we have seen, envoys can get amazing access. Because it says on their business card "Prime Minister's envoy", they get incredible access, and that needs to be leveraged appropriately.

Catherine West: May I suggest that the Minister not only reaches officials but goes to small business communities, which provide huge opportunities for applying pressure in regional ways? They go into communities in much more depth.

Another point I want to make concerns linking the trade envoy with the all-party group and the Chairman of the International Development Committee and its members. We are all here, so perhaps we could establish

a reporting-back system by trade envoys to the Select Committee and to the APPG on occasions, if that is permitted, so that the informal networks that operate among parliamentarians can be enhanced and we close the gap.

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Lady is making up for the shortness of her speech with the length of her interventions, but they are welcome. There are useful observations and initiatives to be pursued there.

John Howell: The Minister is absolutely right when he says that the trade envoy has unparalleled access in the country. It is unparalleled access to Ministers—indeed, right to the top—and to the companies that are there, big or small. I have already been twice to the APPG and I want to continue to do so, provided I do not have too many reports to write.

Mr Ellwood: I think we have some momentum there and certainly some ideas that we need to formalise. That is very much appreciated.

At the core of the problem is not only the challenge of a country that has to deal with the corruption and red tape that we see in many countries in Africa, but the blight of extremism in the form of Boko Haram. Unfortunately, as we have seen with al-Shabaab, Ansar Bait al-Maqdis and Daesh itself, extremist organisations take advantage when there is a power vacuum. They offer something else to the local indigenous people. They say, “Believe in me and I can give you something else.” Unless there is something else as an alternative, they will always win. And—dare I say it?—we saw that in Northern Ireland with the IRA when youngsters saw nothing else on their agenda or in front of them but to join a club, extremist though it might be, because they felt part of something and they got cash and status. That is what is happening in the north-east of Nigeria, and that is what we need to change, as it changed in Northern Ireland. It is a challenge that the international community must face. It is the responsibility not only of Nigeria, but the international community, because the consequences are that the trouble bleeds into neighbouring countries, triggering a refugee crisis, which bleeds into other parts of the world and across the Mediterranean, as we have seen.

Boko Haram’s violent insurgency has resulted in more than 20,000 people being killed in Nigeria and caused more than 2 million people to be displaced. I understand from the UN that 9 million people are in need of assistance across the Lake Chad basin. UN reports also confirm that about 250,000 children are suffering from severe acute malnutrition in the Borno state alone.

As has been mentioned, 276 Chibok girls were abducted in April 2014; 57 escaped and one has been confirmed dead, which leaves 218 still missing. It is the figure of 218 missing that has prompted today’s debate.

Boko Haram has been around for some time. It was formed in 2002 as a Sunni fundamentalist sect, but it has developed into a Salafist jihadi group. It seeks to attract people to join it and to take over and push back the legitimate Government. Today Boko Haram officially refers to itself as the Islamic State’s West Africa Province, because it has decided to join Daesh/ISIS. I am afraid that organisations that are not necessarily attractive

themselves are joining that international franchise in the hope that they will then get further funding and advice on how to move their extremism agenda forward. That is of interest to all of us because of where it leads. That is why we have to work not only in Nigeria but in Libya, in Sirte, and wherever the black flag has been taken over by a local terrorist group to further its cause. It is why we are joining with others on the military side and providing intelligence as well.

The international community has responded, as we have heard today. In January 2015 a joint multinational force was formed with units from Benin, Cameroon and Chad, and with Nigerian forces as well. We have provided assistance in three forms, which have been mentioned in the debate. The first is in a military capacity. We have more than 300 personnel involved in training and advising the Nigerian armed forces. We are also providing huge levels of intelligence, although I cannot go into too much detail about that here. Thirdly, and of most interest to the International Development Committee, there is the humanitarian support. There is no doubt that the Nigerian military and the international force have made progress, but, as has been outlined, Nigeria is a massive country. It has often been the case that when the forces have been able to clear an area and move forward, they have not been able to hold it, and that has been a problem. We are getting far better, but it is a challenge. Unfortunately, Boko Haram continues. There was not only the event in 2014 that we are discussing; the horrific attack on the UN convoy that took place in August is an illustration that it remains very active indeed.

