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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Monday 30 January 2017

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

The Secretary of State was asked—

US-UK Defence Relations

1. **John Nicolson** (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): What discussions he has had with his new US counterpart on US-UK defence relations. [908438]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Sir Michael Fallon): I had an introductory call with Secretary Jim Mattis last Monday. We discussed our joint leadership in NATO, including modernising the alliance and encouraging all members to meet the 2% spending commitment. On Friday, President Trump confirmed he is 100% committed to NATO. We also plan to work together to accelerate the defeat of Daesh in Iraq and Syria. I look forward to meeting Secretary Mattis at the NATO Defence Ministers meeting in a fortnight's time.

John Nicolson: The new American President supports the torture of prisoners of war. We do not and neither does the new Secretary of Defence. May I ask the Secretary of State not to reiterate the Government's position, but instead tell us why he thinks a proponent of torture is an appropriate recipient of a state visit?

Sir Michael Fallon: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made the Government's position absolutely clear. We do not condone the use of torture in operations and nor does the new American Secretary of Defence, Jim Mattis. As I understand it, the President of the United States has made it clear that he will be guided by those in his Cabinet. On this issue, they are taking a different view.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): In my right hon. Friend's discussions, did he mention Chancellor Merkel's call for the remaining EU 27 to engage in closer military co-operation? Does he agree that it would be extremely dangerous and damaging to NATO if such co-operation was within the confines of the EU alone, and that co-operation between European countries should be in the context of NATO, not the EU?

Sir Michael Fallon: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend. At the Warsaw summit in July last year, all NATO members agreed to improve collaboration between NATO and the European Union, particularly in areas such as hybrid warfare and strategic communications. EU Ministers have subsequently resisted the call for unnecessary duplication with what NATO is already doing.

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): When countries announce xenophobic and destabilising policies, does the Defence Secretary think the right thing to do is to appease them?

Sir Michael Fallon: If the hon. Lady is referring to the United States, then as the United States' deepest long-standing ally we will of course make our views known. Our Prime Minister was the first foreign leader to meet the new President. We will continue to offer the United States our candid advice.

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): The Prime Minister securing the President's 100% support for NATO, along with General Mattis's support for NATO, is hugely encouraging, but does my right hon. Friend not agree that some of the less than helpful remarks the President might have made about NATO in recent weeks and months are actually quite a useful wake-up call to NATO? We need to modernise some aspects of the administration of NATO, and we need to say to our NATO partners that they have to step up to the mark and pay their 2% like we do.

Sir Michael Fallon: Exactly. The new President has called for NATO members to fulfil the commitments we agreed—the UK and the United States agreed—back at the Wales summit in 2014. A number of other NATO members still have a long way to go to meet the 2% target. We also agree with the new President that we need to continue to modernise NATO to make it effective as a response and as a deterrent.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): What is the Defence Secretary's attitude to the prospect of the US conducting joint operations with Russia in Syria, an idea floated by the President?

Sir Michael Fallon: The United States and Russia already have an understanding on operations in Syria that they will de-conflict their air operations. Our own aircraft, where they are in similar areas, are covered by that understanding. We see no plans from the American Government, inside the coalition, to co-operate more fully with Russia.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): Cover to the Baltic states has been extended to Romania, given Russia's direct threat to that country. What reassurance can the Defence Secretary give to the Baltic states, which are very nervous about an assertive and aggressive Russia?

Sir Michael Fallon: That is why we agreed, at Warsaw last summer, to deploy troops to all three Baltic states. Britain will be leading the enhanced forward presence by deploying a battalion there in Estonia, and contributing troops to the American battalion deployed in Poland, to deter Russia from any further aggression towards those countries.

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): This weekend, we have been shocked and appalled by the US President's decision to impose a blanket travel ban on citizens from seven Muslim majority nations. To do this on Friday, which was Holocaust Memorial Day, only adds to the horror and outrage that we feel. Has the Secretary of State made clear to his US counterparts that there is no place for such measures in the fight against terrorism, and that

such actions only inflame tensions and risk losing valuable allies, such as Iraq, who are with us in the fight against Daesh?

Sir Michael Fallon: The hon. Lady and indeed the House may have the opportunity to discuss this matter a little later on, when a statement is made more formally about immigration policy, but let me be very clear that we look forward to working with a new United States Administration on the battle against Daesh. That includes, of course, measures to prevent and reduce radicalisation.

Nia Griffith: Many of us have also been embarrassed by and ashamed of our Prime Minister, who for all her rhetoric on Britain leading the world, decided to hold Trump's hand instead of holding him to account. Her belated and limp reply of "We do not agree" was pathetic, especially when compared with Chancellor Merkel, who spelled out that even the necessary and determined fight against terrorism does not justify placing people of a certain origin or belief under general suspicion. Can the Secretary of State assure the House that if President Trump issues defence-related Executive orders that infringe national law or are an affront to humanity, the UK Government's response will be prompt, robust and unequivocal?

Sir Michael Fallon: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister conducted a very prompt and successful visit to the United States, and was able to secure from the new President a 100% commitment to the NATO alliance and to work with him on a number of the issues that we deal with jointly, including the coalition against Daesh.

Sea Cadets

2. **Scott Mann** (North Cornwall) (Con): What support his Department gives to Sea Cadets. [908439]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mark Lancaster): The Government and the Royal Navy recognise the benefits of supporting the Sea Cadets and provide support through a grant in aid payment. This is paid to the Marine Society & Sea Cadets through a memorandum of understanding, which also sets out further support with regard to the provision of personnel, accommodation and training.

Scott Mann: I recently had the pleasure of meeting the Padstow Sea Cadets and their chairman, and fantastic work is done there. The chairman expressed concerns to me about some of their fixed costs, such as some of their utilities, insurance premiums, transport costs and tuition fees. Will the Minister look at this again, and see if he could make a contribution to the fixed costs of the service?

Mark Lancaster: The grant in aid payment to the Marine Society & Sea Cadets is currently £10 million. The MOU between the Royal Navy and the MSSC, which is currently under review, will ensure that there continues to be Royal Navy support for the Sea Cadets. I would be more than happy to ensure that discussions on property issues will continue.

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab/Co-op): Female sea cadets make up just a third of all such cadets. What steps is the Secretary of State taking to encourage more females to join the Sea Cadets?

Mark Lancaster: It must be said that female representation in the Sea Cadets is actually higher than it is in the armed forces, but it is a matter that the Government take very seriously. We have set several targets to ensure that our armed forces are viewed as being open to both men and women, and we will continue to pursue that over the coming years.

23. [908460] **Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): You cannot get much further from the sea than Kettering, yet the Kettering Sea Cadets are an example that other Sea Cadet organisations should follow. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Sea Cadets, the Air Squadrons and the Army Cadets provide our young people with some of the best examples in life that they could follow?

Mark Lancaster: I think Milton Keynes may actually be further from the sea than Kettering, and we also have a thriving Sea Cadet unit. I am a great fan of the cadets. I started my military life in the Air Cadets some 32 years ago. It is something that I valued enormously. That is why I like to think that I am one of the greatest champions for the cadet forces.

NATO Spending Target

3. **James Berry** (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with his international counterparts on NATO's 2% GDP spending target. [908440]

8. **Chris Davies** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with his international counterparts on NATO's 2% GDP spending target. [908445]

13. **Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with his international counterparts on NATO's 2% GDP spending target. [908450]

18. **Jack Lopresti** (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with his international counterparts on NATO's 2% GDP spending target. [908455]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Sir Michael Fallon): At the Wales summit, NATO agreed that security depends on both how much we spend and how we spend it. All 28 allies committed to meeting the defence investment pledge. The United Kingdom already meets NATO's spending targets, and will continue to do so for the rest of this decade. I regularly encourage all allies similarly to meet this commitment.

James Berry: It is right for all NATO members to meet the 2% spending commitment which we make sacrifices here to meet, but in the course of his discussions on spending and NATO deployments, has my right hon. Friend met anyone who believes that deploying troops to a NATO ally's territory is escalatory?

Sir Michael Fallon: The battalions that NATO is deploying to the Baltic states and Poland are combat-ready forces, but they are defensive in nature, and constitute a proportionate response to deter Russian aggression in the region. The only people who believe this deployment to be escalatory are President Putin and the leader of the Labour party. It is extraordinary that the official Leader of the Opposition is not prepared to back the deployment of British troops in Europe, but now favours some kind of demilitarised zone.

Chris Davies: Discussions are taking place in the European Union about an EU defence system. What steps is my right hon. Friend taking to ensure that commitments on the part of our European allies to this new so-called EU army do not contradict commitments to spending 2% of GDP on defence?

Sir Michael Fallon: There is no agreement in the EU on the proposal for an EU army. We continue to make clear that nothing should undermine NATO, which remains the cornerstone of European defence, and we continue to press for closer co-operation between the EU and NATO. It is a fact, however, that 18 of the 22 EU members of NATO do not spend 2% of their GDP, and have much more to do to enable NATO to face the threats that confront it.

Simon Hoare: The Prime Minister played a blinder last week with the President of the United States in stiffening his sinews with regard to NATO, but President Trump's vacillation in that regard over the last few weeks clearly exposes a weakness in NATO in respect of the many countries which do not pay that 2%. May I urge my right hon. Friend to make every effort that he can to ensure that those countries understand that we cannot always rely on the United States of America?

Sir Michael Fallon: There we agree with President Trump. Since making the defence investment pledge, the majority of allies have increased their spending in real terms, but it is still too low: 19 of the NATO 28 spend less than 1.5%, and five NATO members—by no means the poorest—do not even spend 1%. We will continue, with the United States, to encourage all allies to meet those spending commitments.

Jack Lopresti: As well as encouraging our NATO allies to maintain the spending of 2% of GDP on defence, will my right hon. Friend ensure that they do not achieve the 2% by including extraneous items such as pensions and other administration costs, rather than investing in frontline capability?

Sir Michael Fallon: The expenditure that NATO classifies as meeting or not meeting the 2% is something for NATO to judge against its own guidelines. I note that our own Defence Committee commended the Government's commitment to UK defence and found that our accounting criteria fell firmly within existing NATO guidelines, but ultimately, as I have said, this is a matter for NATO to judge.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): Since the Wales summit, 22 NATO countries have increased their defence spending in real terms, and 20 of them have increased it as a percentage of GDP. The number of

allies spending 20% of their overall defence expenditure on equipment modernisation has also risen from eight to 10. Is the real risk to NATO not, in fact, defence spending, but a move away from transatlantic solidarity, which the present President is in danger of taking forward?

Sir Michael Fallon: Of course we welcome the increases in defence spending that have taken place—the baton is moving in the right direction—but I hope the hon. Lady agrees that a number of countries, including some that are quite wealthy, are still a long way from meeting the 2% target, and, in some cases, the 20% target as well. As for her latter point, I agree with her: this is a north Atlantic alliance, and it is extremely important for all of us to continue to assure the United States that that alliance is as much in the interests of the United States as it is in our interests here in Europe.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I think we should hear from a Lancashire knight: Sir David Crausby.

Sir David Crausby (Bolton North East) (Lab): Now that the United States of America has clearly become a less stable and reliable NATO partner, how pragmatic is the 2% spending target, and what consideration has the Secretary of State given to allocating more time for European defence, or is European defence simply not fashionable any more?

Sir Michael Fallon: So far as our partnership with the United States is concerned, it is the broadest, deepest and most advanced defence partnership in the world, and my aim is to continue to strengthen it with the new Administration, particularly in the shared programmes we have on the joint strike fighter aircraft and in the reinstatement of our maritime patrol aircraft capability.

So far as European defence is concerned, I believe that the President's remarks during the campaign and subsequently are a wake-up call to all of us in Europe to make sure that when we make these commitments, we honour them.

Mr Speaker: I am sure the Secretary of State meant graciously to congratulate the hon. Member for Bolton North East (Sir David Crausby) upon his knighthood, but as he did not, I do so on his behalf.

Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): The National Audit Office reports that the procurement budget will reach its peak in 2020-23, at a time when massive and vital projects such as the F-35, Ajax and the Type 26 and 31 programmes will reach their peak. Our NATO partners such as the United States have a much more thorough oversight of procurement projects, something that can be undertaken here only by the Defence Committee or the Single Source Regulations Office. What plans does the Secretary of State have to increase the oversight of these massive projects, to ensure that we not only meet the 2% GDP target, but our capability is delivered on time, on budget and—

Mr Speaker: I think we have got the general drift, and we are deeply obliged to the hon. Gentleman.

Sir Michael Fallon: The hon. Gentleman knows that we are increasing the equipment budget with a programme of £180 billion of spending over the next 10 years, and we have taken a number of steps to improve the delivery of that programme to ensure that, as he says, these major projects are delivered on time and to budget. We have also, of course, established the SSRO to ensure we get best value for money for the taxpayer.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): Despite the Government's huffing and puffing, it is now very clear that their commitment to spend 2% of GDP on defence is more apparent than real. The Government are only able to say that they are achieving the 2% goal because they are including areas such as retired MOD civilian personnel pensions in their calculations, and my question is quite simple: will the Secretary of State instead commit to using the same method of calculation as Labour did at 2010?

Sir Michael Fallon: On the return we file to NATO, I have already told the House that it is for NATO to decide whether or not that expenditure is properly allocated, and the allocations we have made have been endorsed by a Select Committee of this House. Let me remind the House that our defence expenditure this year is £35 billion; next year it will be £36 billion, the following year £37 billion, and in the last year of this Parliament, £38 billion. It goes up every year.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): The Government are certainly not breaking any NATO rules in calculating the 2%, but may I remind Ministers and hon. Members that 2% is a minimum? It is not a target, and we used to spend much more than 2% in the cold war years, as recently as the 1980s. Does the Secretary of State agree that even if all our NATO European allies were to meet the 2% pledge as a minimum, we would still be unable to deter an aggressive Russia without the wholehearted involvement of the United States, which is why the Prime Minister's visit to President Trump was so absolutely important?