We are providing a wide range of support, as the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby outlined articulately. We have provided support in hostage negotiations, for example, as well as financial support, military support and humanitarian aid, which I will touch on in more detail. The UK has increased its support to £32 million over the next three years. It is not my call—it is DFID’s shout—but we are looking to see what more we can do. That will be subject to debates that we will have at the UN General Assembly, but there is a desire to do more, so I am pleased that this debate can help to frame where some of the extra resources can go.

There has been a series of ministerial visits. Baroness Anelay, the Foreign Office Minister in the Lords, visited in February. The former DFID Minister, my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (Mr Hurd), visited prior to the change in Prime Minister. As I mentioned, the current DFID Minister with responsibility for Africa visited a few weeks ago, and I will be going in the next month. That shows Nigeria that we care about what is going on. It also allows us to influence in the best possible way how we can support that country along the three tracks that I mentioned—economic, humanitarian and military. We have pushed back Boko Haram, there is no doubt about it, but we have not completed the job yet.

Clearly, as many hon. Members have illustrated in the debate today, we will not defeat Boko Haram militarily. What we have done is not enough. Boko Haram will simply reform and recruit if something better is not put in place. There needs to be economic development and civilian-led security so that people genuinely feel safe. They want not military people in green uniforms but civilian operators, with gendarmes policing and so forth.

[Mr Ellwood]

We also need improved governance. We need councils and mayors in place, and for governance to work, we need people who are respected and not corrupted to make the local decisions. We need better delivery of basic services such as education and health, which are the basic pillars for any community to be able to move forward. The Nigerian Government recognise that and have been open and have put their hands up about where support is required. That was outlined in the Abuja regional summit in May, and there will be further big conferences with a focus on that issue. Our support reflects that approach, in the sense that we are placing our focus not just on the military but across the piece. As I mentioned, these matters will be considered at the United Nations General Assembly, and I hope that that will deal with not only Nigeria but the whole Lake Chad basin, because there is a need to see things in context.

This has been an extremely important debate, and I am pleased to have listened to the contributions, because of the depth of knowledge shown in them and because Parliament is demanding a commitment from the Government to continue focusing on the matter and make it a priority for Africa.

Albert Owen: The Minister has been very keen to get other people doing extra work—the Select Committee, the envoy and others. Does he intend that after the debate, in the new climate, a Foreign Office statement should be made so that the campaigners who asked for the debate—we are honouring a pledge to them—can hear that the British Government stand in solidarity with them?

Mr Ellwood: I should be more than delighted. The hon. Gentleman's comments are slightly disingenuous, as I was not trying simply to outsource work. I am going to go to Nigeria myself to see what I can do. I like to think that given my close relationship with my DFID counterpart I can again focus on this issue, which the United States is also keen to look at.

Mr Virendra Sharma: I hope that at this important time, with the visit next week, the Minister will be able to visit the group to show his solidarity and commitment.

Mr Ellwood: I have actually made that request already. We will already have fed that in and said that it is important that I get to meet the group, as the Committee did.

As for a statement, I shall look at the best timing. Rather than simply providing an update, which I think I have done, we need to confirm that there are new steps being taken. I have spoken about our desire to do something, and when that is articulated and formed a statement can be made to update the entire House. I agree that that would be a useful move.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby for obtaining the debate, and to all those who have supported it and made contributions. I have outlined our commitment to continuing to support Nigeria in its quest to defeat extremism.

3.22 pm

Stephen Twigg: May I welcome you to the Chair, Mr Brady? We have had an excellent debate, with powerful, well informed and sometimes, understandably, emotional contributions from across the House. I thank everyone for their participation, but particularly members, or those who have recently been members, of the International Development Committee, including those who are here in another capacity and therefore cannot take part in the debate.

I congratulate the Minister on his appointment as Africa Minister. One of the themes of the debate is that it is important that we work together cross-departmentally. An increasing proportion of overseas development assistance will now be delivered through other Departments as well as DFID. The Select Committee wants to make sure that we work together to scrutinise the other Departments' expenditure, which obviously includes the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

I echo strongly what my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen), a fellow Committee member, said in tribute to the Foreign Office and DFID staff on the ground in Nigeria. We had fantastic support from them for our visit earlier this year, and they are a fine example of how the two Departments can work together on the ground in an integrated way on behalf of the British Government.

Many broader issues were raised by several Members, and in particular by the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell). I hope that we shall have an early opportunity to consider some of the broader challenges that Nigeria and west Africa face, such as economic challenges, the trade issues that he is working on, broader issues of education and women and girls, health challenges, and the challenge of supporting the Nigerian Parliament and further strengthening democracy in the country. I should welcome the chance to address in the House many of the issues dealt with in the Committee's report published earlier in the summer.

I want to finish with two points. First, my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) spoke about the diaspora voice, and it is important that it should be heard on such questions. My friend, the hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Mrs Grant), is one of a number of Members who have Nigerian family connections, which added extra power to her brilliant speech. Just before the debate I was talking to my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr Umunna), who also has connections in Nigeria, as does the new shadow Secretary of State for International Development, my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Kate Osamor). Hearing those voices in the House is important, but so is hearing them in the wider community.

The debate has demonstrated the strength of commitment and feeling across the House. We need to get back to the focus of the Bring Back Our Girls message. I welcome what the Minister said in response to the intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn—that he will find a suitable opportunity to set out on behalf of the Government their continued commitment on the issue. I hope that we have demonstrated today that Parliament shares that commitment. We send out from Westminster Hall

this afternoon this message—that we want, as our badges say, to bring back our girls now. I look forward to a future debate in this Chamber or the House, where we can celebrate the return, and the reuniting with their families, of those girls who are still alive; I look forward to making that stride towards gender equality, and towards education for all children, but particularly for girls, in Nigeria.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the missing Chibok schoolgirls in Nigeria.

3.26 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 8 September 2016

TREASURY

ECOFIN: 9-10 September 2016

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond):

An informal meeting of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council will be held in Bratislava on 9-10 September 2016. The Government are committed to leaving the European Union; in the interim, they continue to participate fully in ECOFIN meetings. EU Finance Ministers are due to discuss the following items:

Future economic policies in the EU

Ministers will discuss the EU's current economic policy framework and whether further systemic reforms are needed. This discussion will be supported by presentations from former Italian Prime Minister and Finance Minister Mario Monti and former Swedish Finance Minister Anders Borg.

Deepening Economic Monetary Union (EMU)—fiscal pillar

An orientation discussion will be held on proposals for a euro area fiscal capacity, assisted by Guntram Wolff of Bruegel, Vitor Gaspar of the IMF, and Danial Gros of the Centre for European Policy Studies.

Taxation—current issues: improving tax certainty and fighting BEPS, tax crime and terrorism

Ministers will exchange views on measures to address tax avoidance, tax evasion and tax crime and counter-terrorist financing. The discussion will be framed by a presentations from OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría and State Secretary of the Slovak Finance Ministry Dana Meager.

Investment plan for Europe

The Council will discuss the progress of the first two pillars of the investment plan for Europe; the European fund for strategic investment (EFSI) and European investment and advisory hub. EIB president Werner Hoyer and EFSI managing director Wilhelm Molterer will report on the first year's functioning of EFSI and the hub.

[HCWS138]

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

National Flood Resilience Review

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Andrea Leadsom): The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General, my right hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Ben Gummer) and I would like to update the House on our progress with the national flood resilience review.

Last year the UK was hit by a number of extreme flood events, including in Cumbria, Yorkshire and Lancashire. Record rainfall and river levels have led to widespread floods severely affecting cities, communities and businesses.

The magnitude of these events means that we need to fully understand the scale of risk that the country is currently facing from river and coastal flooding. We need to take immediate steps to improve our resilience to this flooding.