Sir Michael Fallon: I had been hoping over the last few days to find something on which my right hon. Friend and I can agree, and we have now done so, because I absolutely endorse both legs of his proposition. The 2% is a minimum, and we comfortably exceed it at the moment, but it is important that other countries meet it, and, overall, it is important that the alliance continues to improve its investment.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): On Friday, the National Audit Office placed a serious question mark against the Government's 2% commitment. Its report revealed that in order to fulfil the defence equipment plan following the collapse of the pound post-Brexit, the Ministry of Defence will have to use all its £11 billion contingency fund and make a further £6 billion of savings in defence spending across the board. Given that Trident is ring-fenced, will the Secretary of State tell the country whether it will be hard-pressed defence personnel and our conventional capabilities that will bear the brunt of those cuts?

Sir Michael Fallon: No. We have always been able to maintain conventional and nuclear forces in the past. The hon. Gentleman is right to suggest that the scale and success of our equipment programme depends on

our securing and releasing the efficiencies to which we committed at the time of the strategic defence review, and that work is now in hand.

Brendan O'Hara: The National Audit Office report cast further doubt on the Type 26 programme:

"Major changes to the requirement for the Type 26 Global Combat Ship mean that costings for this...will be unclear until 2018."

With an ageing fleet in desperate need of renewal, a looming budgetary crisis and the uncertainty caused by Brexit, cuts to numbers, and delays, how does the Secretary of State intend to make good on the promise to maintain 19 destroyers and frigates in the Royal Navy? For how much longer does he believe that the Royal Navy can respond to global threats with its current fleet?

Sir Michael Fallon: We set out our commitment to the size of the fleet in the strategic defence review. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman is so concerned about the budget for the Type 26 frigate, which is designed to protect the deterrent that he does not want to keep; that seems an odd project to be worried about. The terms of that contract have yet to be finalised, but I can assure him that the expansion of the Royal Navy is fully funded.

Defence Suppliers: Innovation

5. **Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con):** What steps he is taking to encourage innovation by defence suppliers. [908442]

14. **John Howell (Henley) (Con):** What steps he is taking to encourage innovation by defence suppliers. [908451]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Harriett Baldwin): With a rising defence budget and equipment plan worth £178 billion over 10 years, there are great opportunities to encourage innovation. We are spending up to 20% of our science and technology budget on research, creating an £800 million innovation fund and launching a defence and security accelerator to fund great innovative ideas fast.

Mary Robinson: Thales in Cheadle is a global centre for innovation and excellence in underwater combat systems and sonar. The delivery of that technology relies on the retention of high-tech skills. What steps is the Ministry of Defence taking to ensure that we continue to encourage the right environment for firms such as Thales and for smaller firms in my constituency by investing in complex engineering skills training and development to support innovation?

Harriett Baldwin: I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the recently launched skills strategy, which is called "Securing Defence Skills for the Future". The Ministry of Defence and the armed forces are already the biggest provider of apprenticeships in the UK. I know that Thales also runs highly competitive apprenticeships and graduate training programmes, and that it is particularly committed to increasing the number of women with these skills.

John Howell: How can small firms in my constituency that have great, innovative ideas bring them to the MOD without getting caught up in a bureaucratic procurement process?

Harriett Baldwin: I am sure that my hon. Friend noticed that, on Thursday, I launched the Enduring Challenge, which is run by the defence and security accelerator. It is designed to be a simple front door allowing anyone with a great idea that could benefit UK defence and security to enter into defence. The funding for that will be available throughout the year. On the other side of that door are helpful innovation partners who will guide small firms through a simplified procurement process, and I encourage firms from across the UK to visit the accelerator website on gov.uk to see how they can develop the next world-beating idea.

Mr John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): But in order to innovate, companies must have markets and customers. President Trump has clearly proclaimed that he intends to buy American, so will the Minister assure us that, whether it is high-tech equipment, cars or supplies, her Department will actually start to buy British?

Harriett Baldwin: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, we are of course the industry's biggest customer. He will also know that there are great examples of international collaboration. For example, we are purchasing 138 planes from the 3,000 in the F-35 programme, and 15% of each of those 3,000 planes is being built in the north-west of England. We have also been selected as the global hub for the repair and maintenance of those planes.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): How are the UK Government helping defence suppliers to innovate and secure part of the £1.4 billion that is spent on repairing the UK's nuclear weapons systems? Does the Minister agree that it would help those suppliers if there was transparency and accountability about the weapons not working effectively?

Harriett Baldwin: That is another example of where we work closely with companies in the defence supply chain on a range of ways in which they can innovate. We put a premium on innovation right across the defence industrial base, and the right hon. Gentleman draws attention to one of the areas where human innovation has been outstanding.

NATO Assurance Measures: Estonia and Poland

6. **Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con):** What deployments the UK is making as part of NATO's assurance measures in Estonia and Poland. [908443]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mike Penning): The UK has a leading role in NATO's enhanced forward presence. In Estonia, we are providing the framework battalion of around 800 military personnel, which is based around 5th Battalion the Rifles, an armoured infantry unit from Bulford that is equipped with Warrior armoured fighting vehicles. The battle group will also have Challenger 2 tanks from the Queen's Royal Hussars and tactical unmanned aerial vehicles.

Daniel Kawczynski: Our Polish partners and allies will obviously appreciate such rotational deployments, but the Minister will know that they are keen to have a permanent NATO base east of Warsaw. Can he envisage that happening during the course of this Parliament?

Mike Penning: I had the pleasure of meeting my Polish counterpart only the other week. Not only did we discuss the deployment of 150 personnel and Jackal vehicles from the Light Dragoons, but I congratulated them on their spending 2% of GDP on defence. I heard what they said about NATO, but that is a matter for our NATO colleagues.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I learned a great deal about NATO on my very first visit to the United States, when I became a green card holder, so I am particularly worried about what is happening with immigration in the US. In the 1960s, NATO was the bedrock of our defence in Europe; it still is today. We need a stronger NATO and must convert President Trump into a great, positive supporter of the defence of Europe.

Mike Penning: I learned an awful lot about NATO when I was in uniform with the British Army of the Rhine back in the '70s and '80s. Our American allies were with us then, and they are with us today. We need to ensure that America is 100% behind NATO—that commitment has gone through—and the Labour party leadership should be, too.

25. [908462] **Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con):** In relation to both these deployments, I welcome President Trump's wholehearted support for NATO, as well as the transfer of command of the NATO response land corps and the very high readiness joint task force to the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps in Gloucester and the 20th Armoured Infantry Brigade respectively. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is great testament to the UK's role in NATO, and will he send this House's best wishes to the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps and the 20th Armoured Infantry Brigade?

Mike Penning: I could not agree more with my colleague. One thing that I know as a former serviceman is that our armed forces need to know that the country is behind them. I hope that the entire House will support our troops as they deploy to eastern Europe.

Leaving the EU: UK Defence Policy

7. **Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab):** What assessment he has made of the implications for defence policy of the UK leaving the EU. [908444]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Sir Michael Fallon): The Prime Minister has set out our commitment to continuing to work closely with European allies and partners on shared defence and security priorities. We are already making a significant contribution to a wide range of European security challenges, and this year, in addition to undertaking our normal exercises, we will deploy troops to Estonia and Poland, and fighter jets to Romania.

Stephen Timms: The UK has long played a leading role in EU missions, including Operation Sophia in the Mediterranean and Operation Atalanta off the horn of Africa. Given the renewed commitment expressed by the Prime Minister, to which the Secretary of State has drawn attention, does he intend us to continue participating in EU missions after we leave the EU?

Sir Michael Fallon: These are voluntary missions in which we participate not simply because they are European, but because they are in our own national interest—curbing piracy off the horn of Africa, bringing peace to the Balkans and helping to stop the flow of migrants across the Mediterranean. The right hon. Gentleman is right that we will have the opportunity, if we wish to do so, to co-operate with our European partners on future missions where it is in our national interest.

Sir Julian Brazier (Canterbury) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the answers to earlier questions illustrate that we punch above our weight compared with many of our European partners, both in terms of spending and in terms of deployments to protect the eastern flank of Europe? Does he further agree that that is something that our European neighbours would do very well to keep in mind as we negotiate a new relationship with them after Brexit?

Sir Michael Fallon: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his knighthood, as I should earlier have congratulated the hon. Member for Bolton North East (Sir David Crausby). My hon. Friend is absolutely right that we need to continue to improve the effectiveness of our work within the European Union and NATO.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): The 2015 strategic defence and security review considered the pressures on allies, and the undermining of our military and economic alliances and institutions, to be possible risks. With the United Kingdom leaving the European Union, what assurances can the Secretary of State give that we will mitigate the economic risk, especially given foreign currency fluctuations? The National Audit Office pointed out that the fluctuations pose a “significant risk” to the national equipment plan.

Sir Michael Fallon: I will not comment—the hon. Gentleman would not expect me to—on the current level of sterling vis-à-vis the dollar or the euro. Suffice it to say that the Ministry, like any other large organisation, takes precautions against fluctuations in currency rates. It is far too early to say—indeed, it is wrong to speculate—where those exchange rates will eventually settle down.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): The Ministry of Defence’s permanent secretary has said that the European Union is “operationally irrelevant” to defence, but does my right hon. Friend agree with me that there are many areas where there is room for continued collaboration, particularly on a project-by-project basis, through the European Defence Agency?

Sir Michael Fallon: The permanent secretary agrees with me on these matters. Of course, after we leave the European Union, we will still have the largest defence budget in Europe, the largest Navy in Europe and some major capabilities that our other partners do not have.

We will continue to collaborate with our partners, including key allies such as France and Germany, but also northern European allies, on different programmes. Our leaving Europe does not mean that we will not continue to seek the efficiencies that come from future collaboration.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): The Ministry of Defence has said, quite correctly, that co-operation with our European partners can both be cost-effective and achieve worthwhile results. I welcome the Secretary of State’s comments this afternoon, but can he specifically tell us whether he has had discussions with the Brexit Secretary about future European co-operation after we leave the European Union?

Sir Michael Fallon: Yes, I have.

NATO: Role of US Administration

9. **Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with the US Administration on their continuing role in NATO. [908446]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Sir Michael Fallon): The new US Defence Secretary, James Mattis, and I have already discussed a range of NATO issues. I welcome his public support for the alliance. The Prime Minister and President Trump also had positive discussions about NATO last Friday. The United Kingdom and the United States will lead forward battalions this year in Estonia and Poland, and I will work with Secretary Mattis on ways to improve NATO’s effectiveness.

Mr Cunningham: It is quite true that President Trump has said that he supports NATO 100%, but the American Administration have also said that they would like to see changes in NATO to bring it into the 21st century. What discussions has the Secretary of State had with his opposite number about that? If he has not had such discussions, why does he not start them?

Sir Michael Fallon: I have had those discussions, and I look forward to having further discussions when NATO Defence Ministers meet in a fortnight’s time, because we, too, would like NATO to continue to modernise; streamline its bureaucracy and decision making; improve the movement of troops, armour and equipment across its internal borders; and ensure that it can respond more rapidly and more effectively in times of tension.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): Like the Secretary of State, I was pleased to hear that the United States remains 100% committed to NATO, the bedrock of the mutual defence pact. Does he agree that the best indication of the role of the US in NATO is the co-operation that we are seeing on bringing our carrier strike force capability back, rather than some of the commentary we are hearing in the media?

Sir Michael Fallon: Yes. I was very pleased to be able to conclude an agreement with the US Government before Christmas on the US Marine Corps using the carrier to land its aircraft on. There are many more opportunities for deeper collaboration on that programme, and on the development of maritime patrol aircraft, where we are both using the same type of aircraft, as there are in the research and innovation areas that the

Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin), is leading on.

Royal Navy: Size and Capability

10. **Ian Mearns** (Gateshead) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the (a) adequacy of the size of the Royal Navy's fleet and (b) capability of that fleet to respond to global threats. [908447]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Harriett Baldwin): The Royal Navy is growing for the first time in a generation, with new aircraft carriers, submarines, frigates, patrol vessels and aircraft all on their way; 2017 is the start of a new era of maritime power, projecting Britain's influence globally and delivering security at home. [*Interruption.*]

Ian Mearns: Sorry, it is my back, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman may ask his question from a sedentary position if he wishes. I am sorry that he is in discomfort. The House will want to hear from him.

Ian Mearns: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The Select Committee on Defence recently said, in a fairly damning report, that the Royal Navy's fleet of just 17 usable frigates and destroyers is

“way below the critical mass required”.

Does the Minister agree with the many former Sea Lords who gave evidence to the Committee that the number of vessels is just not sufficient, given that we are island nations, to protect our interests on the high seas?

Harriett Baldwin: My sympathies to the hon. Gentleman. I wish to emphasise that the 2015 SDSR announced that we will maintain our fleet of 19 frigates and destroyers, and committed to eight Type 26 global combat ships, three new solid support ships and two new offshore patrol vessels. That is in addition, of course, to the two new aircraft carriers, which, as he knows, are well on their way.

Mr Speaker: We all wish the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns) well. Knowing what a robust character he is, perhaps I can say that no injury will dare to get him down for long.

Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): Question 17.

Mr Speaker: No, the hon. Lady should come in on this question, to which her own Question 17 is similar; she should piggy-back on this question.

17. [908454] **Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan** (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): There is a thought for a Monday afternoon. What percentage of the Royal Navy is now female? How does that compare with other NATO countries? What is the MOD doing to ensure that women who are joining up can have a long and fulfilling career in our world-class Royal Navy, alongside their family responsibilities?

Harriett Baldwin: I can confirm that as of 1 October 2016, some 9% of the naval service strength was female—the departmental recruitment target is 15% by 2020. The Royal Navy has a number of initiatives to encourage recruitment and address the retention of female officers, including having more focused career management and increased access to flexible ways of working.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): In the 2015 SDSR, and again last December in the first annual report on the SDSR, the Government were very clear that the sea trials for HMS Queen Elizabeth would begin this spring, but in response to a parliamentary question last week, the Minister informed me that the trials would now take place this summer. What are the reasons for that? What will the operational service date be for HMS Queen Elizabeth?