As a result, the Government set up the national flood resilience review, chaired by the then Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr Letwin) and overseen by a cross-government national flood resilience review group. That review is being published today, setting out the actions to improve the nation's resilience.

By using new plausible extreme rainfall scenarios developed by the Met Office in the Environment Agency's flood modelling, we are now confident that the extreme flood outlines can be used as a robust planning tool for assessing flood risk.

As part of the review we completed a preliminary assessment of the resilience of key local infrastructure, such as energy, water, health, transport and telecommunications to flooding from rivers and seas. These are services our communities and businesses depend on.

The results showed around 530 facilities vulnerable to river and coastal flooding which could impact significant local communities. Working with the relevant utilities, regulators and Government Departments, a number of areas have been identified to improve resilience planning for this infrastructure. By Christmas 2016, the water and telecoms sectors will develop and implement plans for where temporary improvements can be made to the flood resilience of their infrastructure. These plans will ensure that the utilities obtain stock-piles of temporary defences in advance and have site-specific plans ready to deploy where they can be used. This is in line with current practice in the electricity supply industry.

In addition to these temporary defences all sectors with infrastructure at risk have agreed to develop and implement plans—where not already in place—to make medium-term permanent improvements to the flood resilience of their services to significant local communities.

While better understanding the risk helps us better prepare and protect infrastructure, effective response when flooding occurs is essential to minimise impact and protect lives. The review sets out actions that the Government and others will be taking to improve the response to flooding incidents by delivering a long-term rolling programme of improvements to our modelling, improving working across services and with local communities to strengthen our response, and improving our communication of flood risks.

The Government have prioritised investment in maintaining and improving flood defences in England with a record £2.3 billion six-year commitment to 1,500 schemes. This is set to better protect 300,000 homes and provide £30 billion in economic benefits by 2021.

On top of that, in this year's Budget, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a £700 million increase in flood defence and resilience spending, including a further £150 million for new flood defence schemes in Cumbria and Yorkshire. He also signalled that part of this funding would be used to respond to this review.

The findings published today commit an investment of £12.5 million to increase the Environment Agency's stock of temporary flood defences and other incident response equipment.

The work identified in the review is continuing, including with local resilience forums. Additional funding support will be considered as further findings emerge.

Copies of the review have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS135]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Review of the Forensic Archive Ltd

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Brandon Lewis): I am pleased to announce that I am today publishing the Review of the Forensic Archive Ltd (FAL). FAL was established in October 2012 to manage and maintain material previously held by the Forensic Science Service.

The review makes 10 recommendations, most crucially that the functions of FAL should continue to be carried out and that FAL is the best organisation to do so. It also recommends that the Home Office continue to fund FAL. I agree with these recommendations.

I will place a copy of the review in the Library of the House.

[HCWS137]

JUSTICE

Cremation Regulations

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Dr Phillip Lee): I am today announcing that new regulations regarding cremation in England and Wales have been laid before Parliament. The Cremation (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2016 will come into effect on 1 October 2016.

We are making these changes following our recent response to our consultation on cremation, published on 7 July 2016, in which we committed to make a number of changes to infant cremation regulations and practice. The regulations laid today introduce a statutory definition of ashes. They also remove the current requirement that cremation authorities must keep original paper records for two years, even though they have also made electronic copies of those records. These changes will provide clarity for bereaved parents at a difficult time in their lives, and modernise processes for crematoria.

In addition I would like to announce that, as also promised in the consultation response, we have now set up a national cremation working group. The group is made up of representatives from the cremation and funeral industries, voluntary organisations who support bereaved parents, medical professionals and other Government Departments with an interest in cremation. In the coming months it will provide expert input into our work to further improve cremation legislation and practice. The group's first priority will be amending statutory application forms regarding options for disposal of ashes, and bringing the cremation of foetuses of less than 24 weeks' gestation into the remit of the cremation regulations.