Harriett Baldwin: I can confirm that she will commence her sea trials this summer and enter into the same programme so that she can sail into Portsmouth later this year.

Mrs Flick Drummond (Portsmouth South) (Con): Will the Minister join me in wishing Godspeed to HMS Diamond, which is shortly to leave from Portsmouth to lead the NATO taskforce in the Black sea?

Harriett Baldwin: I certainly will join my hon. Friend in wishing Godspeed to HMS Diamond and, indeed, to all our destroyers that are currently on a range of different tasks around the globe.

Yemen

12. **Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): What recent assessment he has made of the security situation in Yemen. [908449]

16. **Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): What recent assessment he has made of the security situation in Yemen. [908453]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Harriett Baldwin): The security situation in Yemen has been concerning since 2014, when Houthi forces and those loyal to former President Saleh took over the capital Sana'a and forced out the legitimate Government of President Hadi.

Hannah Bardell: As the suffering in Yemen unfolds, the world watches in horror. Nearly 2.2 million people are internally displaced, half of them women and girls. Evidence from Amnesty International shows that partially exploded, UK-manufactured BL755 cluster bombs are lying unexploded, injuring and maiming many people. Despite the Foreign Office Minister denying their existence, the UK Government's own investigations back up media reports that such cluster bombs have been deployed in the war in Yemen, so when will this heartless Tory Government wake up, do a proper investigation, take on Saudi Arabia and stop the sale and deployment of these bombs?

Harriett Baldwin: I think the hon. Lady must have missed the statement that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave on this issue in December. I can

confirm that the humanitarian situation is extremely serious. As a result, the UK is the fourth largest donor to Yemen and is committing more than £100 million this year.

Peter Grant: The single biggest contributor to the humanitarian disaster in Yemen is the Royal Saudi air force, which has systematically destroyed almost the entire infrastructure of the country, leaving 7 million people in danger of starvation because food cannot be got to them. How much worse does the humanitarian crisis have to get before the United Kingdom stops selling £2 billion-worth of weapons per year to a Government who are accused of 250 different war crimes in Yemen?

Harriett Baldwin: The UK position is of course that a political solution is the best way forward to bring long-term stability to Yemen and end the conflict there. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the coalition in Yemen is supported by United Nations resolution 2216. He will also be aware that there are regular incursions into Saudi territory, and I am sure he will recognise the legitimate self-defence of the Saudi-led coalition under United Nations resolution 2216.

24. [908461] **Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): There was widespread concern at the Secretary of State's disclosure in December that UK-made cluster bombs had been used by Saudi Arabia in Yemen. The Saudi Government have since said that they will not continue their use, but there is no way of enforcing that commitment. Will the Minister tell us whether the Secretary of State has personally urged the Saudi Government to sign the cluster munitions convention, which implements a complete ban on this most destructive of weapons?

Harriett Baldwin: Yes, I can confirm that the Government regularly urge Saudi Arabia to sign the cluster munitions convention. I can also confirm that, in his statement in December, the Secretary of State welcomed the announcement that UK munitions would no longer be used.

20. [908457] **Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): We know that the UK sold 500 BL755 cluster munitions to Saudi Arabia, but the Ministry is keen to give the impression that only one of them has been dropped in Yemen. Will the Secretary of State commit to demanding a full current inventory, including serial numbers, of the remaining munitions stockpiled in Saudi Arabia, as well as records for those no longer in the Saudis' possession?

Harriett Baldwin: I draw the hon. Lady's attention to my previous answer about how we welcomed the Saudi Government's commitment. We do not routinely hold records of other nations' use, storage or location of UK-manufactured equipment, particularly items that were supplied decades ago under previous Governments.

Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab): As the Minister knows, there are serious allegations that both sides in the conflict in Yemen have broken international humanitarian law. Those claims are particularly worrying to us in this country because we now know that United Kingdom-supplied cluster munitions have been used in

Yemen. What action are the Government taking to push for a full, independent, United Nations-led investigation into the alleged violations of international law in Yemen?

Harriett Baldwin: We do not oppose calls for an international independent investigation into these incidents but, first and foremost, we want the coalition to investigate allegations of breaches of international humanitarian law attributed to those groups and for the investigations to be thorough and conclusive.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Finally, and with rapier-like speed, I am sure, I call Sir David Amess.

Royal Navy: Size and Capability

15. **Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): What funding he has allocated to increase the size and capability of the Royal Navy. [908452]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Harriett Baldwin): This Government are committed to increasing our maritime power to project our influence across the world and to promote our prosperity. Over the next decade, we will spend £63 billion on new ships and submarines. The Royal Navy will have two new Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carriers, new submarines, frigates, aircraft, patrol vessels, support ships and tankers.

Sir David Amess: When the Queen Elizabeth sets sail, does my hon. Friend agree that it will be testament to the skill of British workers and our superb Navy? It will show Britain as a global force, so will she make sure that Portsmouth gives the ship a wonderful welcome?

Harriett Baldwin: It will be a moment of enormous pride this year when the Queen Elizabeth sails into Portsmouth harbour. I am sure that my hon. Friend will join many people on the pier at Southend, hoping for a glimpse and waving as she sails past.

Topical Questions

T2. [908429] **Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Sir Michael Fallon): My priorities remain our operations against Daesh, strengthening NATO, and implementing our defence review. I can announce today that Her Majesty the Queen will unveil the new Iraq Afghanistan memorial, with a service in London on 9 March, as a reminder of the huge contribution that our armed forces, aid workers and civilians make to the security of the United Kingdom and to help build a more stable future for the peoples of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Vicky Foxcroft: So far, 6,981 people from my constituency have signed the petition to cancel Trump's visit, and minute by minute the figure is going up. Will the Secretary of State publicly condemn the entry ban that Donald Trump has imposed on seven majority-Muslim countries under the pretext of defence?

Sir Michael Fallon: I think that the Government's position on this has been made very clear. We do not agree with the way in which the ban is being applied to British citizens, and the hon. Lady may have an opportunity later this afternoon, if she catches your eye, Mr Speaker, to pursue this directly with my colleague the Foreign Secretary.

T3. [908430] **Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): What assessment has my right hon. Friend made of Trident renewal on associated supply-chain jobs in the United Kingdom?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Harriett Baldwin): I can confirm that the Dreadnought submarine programme is a major national investment programme that will sustain thousands of jobs across the UK. The benefit will extend well beyond the major companies leading the programme.

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): Army recruitment levels are now worryingly low, due in no small part to the Government's total failure to manage the contract with Capita, allowing that parasitic company to sponge off the public purse while bringing in only 6,900 of the target of 9,500 Army recruits? Will the Minister review Capita's contract and improve his Department's monitoring procedures to stop leech-like companies siphoning off taxpayers' money for little or no return?

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mike Penning): We need to be careful, because comments like that undermine the morale of our armed forces. Let us have some facts. On 1 December 2016, the fully trained strength of our regular forces was 143,680, of whom 29,400 were in the Royal Navy; 83,360 were in the Army; and 30,870 were in the Air Force. We have more work to do on retention and recruitment, but those sorts of comments are not helpful to our armed forces.

T5. [908432] **Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): Last week, we debated the difficulty and challenge of recruiting new prison officers. May I urge the Ministry of Defence to use its good offices to point personnel who leave the services of their own volition in the direction of the Prison Service? There seems to be a synergy between the two, with the skills and expertise of those in the services much valued by the Prison Service.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mark Lancaster): Our service leavers have many transferrable skills, and I am pleased to say that the Ministry of Defence is working with the National Offender Management Service to encourage service leavers to join the Prison Service as part of the Government's recruitment of 2,500 new prison officers.

Mr Speaker: I call Julie Cooper. Not here.

T9. [908437] **Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): The recent report of the Select Committee on Defence on UK military operations in Syria and Iraq recommended that the Government

"provide the necessary detail on what is being targeted" in those countries, and

"put this information, as far as possible, into the public domain". Is the Secretary of State prepared to make that commitment today?

Sir Michael Fallon: We already publish a huge amount of information about the number of strikes that the Royal Air Force has carried out. That information was updated today on the Ministry's website. It gave details of operations last week in and around Mosul, and a strike to the west of Raqqa. That information has already been made public but I will, of course, look again into whether we can improve on it.

T7. [908435] **Marcus Fysh** (Yeovil) (Con): I welcome the visit to Yeovil earlier this year of the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin), and the investment in Crowsnest fleet protection to be provided by our Merlin helicopters. What is she doing to ensure that Boeing works with Leonardo in Yeovil on the UK's Apache helicopters, and to encourage Boeing further to build capability in the strategic aerospace cluster in Yeovil?

Harriett Baldwin: I was very impressed when I visited my hon. Friend's constituency earlier this month. Of course, Leonardo helicopters will support our existing Apache Mk1 helicopters until they are retired from service. I am delighted that Boeing announced last week that it will make the UK its European base for training, maintenance, repair and overhaul across its defence platforms. I am sure it will want to discuss that with Leonardo, which is well placed to secure subcontract work on the next generation Apaches.

Natalie McGarry (Glasgow East) (Ind): When will the Secretary of State answer calls to grant an independent inquiry into the botched Trident II D5 missile test to inform this House and our constituents what went wrong? What plans has he made to ensure that the House can be confident that the procedure for providing information is reliable and timely?

Sir Michael Fallon: I have no plans to commission the kind of inquiry that the hon. Lady proposes because, as I have made clear to the House, we do not on the Floor of the House comment on the details of nuclear submarine operations or on the details of the demonstration and shakedown operations, except to conclude that HMS Vengeance successfully carried out that operation last summer and has now rejoined the operational cycle.

T8. [908436] **Mims Davies** (Eastleigh) (Con): With Iraqi security forces making good progress in liberating Mosul, will the Secretary of State confirm what our brave British forces are doing in training Iraqi security forces to rid Iraq of Daesh?

Sir Michael Fallon: As Iraqi forces become increasingly capable and are deployed across the country, we now need to deliver our training more flexibly. In addition to training in Besmaya, Taji and al-Asad air bases, I have authorised UK personnel to deliver training at other secured and protected locations in Iraq. This aligns with our approach in the Kurdish region and ensures that we continue to deliver the infantry skills, counter-IED, combat first aid and bridge training that the Iraqi forces require.

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab): Ministers are well aware and, no doubt, very concerned that RAF serviceman Corrie McKeague has been missing since September. The hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) has done sterling work keeping Members

informed of the work that is taking place to find him, but this is clearly a very distressing time for his family. Will the Minister place on the record the Government's concern about Corrie's whereabouts? Will he also give an assurance that all work is being done and all resources are being put towards the search to bring him home?

Mike Penning: Naturally, there is an ongoing police inquiry, but I am sure that Members across the whole House will want to register that their thoughts are with Corrie's family, loved ones and his service colleagues from the RAF Regiment who I had the honour of meeting at RAF Honington just after he went missing. On a daily basis, I have ensured that all available military kit, personnel and surveillance equipment are available should the police request them, and they have requested them on several occasions. I thank the hon. Gentleman for paying tribute to my Parliamentary Private Secretary, who has done diligent work in Bury St Edmunds to ensure that the local community knows what is going on. We all want Corrie to come home safely, and the MOD will do all we possibly can.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Following the revelation of a very rare failure of a Trident missile test, will the Secretary of State confirm that our nuclear deterrent still meets what might be termed the Federer criterion of being able to deliver lethal projectiles at high velocity, in rapid succession and with total accuracy over a very long period of years?

Mr Speaker: It is a very high bar to imitate the accuracy and genius to which the right hon. Gentleman alludes.

Sir Michael Fallon: I am very happy to confirm the safety and effectiveness of our nuclear deterrent.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Has the Secretary of State had an opportunity to speak to his American counterpart over the weekend, because many of us would hope that he would have pointed out to the Americans that Trump's ban is potentially a massive recruiting sergeant for terrorism and is not going to protect anybody at all?

Sir Michael Fallon: I have already made it clear that the Government do not agree with aspects of the ban that was announced on Friday. The hon. Gentleman will have the opportunity later this afternoon to ask more detailed questions about it.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we will need to increase the study of what is happening in the South China sea, where the strategic threats are changing?

Sir Michael Fallon: Yes, we are concerned at the rising tensions in the South China sea. We continue to encourage all parties that may be contesting the sovereignty of particular islands or other areas to take those disputes through the international forums that were established for that purpose, and therefore to de-escalate the situation as far as they can.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): The whole country will welcome the memorial to our 625 brave soldiers who perished in Iraq and Afghanistan, and also welcome the Prime Minister's admission that we will never engage in wars of that kind in future. Would it not be appropriate now to investigate why we went into Helmand in the belief that not a shot would be fired, yet that resulted in 425 deaths of our soldiers? Should we not investigate that to make sure that we do not repeat it?

Sir Michael Fallon: I hope that the hon. Gentleman, who has long held these views, will take the time to read in full the Prime Minister's speech in Philadelphia last Thursday, where she spoke of the importance of standing by the fragile democracies in both Iraq and Afghanistan, where we have increased our troop presence and where we will stay until the job is done, which is to reduce the threat to our own people here.

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): I am sure that the whole House will have heard with some joy that the MOD's procurement process is to be simplified and diversified. To help us to judge the success of this, will the Minister say how many people currently work in procurement at the MOD and whether that number will go up or down between now and the end of the Parliament?

Harriett Baldwin: I can provide in writing the exact number of people, as of today, who work there. As this is a bespoke trading entity, the aspiration is that we do not manage the head count in terms of our procurement but manage down the cost of procurement.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): In the light of recent events, how relaxed is the Secretary of State about Trump having his finger on the nuclear button?

Sir Michael Fallon: The United States has always been a good partner to this country and has played a leading role in NATO, and is a key part of the nuclear alliance that we and the United States share together. It is worth remembering that NATO is a nuclear alliance. I look forward to working with the new Administration on precisely that.