[HCWS139]

PRIME MINISTER

Intelligence Services Commissioner and the Interception of Communications Commissioner: Annual Reports

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): I have today laid before both Houses a copy of the latest annual reports from the Intelligence Services Commissioner and the Interception of Communications Commissioner. Both reports show the rigour and strength of our intelligence oversight system, a system that will be further strengthened with the introduction of the Investigatory Powers Commissioner provisions set out in the Investigatory Powers Bill. I welcome the unprecedented level of transparency about the authorisation and oversight regimes that both reports contain.

I am pleased that both reports recognise the diligence and rigour of those who use investigatory powers. These are important powers that are used, when necessary, to keep our country safe. Both reports contain details of the recommendations that the Commissioners have made to continue to improve the way that these powers are used. The public authorities who have received these recommendations will be giving careful consideration to them and how to further improve their processes.

I would like to thank both Commissioners, and the staff that work for them, for their continued diligence and the rigour with which they undertake their oversight roles. In particular, I would like to thank Sir Mark Waller for all of the work that he has undertaken as Intelligence Services Commissioner since this is the last full year of inspections that he will undertake.

[HCWS136]

Petitions

Thursday 8 September 2016

OBSERVATIONS

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Private rented sector in Dulwich and West Norwood

The petition of Alper Muduroglu,

Declares that tenants in the private rented sector in Dulwich and West Norwood have to pay high fees to letting agents; further that there is no limit to the amount lettings agents can charge; further that the Government should take action to address the difficulties faced by tenants in the private rented sector, particularly in London; and notes that an online petition on a similar matter has been signed by 1,480 individuals.

The petitioner therefore requests that the House of Commons urges the Government to consider capping the fees that letting agents are permitted to charge.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Helen Hayes, *Official Report*, 28 June 2016; Vol. 612, c. 268.]

[P001699]

Observations from The Minister for Housing and Planning (Gavin Barwell):

The Government are committed to raising standards in this industry. They believe that ensuring full transparency is the best way to do so, giving consumers the information they need so that they do not pay unfair fees, while supporting good letting agents.

Since 1 October 2014, all lettings agents and property managers in England have been required to join one of the three Government approved redress schemes. This requirement means that tenants and landlords with agents in the private rented sector and leaseholders and freeholders dealing with property managers in the residential sector are able to complain to an independent person about the service they have received, helping to weed out bad agents and property managers and drive up standards.

Since May 2015, letting agents are required to publicise a full tariff of their fees, whether or not they are a member of a client money protection scheme and which redress scheme they are a member of. This information must be displayed prominently in their offices and on their website. A fine of up to £5,000 can be levied against agents who fail to comply. A breakdown of fees enables tenants to compare prices and assess value for money, creating effective competition that should force agents to keep fees fair and strengthening consumer choice. The Government's view is that with these measures the balance of regulation for letting agents is about right. However, the Government are committed to review their effectiveness and have established a working group with Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town and Lord Palmer of Childs Hill to look at how client money protection is currently operating and whether to do further by making use of the powers in the Housing and Planning Act 2016 to make it mandatory. If you would like to contribute your views to this, further details can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/client-money-protection-cmp-review>.

The Government are committed to creating a bigger and better private rented sector, which is easily accessible to current and prospective tenants. We have set up the Private Rented Sector Affordability and Security working group which includes experts from across the PRS and housing sectors to explore options to reduce costs for tenants who access and move within the sector.

The Government have also introduced a package of measures through the Housing and Planning Act 2016 to crackdown on unscrupulous landlords and property agents who exploit their tenants by renting out unsafe and substandard accommodation. This includes a database of rogue landlords and property agents, banning orders for the most prolific and serious offenders, civil penalties of up to £30,000, extended rent repayment orders and a more stringent 'fit and proper' person test for landlords applying for a licence. In addition the Government are determined to crack down on landlords who deliberately overcrowd their properties with vulnerable people and illegal migrants by extending mandatory licensing for houses in multiple occupation.