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): Will the Secretary of State join me in welcoming the Heads of Government agreement signed at the weekend between the UK and Turkey, securing over 400 jobs in Lancashire? Does that not send out a signal that Britain post-Brexit is open for business?

Sir Michael Fallon: It does. I, too, am delighted that the agreement has now been signed in principle on the TFX programme, which will combine Turkish and British technology and brainpower into the development of a new fighter aircraft. I hope that that will lead to many more jobs being created both here and in Turkey.

Steven Paterson (Stirling) (SNP): In October, NATO appointed its first ever assistant secretary-general for intelligence. If the new US President follows through with his stated intention to reinstate rendition and torture, the NATO allies would be legally obliged not to work with him on intelligence. Will the Government ensure that the alliance rules out the use of torture in all respects, for the good of NATO effectiveness?

Sir Michael Fallon: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. We do not condone the use of torture and there are obviously implications that flow from that.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Will Ministers take action to make sure that more of the new light tanks we buy are made in Britain?

Harriett Baldwin: I am not sure whether my right hon. Friend is referring to the Ajax programme, but I can confirm that we have taken extensive steps to ensure that a significant portion of the manufacturing processes of the Ajax vehicles takes place in south Wales, and we will continue to work with our suppliers to ensure that we get significant UK content in all our procurement.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): What are the reasons for the delay in the HMS Queen Elizabeth's sea trials, and what will its in-service date be?

Sir Michael Fallon: It has always been our intention that HMS Queen Elizabeth should be accepted into the Royal Navy before the end of this year. We are not giving specific dates as to when the sea trials are likely to commence. Queen Elizabeth will set out on those sea trials when she is ready to do so.

Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): In 2020, Plymouth will commemorate the Mayflower leaving in order to found the American colonies. Is my right hon. Friend willing to meet me and potentially some other people to discuss how we can put together a review of the NATO fleet, not only for Her Majesty the Queen, but potentially for the President of America?

Sir Michael Fallon: I am very happy to consider that suggestion, which is the first I have heard as to how we might commemorate that particular anniversary at sea. It is certainly worth looking into.

Jobcentre Plus Offices: Closure

3.37 pm

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Minister for Work and Pensions if she will make a statement on the proposed closure of Jobcentre Plus offices throughout the United Kingdom.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Welfare Delivery (Caroline Nokes): On Thursday 26 January, the Department for Work and Pensions published proposals for the future of its estate, including jobcentres and back-office sites.

The Government are committed to helping people who can work to get back into work. Since 2010, the claimant count has dropped from almost 1.5 million to about 800,000, and employment has risen by 2.7 million to near record levels.

Old office contracts that are held by our jobcentres and benefits centres are now coming up for renewal, and in the 20 years since those contracts were signed the welfare system has undergone large-scale reform.

The roll-out of universal credit and our reforms of Jobcentre Plus have increased the number of digital interactions that claimants now have with us. Eight out of 10 claims for jobseeker's allowance are now made online, and 99.6% of applicants for universal credit full service submitted their claim online. That has resulted in the DWP buildings being used much less: 20% of the DWP estate is currently underutilised.

As we renegotiate our out-of-date contracts, we are merging some smaller jobcentres with larger ones and co-locating others with local government premises. That will help the DWP to offer a better service to people looking for work, while delivering a better deal for the taxpayer, saving about £180 million a year for the next 10 years. That means that we can bolster the support that we offer jobseekers, with a recruitment drive to hire 2,500 new work coaches.

Of course, DWP staff will be consulted on those changes and the vast majority will have the option to relocate or be offered alternative roles. For any vulnerable claimants that may be affected, we will put in place robust procedures, such as offering home visits or maintaining a claim by post, to make sure that they get the support they need.

Ronnie Cowan: The UK Government's proposal to drastically cut the number of jobcentres and DWP offices across Scotland and, indeed, the UK, including in my constituency of Inverclyde, will have a profound impact on thousands of people desperately seeking work and the support to which they are entitled. It is an insult that there has been a distinct lack of consultation with the communities affected and with our Government in Scotland. That lack of consultation is against the principles of the Smith agreement. Can the Minister explain to me why no consultation took place before the announcement of the closures?

In my constituency, the proposal is to close Port Glasgow jobcentre and make people from Kilmacoll, Port Glasgow and the east of Greenock travel miles to access DWP services. Disappointingly, this model has been replicated across the UK. That is an utter disgrace and it could push vulnerable people further into crisis,

what with the added travel distance and cost placed upon individuals, many of whom have little or no readily available funds to pay for that commute. What assurances can the Minister provide to my constituents that they will still have ready access to Jobcentre Plus and DWP services?

This should be far more than a spreadsheet exercise. I ask the Minister to put people first. Many Jobcentre Plus staff work hard to build good working relationships with service users, and they are aware of specific issues and needs. Can the Minister guarantee service users the continuity and quality of those working relationships? If the Minister is so certain that the measures are required, will she at least halt their implementation until a full equality impact assessment has been conducted and a full consultation of all sites has taken place; and if not, why not?

Caroline Nokes: There are lots of points to reflect on. Most importantly, we want to see service delivery to claimants, and the hon. Gentleman was right to focus on claimants in his constituency. As he will be aware, the claimant count in his constituency is down by 39%. I believe it is critical that we seek to maintain the relationship between work coaches and the claimants they have been working with, which is why we will seek to replicate that when work coaches are moved to a new jobcentre.

Claimants will be able not just to go to the jobcentre that falls in the catchment allocated by us, but to choose the one that works best for them. We are very conscious of the fact that many people in employment already travel significant distances to work. We are making sure that when changes fall outside the ministerial criteria, there is a public consultation, and we will use that to reflect on our public sector equality duty, which we take very seriously indeed.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am keen to accommodate the very considerable interest in this subject, but I should point out to the House—and remind those colleagues who previously knew—that there is a statement by the Foreign Secretary to follow, and thereafter other important business, which is likely to be well subscribed. There is a premium on brevity from Back Benchers and Front Benchers alike.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Does the Minister agree that the Government's success in reducing unemployment leads to the need to look at reducing the number of Jobcentre Plus offices?

Caroline Nokes: As my hon. Friend will have heard me say, the jobcentres that we are looking at are, in some cases, 20% under-occupied. It is absolutely critical and appropriate that we look at how we use our estate, and that we reflect on providing not only the best service that we can to jobseekers, but value for money to the taxpayer.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): The Opposition strongly oppose the Government's latest plans for the closure of one in 10 jobcentres in the UK. What assessment has the Department made of the

impact of these closures on claimants, in terms of travel times and additional costs? Will the Department consider issuing guidance to staff to take into account increased travel times when issuing sanctions? Accessibility is a major issue for many disabled people. The Government have said that they aim to halve the disability employment gap in the lifetime of this Parliament. How do the planned closures fit with that aim?

From this April, lone parents will be obliged to prepare for work through interviews with work coaches once a child is three years old, rather than five years old as is currently the case. We are particularly concerned about the impact on women, children and people with disabilities. Will the Government publish an assessment of the impact of these proposals on equality issues?

The Government continue to roll out universal credit, and, for the first time, people who are actually in work will have to attend interviews at jobcentres. Will the Government delay their plans to reduce their estate until they have a clearer idea of what the demands on jobcentres and staff will be under universal credit? The Government's hope seems to be that universal credit claims will be made and managed online, but many people are not confident using IT and they may not have access to a PC, laptop or tablet. What provision will be made for claimants who have difficulty using PCs and the internet in areas where jobcentres are earmarked for closure?

These plans have simply not been thought through, and they will have a damaging impact on the way in which vital employment support is provided. The Government should think again.

Caroline Nokes: As the hon. Lady will have heard me say, the vast majority of our UC claimants now access services online, and we welcome and encourage such a relationship. We have made it very clear that vulnerable claimants will be able to make claims by post in some circumstances, particularly where they find it difficult to access a jobcentre or have childcare responsibilities, and it is very important to make that distinction. The hon. Lady talked about accessibility. Where there is a difference under the ministerial criteria of more than 3 miles or of 20 minutes by public transport, we will seek to hold a public consultation, which will then feed in to our equality analysis so that we can best understand the impact on claimants.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): One of the things that really impressed me during my spell at the DWP was the quality of the work coaches and their capacity for supporting real, positive change in people's lives. If there is an opportunity to spend less on near-empty bricks and mortar and to invest more in a greater number of work coaches, is that not exactly the right thing to do?

Caroline Nokes: My right hon. Friend is of course right. Our work coaches are on the frontline of delivering services to claimants, not just helping them into work but helping those who are in work into more and better-paid work. That is why we are recruiting more work coaches and looking to make sure that our DWP estate both best reflects value for money for taxpayers and provides the services we need for claimants.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

May I tell the Minister that the Government appear to be making exactly the same errors as they did with the announcement of the Glasgow closure programme? Will the Minister tell us why the Scottish Government were not consulted, as per the Smith agreement? Why did she say in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) that jobcentres have catchment areas, when written answers to Members of the House have suggested that there are no catchment areas for jobcentres? Will she also tell us why the written ministerial statement indicated that redundancies may be required, and may we have further detail on that? Finally, what support, if any, will be available to claimants, particularly those with caring responsibilities, who have to travel greater distances?

Caroline Nokes: The hon. Gentleman will of course be conscious that, as an employer, the DWP has sought to put its staff first and to make sure that they are informed first about the proposals. It is important to reflect that we need to make sure we have good working relations with the Scottish Government, and he will be aware that my hon. Friend the Minister for Employment travelled to the Musselburgh jobcentre the week before last. It does matter to us that people get to go to the jobcentre most convenient for them. That need not be the one allocated to them by the jobcentre, but could be one they choose for themselves. In every instance, we are seeking to make sure that claimants can work with their work coach and go to the jobcentre that is most appropriate for them.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): I received notice on 26 January of a proposal to relocate the jobcentre from Red Lion Street in Chesham to Chesham library on Elgiva Lane. Will the Minister say what consultation has taken place with the 14 members of staff, and will she confirm that there will be no reduction in services for my constituents in the surrounding areas? We all want to see value for money, but will she send me the detailed analysis of the costs and savings that derive from this move, because it is just around the corner and we need to ensure that it makes sense and provides the value for money that she is rightly seeking?

Caroline Nokes: In many instances, co-location provides the best solution, exactly as my right hon. Friend has described, for claimants and indeed for our own staff. She will be aware that we have consulted jobcentre staff closely and looked at how we can best make sure that the new location for their roles fits with what they want, or, where essential, that they can be redeployed to other DWP roles.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): In 2010, I had three jobcentres in my constituency. Old Swan was closed by the Minister's Department at the start of 2010, and now she wants to close the other two, in Edge Hill and Wavertree. My constituency has the 39th highest level of unemployment in our country. Why does she want to make it harder for the 2,950 people who want to access support but will have to pay £8.80 every month to do so?

Caroline Nokes: It is important to reflect that we are trying to make it easier for claimants who interact with the DWP online to do so. We are looking at instances where we can get involved in outreach projects, as has happened in various places around the country. When there are special circumstances and when people are vulnerable, we are trying to ensure that they can be given assistance with travel to jobcentres.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): Shipley jobcentre has an excellent local rapport with the Salvation Army, which is situated next door and provides additional help and support for many of the people who go to the jobcentre. Will the Minister look again at such local circumstances before she goes ahead with her closure programme? In doing so, will she tell me what consultation will take place with the local community and staff at the Shipley jobcentre to ensure that any decisions taken are the right ones for my constituents and the people in the surrounding areas?

Caroline Nokes: We are seeking to ensure that we consult our staff, local stakeholders and claimants to understand what is best for them. This is part of a process brought about because the prime contract expires in March 2018. It would be grossly irresponsible of us not to reflect on how we make best use of our DWP estate, particularly when up to 20% of it is underutilised.

Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister give it a rest with the jargon about relocating or co-locating, because she is actually closing jobcentres? Hyson Green jobcentre in Nottingham, where we have twice the national average unemployment and are in the 5% least employed, was opened by Lord Heseltine after civil disturbances in the city. It has been important in matching people with vacancies. Please will she think again?

Caroline Nokes: It is important to match people with vacancies, but it is also important to reflect on making the best use of our estate. This is an opportunity to reflect on the fact that 20% of our space is underutilised. I am sure the hon. Gentleman would agree that this comes at a time when we should not be wasting taxpayers' money.

Craig Whittaker (Calder Valley) (Con): I support the rationalisation and modernisation of any service, but Brighouse is the largest township within the Calder Valley, so relocating our jobcentre uphill and down dale out of the constituency will be a disaster to the long-term unemployed who rely on it for job advice and training. Will my hon. Friend assure me that those who have put forward the proposals have visited places such as the Calder Valley to understand the demographics and geography, or have they just sat in their offices in Whitehall using Google Maps?

Caroline Nokes: This is not an exercise using Google Maps. We have engaged in the exercise over very many months to make the best use of our DWP estate. When we are not using the space we have but are paying for it, it is critical that we think very hard about how we can best provide services to our claimants.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): Has the Minister done another Glasgow? Before Christmas, her Department announced the closures of eight out of 16 jobcentres in Glasgow, calculated using Google Maps. Has she done the same again?

Caroline Nokes: The hon. Gentleman and I discussed this matter in Westminster Hall just a few weeks ago. It is important that we reflect not only on geographic location, but on travel patterns so that people can get to the jobcentre that is most convenient for them. We should not simply allocate them to the jobcentre that we want them to go to. They should have the ability to choose and work with their work coaches to ensure they have the best access to facilities.

Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con): In 2013, I sat on the Work and Pensions Committee when we produced a report on jobcentres. Overwhelmingly, we found that it is more important to have quality over quantity. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is more important to have modern and efficient services in our jobcentres, such as disabled access? At the end of the day, it is all about outcomes. We have more jobs than ever in our country, and it is all about getting the long-term unemployed into work.

Caroline Nokes: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Government have done a great job in getting people into work, but it is important that we do so through our work coaches, whom I have visited in many jobcentres up and down the country. They are working as hard as they can to help individual claimants. We must focus on those relationships.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): Is there not a more sinister reason as well as some of the ones discussed earlier—namely, the operation of agency workers in most of the ex-mining areas, where people do not use the jobcentre, principally because as many as 500 people at a time can be brought in to work on zero-hours contracts? As a result, they do not go to the jobcentre at all. That is one of the reasons.

Caroline Nokes: I would like to reassure the hon. Gentleman that this is not about anything sinister. This is about us looking at the best use of the DWP estate, value for money for taxpayers, and the unemployment rate, which is down significantly since 2010.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): The staff and users of the Bury Jobcentre Plus office will be delighted that it will remain open, but will my hon. Friend say when her Department next plans to review the number of Jobcentre Plus offices?

Caroline Nokes: As I indicated, this review is part of the prime contract established in 1998. It is nearly 20 years old and expires next year. All the proposals are a part of our making the best use of that contract and looking forward to what we need to provide now and in the future.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): Two jobcentres in my constituency are being relocated to another jobcentre in my constituency. I need to understand why that decision was taken. We have no evidence or anything on our equality duty. I am very concerned that in Lambeth there is still a problem with gang culture, and young people in particular do not want to move from one area to another. Will the Minister please look at this again and talk to people in Lambeth before the decision is taken?

Caroline Nokes: The hon. Lady makes a really important point. We want people to be able to access the jobcentres they feel most comfortable with. In some circumstances, for example where people feel sufficiently vulnerable that they do not wish to go to a jobcentre, we send the DWP visiting. I have seen that at first hand, with claimants accessing services by telephone—perhaps in instances of domestic violence—where they feel vulnerable about having to go to a public building. I absolutely take on board her points about our public sector equality duty, which we take very seriously. That is why we are carrying out an equality analysis and talking to our claimants to understand how this will impact on them.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): In my constituency over the past seven years, unemployment has more than halved. That is good news, but it means that the people who are still unemployed are the more difficult people to place and they need more intensive work. The good people of Edgware will be wondering what they have done to upset their public services, with the closure of two libraries and the jobcentre. Will my hon. Friend consider the potential for not only home visits but satellite visits using commercial premises so that job organisations can run them and workplace coaches can coach a number of people together?

Caroline Nokes: I reassure my hon. Friend that the DWP is doing exactly that. Outreach is an important part of our suite of products to enable claimants to be get back into work. We will continue to look at the best ways to deliver that in the best locations across the country.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): Closure of the last jobcentre in my constituency will require those who sign on fortnightly to pay an extra £6 a month in bus fares to get to a more distant jobcentre. Can the Minister reassure me that Jobcentre Plus will reimburse claimants with those additional costs?

Caroline Nokes: Where claimants are required to sign on more frequently than fortnightly we will look to reimburse costs, but I remind the right hon. Gentleman that across London the claimant count is down 24.6% since 2010. There are fewer people claiming and we are trying to work with them more intensively.

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): It is all very well to talk about jobcentres in London, but in rural Lancashire my constituents in Edgworth will have to travel for over an hour to get to Blackburn if we close the Darwen jobcentre. They are supremely hardworking and supremely successful, and anyone who thinks they can get from Darwen to Blackburn in 23 minutes is living in la-la land.

Caroline Nokes: Like me, my hon. Friend represents a rural constituency. Our constituents are used to having to travel long distances to access services. Where claimants will have to travel for over an hour by public transport, we are considering what arrangements we can put in place, including claiming by post.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): Leytonstone jobcentre, which is bang in the middle of my constituency, is due to close. I deal with vulnerable people week in,

week out for whom that centre is highly important. They will have to travel to either Walthamstow or Stratford to receive advice and sign on. What impact assessment was made before the announcement on the effects across north-east London?

Caroline Nokes: The consultation that we are carrying out with both our staff and claimants will feed into the equality analysis that we are carrying out.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): The good news in Kettering is that the number of unemployed people has fallen from more than 2,000 in May 2010 to just over 900 today, and record numbers of local people are in employment. Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the key achievements of hard-working jobcentre staff is to get many people online for the first time, thus improving their employability?

Caroline Nokes: My hon. Friend is exactly right. We should celebrate not only the high number of people in Kettering in work, but the additional skills with which they have been helped by our hard-working work coaches.

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): Unemployment may be falling now, but numerous forecasts suggest that the effects of Brexit might reverse or stagnate this decline. What assessment have the Government made of the ability to scale up support in the already overstretched jobcentre pluses if, as many expect, unemployment begins to increase in the future if the cuts go ahead?

Caroline Nokes: I would like to direct the hon. Lady's attention to the National Audit Office report of 2005, which says:

“One of the Department's main needs is flexibility in the amount of accommodation it uses.”

I reassure the hon. Lady that we are ensuring that we retain enough flexibility within the system to be able to cope with future changes in the jobs market.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): For those out of work or in other difficulties, it could be incredibly useful if citizens rights bureaux, jobcentre plus offices, council offices, local law centres and possibly agencies for those with disabilities were found in the same place—more or less co-located. Will the Minister update us on the extent to which regional Jobcentre Plus managers are discussing that with local authorities?

Caroline Nokes: I do not intend to give a blow-by-blow account of the sensitive commercial negotiations, but my hon. Friend will be aware that we are working very closely with local authorities, the voluntary sector and the education sector to make sure that we can put co-location in place. I direct him to the co-location that has taken place in Lincoln, which has proved to be a beacon of how we can best deliver services.

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab): Some of my constituents do not use the internet, and they use jobcentre resources to complete their job searches. With the closure of Batley jobcentre, will the Minister confirm that she will reimburse those who wish to travel to use Dewsbury jobcentre for visits which, while not mandatory, are absolutely and utterly essential?

Caroline Nokes: What we are looking at is how best to support the vulnerable. The hon. Lady makes a really important point about those who are not able to deal with their claims online. It is crucial to continue to look at how our work coaches can work with those people to make sure that provision, whether it be in the shape of outreach or at a different location, is best tailored to their needs.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): Wellington Jobcentre Plus office is due to relocate to Telford later this year, and Telford is 4 miles away. While we have record employment in Shropshire and in my constituency, which is most welcome, what can the Minister do to mitigate the increased costs for those who are long-term unemployed to get from Wellington to Telford to seek work?

Caroline Nokes: Many jobseekers will already travel more than 4 miles to access their nearest jobcentre, and it is important that we remember not just that, but that people in employment will also be travelling significant distances in their daily commute. We are seeking the best solutions for individuals by looking at outreach and co-location—to find ways that people can access services online so that where possible we can minimise the disruption to their looking for work.

Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): The DWP administration centre in my constituency is closing, and 300 jobs will be transferred out of Paisley. Has there been any assessment or consideration of the economic impact on the area? Has there been any consultation whatever; and if not, why not?

Caroline Nokes: The most important aspect when it comes to relocations such as that one is, of course, the staff. That is why we have been working closely with all our DWP staff to make sure that we find roles for them elsewhere and give them the assistance they need, should we choose to relocate them.

James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): Many of my constituents use the jobcentre or the council's housing services, so I welcome the decision to move Kingston jobcentre to the council offices when the lease expires in a few months' time. It will be much more convenient for my constituents.

Caroline Nokes: Co-location is an important part of our strategy, and I am glad that my hon. Friend welcomes it. We need to identify the ways in which our claimants can best gain access not only to DWP services, but to the services of other organisations such as, in this instance, the local authority.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The Minister has refused to answer this question, so I am going to give her another chance. Is she saying that she will repay the bus fares of my constituents who will now have to travel from the west end of Newcastle into the centre, or is she seriously proposing to make the most vulnerable people in Newcastle pay the cost of her failure?

Caroline Nokes: One of my first visits as a DWP Minister was to the jobcentre in Newcastle, and it was a great opportunity to see the universal credit full service being delivered at first hand. It is important to reflect

on the specific criteria, and I am happy to answer the hon. Lady's question. When people have to attend a jobcentre more than once a fortnight, we will reimburse them. As for those who are vulnerable and have childcare responsibilities, we are considering various ways in which we can deliver the service, which include allowing them to claim by post. We are very conscious that many people already travel much further than the distances that the hon. Lady has mentioned, either to go to work or to gain access to jobcentre services.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): In Corby and east Northamptonshire unemployment has also fallen by more than 50% since 2010, but what assessment has my hon. Friend made of the actual outcomes for jobseekers when Jobcentre Plus facilities are co-located with other services?

Caroline Nokes: We should reflect on some of our successful co-locations. For instance, as I mentioned earlier, we have worked closely with the local authority in Lincoln. The outcomes for jobseekers who are able to gain access to many services in the same place are as good as, or better than, the outcomes at individual jobcentres. It is important for us not to get hung up on the bricks and mortar, but to focus on the services that our work coaches provide for people who are looking for work.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): On 23 January, in a written question, I asked the Secretary of State what the criteria were for the equality analysis. I was told:

“The criteria for equality analysis requires us to pay due regard to the requirements of the Equality Act 2010... We will be undertaking an equality analysis... This will include feedback from public consultation”.

As the only promotion of that public consultation has been carried out by my colleagues and me, how can the Minister ensure that due regard has been given to the Equality Act?

Caroline Nokes: In fact, there are also notices in all the Jobcentre Pluses indicating that the consultation is ongoing. We have communicated with our claimants, and it is very important that it is their views that feed into this process.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): Does the Minister or her Department think that there is any correlation between ease of access to jobcentre facilities and those who are seeking work? Can she give a cast-iron guarantee that no one will be sanctioned as a result of the closure of jobcentres in a locality?

Caroline Nokes: What we do know is that those who are on universal credit full service are spending more time looking for work. We also know that the vast majority of those job searches are conducted online, and that they are more successful.

It is important for individual claimants to have a relationship with their work coaches, because circumstances may change. That was emphasised to me in a Westminster Hall debate relatively recently. What is someone misses a bus? What if missing a connection means that a person is late for an appointment with the work coach? We want people to have a good relationship with their

work coaches, so that they give them the necessary information. It is critical that if people miss appointments, they tell us why.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): As chair of the all-party parliamentary group for disability, I am extremely worried that closing jobcentres will make employment even less accessible to disabled claimants. Will the intensive support that needs to be given in person—not online or by post—be afforded to that group, and will home visits be afforded to all disabled constituents?

Caroline Nokes: Of course, many disabled claimants access our services very successfully online, but, as I have said, the DWP has a home visiting service which we can extend to all disabled claimants who ask for it when their circumstances make it difficult for them to go to a jobcentre. We want our work coaches to provide tailored support for each of their claimants, to have a relationship with them, and to understand their specific needs.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): It is difficult to square the Minister's claim that she is merging smaller jobcentres into larger ones with her plan to close Hammersmith, our busiest jobcentre in our main town centre. Coming on top of the closure of courts, post offices and police stations, is this not the hollowing out of vital public services from our towns and cities?

Caroline Nokes: No, it is not the hollowing out of public services; it is finding the best way to deliver services to our jobseekers at the most cost-effective price for the taxpayer.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The proposal to cut the back-office functions at Corunna House and Portcullis House in my constituency came on the back of the proposal to shut the Jobcentre Plus office in Bridgeton, one of eight being closed in the city of Glasgow—and before the consultation which closes tomorrow had even concluded. This proposal is a bolt from the blue, with no consultation with agencies in the city or with the Scottish Government. What do this Government have against the people of Glasgow?

Caroline Nokes: The hon. Lady will have heard me say earlier that my hon. Friend the Minister for Employment was in Musselburgh just two weeks ago, and she will remember that the claimant count in her constituency is down 42% since 2010.

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): The Minister has talked a lot about jobseekers choosing the jobcentre that works best for them. For many of my constituents, that is the one on Eastern Avenue, which she is proposing to close. She has talked about claimants who have to attend more than fortnightly, but does she not recognise that, even for claimants who have to attend fortnightly, she is imposing huge additional travel costs on those who can least afford them?

Caroline Nokes: The hon. Gentleman will, of course, be aware that we expect claimants to be prepared to travel for up to an hour to seek work, and it is important that we get feedback from claimants and talk to our

staff and understand the impacts. As I have said, we are looking at outreach options, we can do DWP home visiting, and many claimants will be able to conduct their claims either online or by post.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): One of the “super co-location” proposals we have heard about applies to Ayr jobcentre: Russell House, a medical centre, is going to close down and be relocated to the jobcentre. The medical centre has a car park with disabled parking spaces and a bus stop that my constituents can use, but it will be moved to a jobcentre with no parking that is half a mile from the nearest bus stop. How does that meet an equality impact assessment?

Caroline Nokes: As the hon. Gentleman will have heard me say, we are very concerned that disabled claimants make us aware of their circumstances so that they can nominate the jobcentre that is most convenient for them, benefit from DWP home visiting or conduct their claims online.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Rhondda has one of the highest unemployment rates in this country, so how on earth does it make sense to close the debt management service—the only one in Wales, at Oldway House in Porth in the Rhondda—taking the 93 jobs and sending them somewhere else? For that matter, why on earth are they closing the office in Llanelli as well? Is the plan just to put everything in Cardiff, because I simply say, like the Prime Minister said last week, yes, Cardiff is in Wales, but not all Wales is in Cardiff?

Caroline Nokes: No, of course the plan is not to put all services in Cardiff. As the hon. Gentleman will have heard me say many times, what we are seeking to do is make the best use of our estate, learn from what claimants and our Jobcentre Plus staff are telling us about these proposals, and make sure we get value for money for the taxpayer.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): The DWP said that it wants to reduce its estate by 20%, but in Glasgow it is closing 50% of the estate, and in Inverness, where I grew up and my father once worked at the jobcentre, it is reducing locations by two thirds. Why is Glasgow losing out disproportionately?

Caroline Nokes: The hon. Gentleman will, of course, be conscious that the Jobcentre Plus estate in Glasgow has grown up historically and has many more smaller jobcentres than other parts of the country. This is about making best use of the premises we have and making sure we do not have empty desk space in our buildings.