HEALTH

Dr Keilloh and the Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service

The petition of residents of the UK,

Declares that the petitioners believe that the decision made by the Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service (MPTS) to remove Doctor Derek Keilloh from the Medical Practitioners Register was a travesty of justice; further that the petitioners believe that it was not in the public interest to have a community deprived of their so obviously well-loved and much appreciated family doctor; further that the petitioners believe that it is unfair that any appeal against the decision can only be made within 28 days when the doctor has just been deprived of his or her income, and no longer has financial support for legal affairs and is in a state of shock; further that the petitioners call into question why well documented "inattentive blindness" was not taken into consideration during the MPTS hearing; further that the Professional Standards Authority only exists to protect patients and will only investigate Fitness to Practise outcomes if they believe that the sanctions have been too lenient, not if the patients complain that the sanction has been too severe, prejudiced or faulty; further that there is no equivalent body to support the registrants; further that previously a handwritten petition from 1,034 patients and colleagues was sent to the MPTS and to Parliament in 2013 asking for his re-instatement; further that the petitioners have been informed that the new statutory rules governing MPTS procedures "Adjudication Section 60 Order" which were brought about in December 2015 now allow the General Medical Council (GMC) to review the MPTS decisions, the petitioners believe that although it probably cannot be post-dated the new ruling should make a difference in bringing about justice in this case; further that the petitioners believe that the case was prejudiced by the publication of damning articles in the media, some of which quote the MPTS tribunal chairperson as pronouncing Doctor Keilloh guilty even before the commencement of the hearing;

further that the petitioners call into question that the MPTS panel of three people was able to strike Doctor Keilloh off on probability which was not beyond reasonable doubt for supposed public interest failing rather than any clinical failing; further that the petitioners believe that the complainant against Doctor Keilloh was Phil Shiner of Public Interest Lawyers, a lawyer acting on behalf of complainants not from this country, about an event in a war zone almost ten years ago, rather than from his NHS patients who are the people who have suffered from Doctor Keilloh's erasure; further that the petitioners believe that in this case written statements from witnesses for the prosecution, presented by Phil Shiner, the lawyer acting on their behalf, were accepted by the MPTS panel without opportunity for cross examination; further that the Al-Sweady inquiry collapsed due to a lack of convincing evidence some of which was presented by Phil Shiner; further that the petitioners understand that Phil Shiner has been under investigation for professional misconduct by the Solicitors Regulation Authority and is now to face a tribunal; and further that an online petition on a similar matter has been signed by 3,496 individuals.

The petitioners therefore request the House of Commons to take note of the damage done to Doctor Keilloh's life and career by what the petitioners believe to have been a flawed disciplinary process; and call on the House to urge the Government to re-examine the statutory basis for the jurisdiction of the MPTS with a view to remedying this and potential future injustices; and to urge the Government to open an investigation into the written

statements from the Iraqi witnesses as presented by Public Interest Lawyers, and the evidence they gave under cross examination in the Al-Sweady inquiry, the original British army court-martial in the Baha Mousa case, the Baha Mousa Public Inquiry and Dr Keilloh's Fitness to Practice hearing.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Rishi Sunak, *Official Report*, 12 July 2016; Vol. 613, c. 260.]

[P001700]

Observations from The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr Philip Dunne):

The General Medical Council (GMC) is the independent regulator for doctors in the UK and takes action when a doctor fails to meet the standards needed, either through imposing sanctions on the doctor's registration, or by removing their right to practise.

At the time of Dr Keilloh's removal from the medical register in 2012 the due process was taken forward by a fitness-to-practise panel of the Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service (MPTS). The panel heard evidence and decided whether Dr Keilloh's fitness to practise was impaired.

The legislation that underpins the workings of the GMC and MPTS has been the subject of public consultation and has been properly scrutinised by Parliament.

As the GMC and MPTS are independent of Government it is not appropriate for the Government to comment on or become involved with individual fitness-to-practise cases.

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**not later than
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Bangladesh (Religious Minorities) [Col. 567]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Westminster Hall

Chibok Schoolgirls [Col. 223WH]

General Debate

Written Statements [Col. 11WS]

Petitions [Col. 3P]

Observations

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