Heidi Alexander (Lewisham East) (Lab): Lewisham has a higher than average unemployment rate, yet the Government are proposing to close the main jobcentre in Rushey Green. They want to squash it into an alternative, less accessible premises in Forest Hill. That defies common sense, to be honest. Will the Minister confirm that she will seek to find alternative premises in Lewisham town centre?

Caroline Nokes: This is not about squashing anything; it is about making sure that we have full desks in buildings, not empty desks. In some instances, we have

[*Caroline Nokes*]

jobcentres where more than 20% of the desks are unused. The hon. Lady will be aware that unemployment is down nearly 5% across London since 2015, and it is very important that we make the best use of the facilities we have and get the best value for taxpayers.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): The DWP guidance says that it is a reasonable expectation that claimants should have access to an office within 3 miles or 20 minutes' travelling time. The Minister is planning to close the Broxburn centre in my constituency, which will result in claimants travelling 6 miles or 30 minutes. Given that that closure is in breach of her own guidelines, will she reverse the decision? If not, will she put on a free, accessible bus for my constituents and others so that they will not be left out in the cold?

Caroline Nokes: The circumstances that the hon. Lady has outlined are outside the ministerial criteria, and that is exactly why we are having a consultation with the public on the matter.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): The Torrington Avenue office in my constituency is due to be closed and its claimants sent into the centre of the city. Does the Minister not realise that this will cause great inconvenience and great cost to my constituents, who live in one of the least well-off areas of Coventry? What is she going to do about that?

Caroline Nokes: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that we expect jobseekers to be prepared to travel for up to an hour for work. This is about making the best use of the DWP's estate and making sure that there are no empty desks in jobcentres up and down the country.

Natalie McGarry (Glasgow East) (Ind): Contrary to the Minister's assertion, it was confirmed to Glasgow's MPs at meetings with DWP Ministers and representatives before Christmas that the Department used Google Maps. The Government have stated that they are consulting in areas where service users would be forced to travel more than 3 miles or for more than 20 minutes on public transport. I have checked, and it takes 23 minutes to travel the 3 miles from Easterhouse to Shettleston. Given that I made the Minister aware of this fact in last week's Westminster Hall debate, will she tell my constituents why Easterhouse was not included in the consultation, either initially or subsequently?

Caroline Nokes: As I have said several times this afternoon, we expect people who are looking for work to be prepared to travel for a great deal longer than 23 minutes to get to the workplace. The hon. Lady makes an important point about the consultation, which I will raise with the Minister for Employment, my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds).

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): The industrial injuries team in Barrow has accumulated many years of experience, and that expertise has enabled the team to take the claimant handling time for one of the nation's most complex benefits down from 175 days to 33 days. That reduction has meant that some of the most vulnerable people in the country, with terminal conditions such as asbestosis, have been able to receive their benefit before they died. Will she listen to the concern that if that expertise is dissipated when a new team comes in, the waiting times will go back up and many people will die before they receive their benefit?

Caroline Nokes: The hon. Gentleman makes a really important point. It is crucial that we do not lose expertise, which is why we will be listening to all DWP staff to see how we can best use that resource in future.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP) *rose*—

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: What an unenviable dilemma! I call Margaret Ferrier.

Margaret Ferrier: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I have been out on the streets of Halfway and Rutherglen in my constituency over the past two wet weekends, collecting signatures for the petition to keep the Cambuslang jobcentre open. Collecting the signatures has not been a difficult task; people are outraged by the DWP's decision and they want to make their views known. Will the Minister please allow them to do that by doing the right thing and opening up the consultation process to all DWP sites marked for closure?

Caroline Nokes: I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister for Employment will be delighted to receive the petition from the hon. Lady's constituency and that he will reflect on the views expressed.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: Does the Minister agree with those of us losing local services, such as the Alexandria jobcentre in my constituency, that the Prime Minister's vision of a shared society is nothing other than this Government's camouflage for attacking the most vulnerable in our communities and putting them at risk?

Caroline Nokes: We are talking about a shared society in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, where unemployment has gone down by 56% since 2010. It is really important that we ensure that our DWP estate and our work coaches are in the right locations to provide the best service to claimants and value for money to the taxpayer.

Mr Speaker: I am most grateful to all colleagues, and I thank the Minister for her splendidly succinct replies. Perhaps she should send a copy of her textbook to all her ministerial colleagues.

US Immigration Policy

4.19 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Boris Johnson): With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement on the implications for this country of the recent changes in US immigration policy.

In view of the understandable concern and uncertainty, it may be helpful if I describe for the House the consequences for British citizens and dual nationals of the Executive order issued last Friday. Let me begin by saying that it is not UK policy—this is not our policy—nor is it a measure that this Government would consider. I have already made clear our anxiety about measures that discriminate on grounds of nationality in ways that are divisive and wrong.

On 27 January, President Trump issued an Executive order banning citizens of seven countries from entering the US for a period of 90 days. Those countries are Syria, Iraq, Iran, Somalia, Yemen, Libya and Sudan. The order makes it clear that no US visas will be issued to citizens of those states and that anyone who already has a visa will be denied entry. The immigration policy of the United States is of course a matter for the Government of the United States, but on the face of it this Executive order has consequences for some British citizens. For that reason, I spoke yesterday to the US Administration and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has today spoken to General Kelly, the Secretary of Homeland Security. I am able to provide the following clarification: the general principle is that all British passport holders remain welcome to travel to the US. We have received assurances from the US embassy that the Executive order will make no difference to any British passport holder, irrespective of their country of birth or whether they hold another passport. In any case, the Executive order is a temporary measure that is intended to last for 90 days until the US system has added new security precautions. This is of course a highly controversial policy that has caused unease and I repeat that it is not an approach that this Government would take.

Let me conclude by reminding the House of the vital importance of this country's alliance with the United States, which I am sure Opposition Members appreciate. On defence, intelligence and security, we work together more closely than any other two countries in the world. That relationship is overwhelmingly to our benefit. The Prime Minister's highly successful visit to the White House last week underlined the strength of that transatlantic alliance. Where we have differences with the United States, we will not quail from expressing them, as I have done today—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. Let me just say to the House that it is obvious that there is huge interest in this matter, which colleagues can rely upon me to accommodate. I understand the strength of feeling, but the Foreign Secretary's statement, and his upcoming answers to questions, must be heard.

Boris Johnson: Where we have differences with the US, we will not hesitate to express them, as I have done today—if Opposition Members were listening—as the Prime Minister did yesterday, and as she did in

her excellent speech in Philadelphia last week. We also repeat our resolve to work alongside the Trump Administration in the mutual interest of both our countries. I commend this statement to the House.

4.23 pm

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): I am sure that the whole House will join me in expressing sorrow at last night's gun attack on a Canadian mosque, which left six dead and eight injured. They were all victims of hate, and we all have a duty to stand up to hate whenever, and in whatever form, it appears.

I thank the Foreign Secretary for advance sight of his statement. I must say that I thought that it was missing a few pages—apparently not—so I hope, Mr Speaker, that you will allow me to ask about some details that were missing from the statement and about its timing.

First, on the detail, as the Secretary of State knows, thousands of people in Britain live here on a permanent basis but are nationals of the seven listed countries and have no dual citizenship. Many of them are here with indefinite leave to remain, having fled persecution or war. Can he confirm, based on what he has said today, that these thousands of British residents are now barred from travelling to the United States? Dr Hamaseh Tayari, an Iranian national living and working in Glasgow, was told on Friday that she was not allowed to fly home from Costa Rica because she needed to change planes in New York. Similarly, can the Foreign Secretary confirm that a Somali national with a temporary US visa who is currently in the UK visiting their family cannot now return to the US under these rules? I hope he can clarify those points.

On the timing of the announcement, the order was issued at 9.45 pm on Friday, UK time. It then took No. 10 until midnight on Saturday, a full 27 hours later, to say that it would consider the impact on UK nationals. It then took the Prime Minister until Sunday morning to tell the Foreign Secretary to telephone the White House, and it took him until midday on Sunday to call the travel ban “divisive and wrong”—that is 38 hours. It took 38 hours to have the courage to say what everyone else was saying on Friday night.

Forty-six hours after the Executive order, we got clarification that UK nationals and dual nationals would not be affected. If that was because the wheels in Washington were slow to turn, it might be understandable, but Canada was immediately in touch with its American counterparts on Saturday and by that evening it had secured the travel rights of Canadian nationals, a full 17 hours before we had secured the travel rights of ours. Canada is supposed to be five hours behind the UK, so why was it a day ahead of us in resolving this issue?

Finally, on the timing, the order was signed barely an hour or two after the Prime Minister left the White House. Can the Foreign Secretary tell us whether this imminent order was mentioned in the discussions about terrorism and security? I do not know what is worse: that the President has such little respect for the Prime Minister that he would not think of telling her, or that he did and that she did not think it sounded wrong. If it was the first, it would hardly be a surprise; but if it was the latter, we really do have a problem because, when it comes to human rights, when it comes women's rights and when it comes to torture and the treatment of

[Emily Thornberry]

minorities, President Trump is already descending a very dangerous slope. When that happens, we need a Prime Minister who is prepared to tell him to stop, not one who simply proffers her hand and silently helps him along.

Boris Johnson: I listened very carefully, and I think the hon. Lady's most substantial point was about the particular case of a Glaswegian doctor. I appreciate that there will be all sorts of cases—particularly difficult cases, heart-breaking cases—in which people have experienced a lot of frustration as a result of this measure. I repeat, because perhaps Members did not follow it first time, that this is not the policy of Her Majesty's Government but a policy that is being promoted elsewhere.

What we will do is make sure that all our consular network and all our diplomatic network are put at the service of people who are finding difficulties as a result of these measures, but, as I said, because of the energetic action of this Government, of the Prime Minister and of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary we have an exemption for UK passport holders, whether dual nationals or otherwise. I think that most fair-minded people would say that that shows the advantages of working closely with the Trump Administration and the advantages of having a relationship that enables us to get our point across and to get the vital protections that UK passport holders need. The approach taken by the Labour party, of pointlessly demonising the Trump Administration, would have achieved the very opposite.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): Does the Foreign Secretary welcome the joint statement by Senator John McCain and Senator Lindsey Graham expressing their fear that this Executive order will be a self-inflicted wound in the fight against terrorism?

Boris Johnson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that. What the interventions of Senator McCain and Senator Graham possibly show is that this is a subject for lively debate on Capitol Hill, as it is here in this House. I repeat that we do not support this—it is not a policy we agree with—and it is clear from what my hon. Friend says that others in the US do not agree with it either.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Foreign Secretary for advance sight of his statement. Without a thought to the context, on Holocaust Memorial Day President Trump issued an Executive order to ban those who were born in seven predominantly Muslim countries from entering the USA, including those “bad ‘dudes’” who are actually the real victims of violence fleeing the conflict in Syria. This action is inhumane, racist and immoral, and I welcome the fact that this House is now treating the threat posed by President Trump with the seriousness it deserves.

We on these Benches would also like to pay tribute to and support the strong statements made on this issue by Scotland's First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, and welcome the work that has already been done by so many—[*Interruption.*] You can learn some lessons from Scotland's First Minister. I also pay tribute to the work being done

by so many on the ground in Scotland, particularly Women for Independence, who have provided moral and practical support to those who have been unjustly affected by this despicable action. Given the Prime Minister's blossoming and frank relationship with President Trump, did she know in advance that he was going to issue this order, which has concerned so many of our citizens? Does the Foreign Secretary agree with senior national security experts in the US and elsewhere that this will have national security implications for the UK, given that the US Administration have now adapted Daesh's false narrative that its conflict is one between the west and Islam? If we want to be a global leader, this Government need to show global leadership—where is it? The Prime Minister has been tested and she has failed on this, her first challenge.

Boris Johnson: As the hon. Lady will know, when it comes to tackling the scourge of Daesh—she is absolutely right about that—this country is the second biggest contributor to military action in strikes against Daesh in Iraq and in Syria. We continue to be the second biggest donor to dealing with the humanitarian crisis in that region. Everybody in this House should be incredibly proud of the leadership that the UK is showing in that respect. I have already set out my views. It is up to Members of the House of Commons if they wish to exhaust the wells of outrage in the denunciation of this policy. I have made my position clear—I made it clear yesterday. I said it was wrong to promulgate policies that stigmatise people on the basis of their nationality, and I believe that very profoundly. What we have done in the last few days is to intercede on behalf of UK nationals—that is our job—and UK passport holders. We have secured very important protections for them.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): President Trump is what we might call a “known unknown”: we know that he will do and say unpredictable things, and often just as quickly abandon those positions. He will learn as he goes along, and what we have to remember is that our security and that of Europe depends on the Atlantic alliance. So does my right hon. Friend agree that there must be no question of our refusing to welcome him to these shores, in the hope of setting him along the right path as soon as possible, to our mutual benefit?

Boris Johnson: My right hon. Friend is entirely right, in the sense that the Prime Minister succeeded the other day in getting her message across about NATO and President Trump affirmed very strongly his commitment to that alliance; it is vital for our security, particularly the article 5 guarantee, and the new President is very much in the right place on that. [*Interruption.*] He said so. It is totally right, of course, that the incoming President of our closest and most important ally should be accorded the honour of a state visit. That is supported by this Government and the invitation has been extended by Her Majesty the Queen, quite properly.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): This is not just about the impact on British citizens. One of our closest allies has chosen to ban refugees and target Muslims, and all the Foreign Secretary can say is that it would not be our policy. That is not good enough. Has he urged the US Administration to

lift this order, to help refugees and to stop targeting Muslims? This order was signed on Holocaust Memorial Day; for the sake of history, for heaven's sake have the guts to speak out.

Boris Johnson: As I say, it is open to Opposition MPs—indeed, MPs on both sides of the House—to come forward with yet fresher expressions of outrage about the presidential Executive order. They are entitled to do that. I share the widespread disquiet and I have made my views absolutely clear. I have said that it is divisive, I have said that it is wrong, and I have said that it stigmatises people on grounds of their nationality. But I will not do what I think the Labour party would do, which is disengage from conversations with our American friends and partners in such a way as to do material damage to the interests of UK citizens. We have secured important protections for people in this country, and that is the job of this Government.

Sir Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con): Given our new-found closeness to the Trump Administration, what plans does my right hon. Friend have to try to persuade the Administration, after the 90 days, to abandon what to many is a despicable and immoral policy? Would he agree—to paraphrase a far wiser President, John F. Kennedy—that those who ride on the back of a tiger end up inside it?

Boris Johnson: I am sure that my right hon. Friend's words will be heard in Washington, but all I can say is that we will continue to engage with the Administration to make our points about the interests of UK nationals and, of course, to convey our feelings about the global consternation that this measure has caused.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): Will the Foreign Secretary clarify what the position would be for an Iraqi national resident in the United Kingdom whose child was a dual British and Iraqi citizen working in the United States, in the event that that child died? Would her mother be able to travel from London to the United States to bury her daughter, under the current US arrangements? If not, would he agree that that would be quite simply inhuman and outrageous?

Boris Johnson: Of course, it is possible to create all sorts of hypothetical situations that are yet more outrageous. As far as I understand the matter—the right hon. Gentleman will appreciate that it is for the US to explain that aspect of its policy—the answer is that such a case would be treated very expeditiously and particular arrangements would be put in place to ensure that that person was able to travel to the US.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I will do my best to accommodate the extensive interest in this subject, but may I gently and perhaps tactfully point out that Members who toddled into the Chamber after the Foreign Secretary's statement had begun should not be standing? It is in defiance of the conventions of the place, and I am sure they would not be so unreasonable as to think that they would have a right to be called. That would be perverse, and I feel sure that they would not behave in a perverse way.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): The United States Congress and courts, as well as the President and diplomacy, will play a part in arriving at a solution to this question. Does my right hon. Friend accept that there is a universal threat from jihadists? For example, Europol has estimated that up to 5,000 jihadists have come over from several of the relevant countries. Furthermore, we should remember the victims of 9/11 in New York and 7/7 in London, and in Paris, Brussels and Berlin, not to mention Lee Rigby.

Boris Johnson: We understand the threat from jihadists both at home and abroad, so it is ever more vital that we work with our American friends to combat that threat.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): Will the Foreign Secretary for a moment try to recall, along with me, what it was like as I hid under the stairs when two fascist dictators, Mussolini and Hitler, rained bombs on towns and cities in Britain? Now this Government are hand in hand with another fascist, Trump. I say to the Foreign Secretary: do the decent thing and ban the visit. This man is not fit to walk in the footsteps of Nelson Mandela.

Boris Johnson: I hesitate to say it, but the hon. Gentleman's memory is at fault if he thinks that Mussolini rained bombs on this country. I hear the comparison that he makes, but I do not accept it; I believe that it is in our interest to work with our American friends and partners, to show our disquiet where appropriate, and to get the best deal for UK nationals and dual nationals.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): When President Obama imposed a similar ban on a single country in 2011, American democracy ensured that it did not last, and other action was taken. Can we not rely on American democracy this time to do the right thing and take the right moral pose, and is it not the job of British Ministers to speak for British policy?

Boris Johnson: My right hon. Friend is entirely right; indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) has pointed out that there is already disquiet about this policy on Capitol Hill. I have no doubt whatsoever that the American political system will help to introduce the requisite balances in the end. It is our job to intervene now and get the best deal we can for UK nationals.

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): In November 1938, the then Conservative Government prepared a Bill that led to the Kindertransport that transported Jewish refugee children to this country. Does the Secretary of State not realise that in making his statement he should uphold the Geneva convention and speak truth to power in the United States? He has let the House, and his job, down.

Boris Johnson: The right hon. Gentleman is taking sanctimony to new heights. Most fair-minded people would say that we have made it clear to our friends in America that we do not agree with their policy and that we disapprove of discrimination on the grounds of nationality. However, we have worked with them to get the best possible outcome for UK nationals and dual nationals. We have also made clear to the American

[*Boris Johnson*]

Administration—I am sure that he will approve—the widespread consternation felt by individuals such as him around the world.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): I congratulate the Foreign Secretary on condemning America's policy, which, by any standards, is completely unjustified. Like many of us, I am delighted that Sir Mo Farah can apparently go home and see his wife and children. Does the Foreign Secretary agree with Sir Mo Farah, who described the policy as based on nothing more than prejudice and ignorance?

Boris Johnson: I savour the rare congratulations from my right hon. Friend on any matter whatever. I am particularly delighted that Sir Mo Farah can continue to go back to the United States, where he trains and can get fit to win the many medals that he does.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): The Foreign Secretary knows that this policy is counterproductive, immoral and wrong. His attitude and approach is to get an exemption for UK citizens and invite the perpetrator to a full state visit. That does not seem like the wholehearted condemnation that the House deserves to hear given. What will he do to make it absolutely clear, in no uncertain terms, to the American Administration that this kind of discrimination is counterproductive, wrong and immoral?

Boris Johnson: The hon. Lady says that the policy is counterproductive, immoral and wrong; I have said that it is divisive, discriminatory and wrong. If anyone thinks that there is a substantial difference in our positions, I invite them to write to me and explain.

Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): I commend the Foreign Secretary on the work that he did on Sunday into the night to ensure that Britons had safe travel to the United States of America. Has he had clarification from the Administration on whether they have updated the advice to their embassies, because there is confusion? Some embassies are still turning dual nationals away and not allowing them to enter the United States of America.

Boris Johnson: I am thrilled that neither my hon. Friend, with whom I have travelled many times, nor Sir Mo Farah will be affected by this presidential Executive order. I can confirm that the embassy advice has been updated as we have been speaking.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): Most of us condemn xenophobia without hesitation and reject racism almost by instinct. Which of the Prime Minister's Great British values informed the initial response to Mr Trump's order?

Boris Johnson: The Prime Minister's primary duty, as the hon. Gentleman will know, is to the safety and security of everybody in this country, and to protect their rights and freedoms. That is what has been achieved by the agreement that we have struck. He will also know that the Prime Minister was first or very early out of the box in saying that she disagreed with this policy.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on making those words in our passports that refer to allowing Her Majesty's subjects to travel "without let or hindrance" a reality, and on being the first Minister to come to the Dispatch Box to defend domestic policy in the United States since Lord North. May I encourage him to defend our interest, as he is doing, and not seek to tell America how to run itself?

Boris Johnson: I am not seeking to defend, explicate or rationalise in any way the policy of the presidential Executive order. I merely seek to explain how it may affect UK nationals and dual nationals, and what we have done to mitigate its effects.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): On Holocaust Memorial Day on Friday, the Prime Minister told us:

"Our commitment to remember the Holocaust is about more than words...It is about...standing up to prejudice...wherever it is found today."

Why, then, was the Prime Minister unable on Saturday to adhere to her own call to action?

Boris Johnson: The Prime Minister made it very clear that she did not agree with the policy.

Luciana Berger: She didn't.

Boris Johnson: She did, and I have made it abundantly clear several times during the course of these proceedings that the policy is entirely a matter for the United States, but that my view is that it is divisive, discriminatory and wrong.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): The Foreign Secretary is to be congratulated on working to protect the rights of British nationals, but will he also consider that he would not be telling an ally how to run its own country by reminding it, in calm and firm terms, that our shared relationship is based on mutual respect for the rule of law, both nationally and internationally? Persisting with this policy does America no good in that regard at all.

Boris Johnson: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. I would just point out that we are more likely, as a nation, to get a hearing on these vital issues if we treat our long-standing friends and partners with the respect that they deserve.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): It seems that fake news has come to the House of Commons with a vengeance, because the Foreign Secretary has just said that our Prime Minister was one of the first out of the blocks to condemn the words of President Trump. She certainly was not; we have heard that it took 38 hours. Her failure shames this whole country. I am proud that more people in my constituency of Brighton, Pavilion, have signed the petition to stop the state visit than in any other. They recognise that our Prime Minister has been not involved in diplomacy, but complicit with tyranny. What does the Secretary of State say?

Boris Johnson: The hon. Lady's constituents are, of course, perfectly at liberty to sign the petition and express their views. I have expressed my views about the measure,

but I also think it would be a good thing for the visit to go ahead, because the relationship between the United Kingdom and the United States is the single most important geopolitical fact of the past 100 years, and we are going to keep that relationship going.

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): I strongly agree with the Foreign Secretary on the importance of this country's alliance with the United States, but does he agree that, whatever others may do, refugees arriving in this country will be dealt with with patience, courtesy and respect?

Boris Johnson: I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend for his point. I am glad to see that the bust of his grandfather has been rightfully restored to its place in the Oval Office. I remind him that of course Winston Churchill took a very strong view on a country being able to control its own borders and immigration policies.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): I do not think the Foreign Secretary understands that so many people in this country feel such contempt for what Trump has done. Can the Foreign Secretary clarify what he said earlier? If indeed the visit of this wretched, bigoted man is going to take place, can we be reassured that under no circumstances will he address Parliament in Westminster Hall? That, in itself, would be a disgrace.

Boris Johnson: I am sure that the mood of the Chamber of the House of Commons will be reflected in all discussions about how the visit is to go ahead, but we should bear in mind that he is the elected Head of State of our closest and most important ally, and there is absolutely no reason why he should not be accorded a state visit, and every reason why he should.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): Certainly, if we got the Queen to have tea with the President of China, I do not see why she should not have tea with the President of America. As all our security for 70 years depended on the special relationship, and with regard to our prosperity and a future trade deal, was not the visit of the Prime Minister an absolute triumph? We are all thoroughly proud of her. Is not the first fruit of this special relationship the fact that the Foreign Secretary has ensured the rights of British citizens?

Boris Johnson: I agree with my hon. Friend about the Prime Minister's visit. I think it was a very great success, and the two evidently kindled an important relationship. The parallels that were drawn extensively in the US commentariat between Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher and our Prime Minister and the new American President were very apposite. We can look forward to a new era of security and stability, working together with the US.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The British embassy in the United States has a very important page on a website that shows a list of presidential visits to the United Kingdom. Can the Foreign Secretary confirm that George W. Bush and Barack Obama were President for more than two years before they made a state visit, and that many previous Presidents did not have state visits at all, although they did visit this country in the

course of their duties? Why on earth has Theresa the appeaser got this President here within a few months? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman will have heard the response to what he said, but my immediate reaction is that the matter—*[Interruption.]* Order. I do not require any assistance. My immediate reaction is that the matter is one of taste, rather than of order—and I certainly do not need any help from the hon. Member for North West Leicestershire (Andrew Bridgen), who would not have the foggiest idea where to start.

Boris Johnson: May I therefore say, with your guidance, Mr Speaker, that I do find it distasteful to make comparisons between the elected leader of a great democracy and 1930s tyrants? I really have to say that I think it is inappropriate. As for the exact protocol of when the visit should take place—something about which the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) obviously cares very deeply—I cannot give him any guidance about that; it is a protocol matter.

Mr Keith Simpson (Broadland) (Con): May I offer the Foreign Secretary my commiserations on his being sent out to bat on a very sticky wicket? Will he tell the House whether, when he intervened in Washington, it was through the State Department or the President's son-in-law?

Boris Johnson: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that ingenious question. I am sure that the House will appreciate that we have very good relations with the US Government at all levels now. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has had an excellent conversation today with General Kelly of the Homeland Security Department, confirming the very important exemptions that we have achieved for UK nationals and dual nationals.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The Foreign Secretary does not like outrage, so does he understand the dismay felt by millions of Britons at the Prime Minister's failure to condemn immediately and unequivocally Trump's Muslim ban? Does he acknowledge that the ban may have increased the risk to British citizens in the seven countries affected by it?

Boris Johnson: I will simply have to repeat what I have already said about 15 times this afternoon about my views on this policy, which I think are exactly the same as those of the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle): it is divisive, discriminatory and wrong. That is our position. The right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) can find all sorts of other adjectives, if he chooses to. Let him reach into his thesaurus and exhaust the wells of outrage, by all means. We have made our position clear, and we have also secured an important exemption for UK nationals.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): As recent barbaric attacks across Europe demonstrate, we all face a continuing threat from Islamic fundamentalism, which we are all trying to address in our different ways. Although we may not have adopted the same policy as the United States, surely this is a matter for the newly elected Administration in America, its courts and its people. Our position has been immensely enhanced by the fantastic visit by our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. Britain now has influence, thanks to her.

Boris Johnson: May I just say something in defence of that great democracy, the United States of America? If we look at all the migrants in the world—all those who are living in a country other than that in which they were born—fully 20% of them are in the US. Some 45 million people in the US were not born in that country. I do not think that it is possible to say credibly that that country is hostile to those from overseas. Of course, it is vital that we work with the United States in combating terror and that we deepen our relationship, as we are doing.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): May I congratulate the Government on a very successful visit to the United States of America, and on putting the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland at the front of the queue? Does the Secretary of State agree that there is a touch of a double standard here? People from Ulster have been told for decades that they must talk to, and work and be in government with, the most objectionable people, yet they are now being told by the same people that the President of the most democratic country in the world should not come to this country. May I encourage the Secretary of State to ensure that the state visit proceeds? Could he also advise Northern Ireland citizens who hold Irish passports but who are entitled to full British passports on whether they should apply for British passports for ease of travel to the United States?

Boris Johnson: I completely agree with the point that the hon. Gentleman rightly makes. President Trump and his Administration have not, to the best of my knowledge, been engaged in terrorist offences on mainland Britain, unlike those with whom the hon. Gentleman and his party were asked to negotiate.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Given the reservations that my right hon. Friend has expressed and the mitigation that he has secured, what further opportunities will there be to maximise our influence? May I suggest that a return visit by the President is a rather obvious one?

Boris Johnson: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that very good thought. The presidential visit will, of course, be an occasion for deepening the relationship and having further such conversations. I will meet my US counterpart at the Munich security conference in just a few days' time.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): In addition to the general dismay, does the Foreign Secretary realise that those of us with constituencies with large Muslim populations—my constituency has the largest Arabic-origin population in the country—are feeling deep concern and anxiety? Many of them travel regularly to America for work and family reasons, and they are looking for the strongest possible reassurance from the Government. Can the Foreign Secretary help me on one specific point? A very diverse school party will leave for America in a few days, and a couple of the students have already been refused visa waivers. Will he do what he can to ensure smooth passage for those students, who are going to America to study the great tradition of American democracy?

Boris Johnson: We will, of course, do everything we can to help the party of schoolchildren that the hon. Lady refers to and to make sure that they have a great

trip to the US. If there are any difficulties with their visas, we will assist. As for the Arab Muslim minority in her constituency, of course we must speak up for them and defend their interests and rights. That is why we have made the points that we have about the needs of duals and the needs of UK passport holders.

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): I commend my right hon. Friend for his statement of condemnation. Is he aware of the speech in 1940 in which Winston Churchill said:

“Each one hopes that if he feeds the crocodile enough, the crocodile will eat him last”,

in reference to the countries that remained neutral in the war? The dangerous trend towards nationalism, which we have not seen since the 1930s, inflicting itself on the western world has wrongly been defined as populism. It is clear that this Executive order needs to be condemned. Does my right hon. Friend agree with me that the House must make its stand, here and now, for the weight of history stands on our shoulders?

Boris Johnson: I completely agree that we must stand up against bigotry and nationalism, but I do draw the line at the comparison that has been made relentlessly this afternoon between the elected Government of our closest and most important ally—a great democracy—and the anti-democratic, cruel and barbaric tyrannies of the 1930s. Continually to use the language of appeasement demeans the horror of the 1930s and trivialises our conversation.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): People feel strongly about the matter because of the great love held for the United States in this country and in this Chamber. The Foreign Secretary is right to say that our deep friendship brings with it the ability to be candid. Strength also brings with it the ability to be candid; is not the lesson from the weak response to these announcements that desperation leads to the opposite of candour?

Boris Johnson: The important point, I stress again to the House, is that the Government have earned the right to speak frankly to our friends in the US. We have done so, and we have made our views about this measure known. As the House has heard, my views are ad idem with the views of the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) and other Members here today. The Prime Minister does not approve of the measure, but the important thing to do is to talk to our friends and partners in the US—to reflect and relay some of the global consternation that we detect, but to get a positive outcome for UK nationals.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on securing the rights of dual British nationals. Will he undertake to look into the case of some middle eastern and other Asian countries refusing entry to dual nationals from this country?

Boris Johnson: I am aware that there are other countries, particularly in the middle east, that ban the citizens of at least one country from entering their own.

Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): Why did the Foreign Secretary make no reference at all in his statement to the Americans' suspension of their refugee

programme? Should not our Prime Minister have echoed the words of the Canadian Prime Minister by saying that we welcome those who are fleeing persecution, terror and war, regardless of their faith?

Boris Johnson: Our policy on receiving refugees has not changed, and we have a good record. The United States, to the best of my knowledge, has taken about 12,000 Syrian refugees alone. As I said earlier, I do not think that anybody could reasonably fault the United States of America as a great recipient of migrants from around the world. If we look at the numbers—45 million people in the US were not born in that country—we see that it has a very distinguished record.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend share my disappointment that so many Members of this House have got so used to our not having control of our own immigration policy that they appear to resent another sovereign country having control of theirs?

Boris Johnson: My hon. Friend puts it bluntly, but accurately. Whatever Members may think about this policy—there is a wide measure of agreement about the policy across the House—it is the prerogative of the President of the United States and the American Government to do this.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): The world is an increasingly dangerous place and if the special relationship is to mean anything, surely we, as friends of America, should be deploring this in the strongest possible terms and saying to President Trump that he must desist. This is not about making clear our anxiety, as we read in the Foreign Secretary's statement; it is about the leadership we must show to deliver peace and security in the world.

Boris Johnson: With great respect, the hon. Gentleman must have failed to pay attention during the previous 15 answers I have given on exactly that point. We do not agree with the policy, but we are engaging with the United States to improve it.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): I know the Foreign Secretary understands the fear that this Executive order has struck into the hearts of some of our British citizens, particularly as during the Obama Administration British citizens of Iranian extraction in my constituency had their bank accounts at UK banks closed, ostensibly because of US banking rules. May I urge the Foreign Secretary not to disengage from the USA, but to seek protections and assurances to ensure that the Executive order does not lead to further personal financial sanctions on British citizens originally from these seven countries?

Boris Johnson: My right hon. Friend makes an excellent point. I would just remind the House that the reason the particular seven countries have been singled out—there has been a certain amount of confusion and controversy about this—is that they were in fact the seven selected by the Obama Administration for the withdrawal of the visa waiver scheme for anybody who had been to those countries.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I am sure that the three Members of this House who were born in Yemen are grateful to the Foreign Secretary for allowing us to travel to America, but a British citizen who happens to be an aid worker in Yemen or has visited Yemen for humanitarian purposes will be caught by this ban because—as I understand it, but he may have other information—the United States will not allow those who have visited or worked in Yemen to visit the United States, even though they are nationals of Britain.

Boris Johnson: I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. I know that he was born in Yemen, and there must initially have been some anxiety in his mind about exactly how he would be treated were he to go to the US. I am happy to say that he will face no obstacle whatever because he is a UK passport holder; nor will any UK aid worker in Yemen, because that is what we have achieved.

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): We did not need the Executive order to be signed to realise that this was President Trump's policy. After all, it was an election pledge in an election he went on to win. Given that we knew, or should have known, that this was going to happen, did the Foreign Secretary raise the issue in his meeting with President Trump's transition team or did the Prime Minister raise it when she met president Trump? We should have known about it, and we should have raised it.

Boris Johnson: The reality is that conversations between the new Administration and the UK Government have been going on for many months. I have to say that we became aware of the policy when it was enacted by the President on Friday evening, and since then we have worked very hard to secure the exemptions and protections that we now have.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): Given that the Foreign Secretary has said today that the US President's policy is "divisive, discriminatory and wrong", can the House safely assume that he will strengthen any representations he makes to our friends in the US on this policy by working closely in co-operation and partnership with our counterparts in the European Union and the Council of Europe?

Boris Johnson: We already work very closely—hand in glove, cheek by jowl, locked at the hip—with our friends and partners in the EU on matters of common foreign and security policy, and by the way we will continue to do so once we have left the European Union.

Nigel Adams (Selby and Ainsty) (Con): Many thousands of people will be comforted by the fact that all British passport holders will be able to travel into the US, and that those who have the legal right to be here will be able to apply for a visa. Seven countries are on President Trump's list—their citizens are banned from entering the US for a period of 90 days. Every one of those countries bans Israeli passport holders from entering their country. Has the Foreign Secretary had any representations from dual British-Israeli citizens regarding that immigration policy, which is similarly divisive, discriminatory and wrong?

Boris Johnson: I am glad my hon. Friend has pointed that out. I had alluded to it in an elliptical way, but it is right that the House should be aware of that discrimination and the ban that exists. By the way, the House should reflect on the fact that all immigration and visa policies are by their nature discriminatory as between individuals and nations.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): The Foreign Secretary is right about one thing: we have lots of friends in America. I stand with our friends there today who are standing up against this ban, which affects Muslims and others from those countries, but may I turn the Foreign Secretary's attention back to the humanitarian cause in the middle east? Many of those affected will have been striving to save lives in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere. What contact has he had with humanitarian leaders to ensure that they can travel to the United States if they need to do so?

Boris Johnson: What I can say about the conversations we have had so far is that, where people have diplomatic or political reasons to travel, or if they are travelling because they are aid workers, there should be expeditious systems for ensuring that they get through fast. That also applies to some of the people who are resident in this country but do not have either dual or UK nationality.

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): The Foreign Secretary has touched on this point. Sixteen countries currently forbid admission to Israeli passport holders. What the US is doing is without question misguided and wrong, but does my right hon. Friend agree that we should be consistent in our condemnation?

Boris Johnson: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for raising a point about which many Members of the House would have been ignorant until this afternoon. *[Interruption.]* There we go. Opposition Members knew it. In that case, why did they keep silent?

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Many in our academic community are not British passport holders. At the weekend, my constituent Hamaseh Tayari, a specialist vet at Glasgow University, was prevented from boarding a flight because it involved a transfer in New York. The holocaust did not start with the gas chambers. Only days after Holocaust Memorial Day, the parallels are clear. I welcome the Foreign Secretary's condemnation, but will he condemn the restrictions in any discussions he has with his US counterpart? Will he assure the House that the price of trade with the US will not be our complicit acceptance of the new rules?

Boris Johnson: I said in my answer to the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), who speaks from the Front Bench, that we are aware of the problem with the Glaswegian vet and will do everything we can within our consular power to help her. The hon. Lady's repetition of comparisons—they have been made all afternoon—between these events, the second world war and the holocaust trivialises the holocaust.

Dr Tania Mathias (Twickenham) (Con): Will the Foreign Secretary make it clear that, while America pursues this terrible and divisive policy, which I utterly

condemn, the United Kingdom will always be a place where refugees are welcome and made to feel welcome? In that spirit, will he join me in praising and thanking voluntary groups such as Refugees Welcome in Richmond, which do great work in this field?

Boris Johnson: Absolutely. I assure my hon. Friend that we will continue to be a great open society in the UK. I was very proud when I was Mayor of London that 40% of Londoners were born abroad, including me. She has repeated condemnation of the Executive order, which has been heard on both sides of the House. As I have said, it is not my place to defend or explicate that policy, but it is there for 90 days and 90 days only, and will be subject to the full scrutiny of debate on Capitol Hill. As we have heard, there is doubt there, too.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): President Trump's decision to issue this Executive order is deeply divisive and dangerous. It has sent shockwaves around the Muslim world, including in Muslim communities across Europe and here in this country. As a Muslim, I find it deeply worrying and disturbing. Living in this country, I am deeply fearful of reprisals like the attack in Canada. When political leaders amplify tensions, when they fail to show courage and leadership, and when they fail to stand up in the face of division and hatred, we send the wrong message. I appeal to the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister to show courage and leadership, and to take steps to provide protection for those communities across Europe who are feeling very, very worried about their safety after this Executive order.

Boris Johnson: I agree very much with a lot of what the hon. Lady says, which is why the Prime Minister and I have taken the line we have on this measure. She speaks of hate crime and is absolutely right to do so. I do not want to see anything that stigmatises, entrenches divisions or causes communities to feel unwelcome, whether in this country or elsewhere. That is absolutely wrong. We take hate crime very seriously in this country. We can be proud of some of the achievements we have made in the past 10 to 20 years in cracking down on those who foment mistrust and division between our communities.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): The Prime Minister's speech in Philadelphia was one of the best expositions I have heard in recent years of the importance of the Atlantic alliance. I urge all hon. Members who doubt that to read her speech and they will see why this is a relationship worth holding on to. Will my right hon. Friend, in considering these issues, recognise the warm response the Prime Minister received from Congressional leaders, and redouble our efforts to reach out to them across the aisle as wise counsel and friends of the United Kingdom in Washington?

Boris Johnson: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. There is a wide measure of agreement across the Atlantic on some of the essentials that unite us: the importance of NATO and our collective western defence; and the importance of promoting our values and our belief in freedom, democracy, the rule of law, equality and human rights. They are shared by many, many people in the Republican party on Capitol Hill. They also share our

strong desire to develop our trading relations with a new, free trade deal, one of the great achievements of the Prime Minister's visit.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): I have to say to the Foreign Secretary that the emptiness and hollowness of his statement demeans his great office of state. Given that during President Trump's campaign he very clearly set out a policy to ban Muslims, does he agree that the Executive order amounts to banning Muslims?

Boris Johnson: No. The hon. Lady will understand that it does not amount to that. Certain states have been singled out. As I have said, I believe that to be wrong in the sense that it discriminates against people on the grounds of their nationality.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): When President Obama came over here during the EU referendum, he voiced his concern about what we were trying to do. We told him in no uncertain terms that it was none of his business—it was entirely ours. Friends should be able to speak to each other, but does my right hon. Friend agree that the American people have voted Donald Trump to be their President and it is their business how they defend their borders?

Boris Johnson: I agree with my hon. Friend up to this point: it is also our duty, as many Members have said today, to make our views about this measure clear to the American President. We do not like it. We disapprove of it. We think it is divisive, discriminatory and wrong, as I have said repeatedly. As he rightly says, however, this is a sovereign Government of a friendly country and they have taken this decision by due process.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am keen to accommodate remaining interest. If colleagues have been listening, they will have noticed that the Foreign Secretary has been giving pithy replies, so I would now ask for pithy, single-sentence questions without preamble. If people want to go for preamble, let me politely say, "Keep it for the long winter evenings that lie ahead; we do not need you today."

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): What assessment has the Foreign Secretary made of the impact of this Executive order on British foreign policy objectives in the middle east and other areas in the world with substantial Muslim populations, and how will a state visit from President Trump assist them?

Boris Johnson: Of course, most countries in the middle east are exempt from these provisions, but we will work with the incoming Administration to address all the crises in the middle east, including those affecting the countries concerned.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): I congratulate the Foreign Secretary on standing up for British nationals. It is right that we remain a close friend of the United States, but will my right hon. Friend also point out as a candid friend to the US Administration that we should steer clear of policies that could act inadvertently as a recruiting sergeant for Daesh?

Boris Johnson: We have been extremely candid with our American friends and partners, as indeed I have been candid with the House this afternoon about our reservations, which include the grounds that my hon. Friend mentions.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): In the hope that he will now answer it, let me repeat the question put by the shadow Foreign Secretary that the Foreign Secretary did not answer. In the light of our special relationship with the United States, why did it take the Government of the United Kingdom over 17 hours longer to get the same assurances that the Canadians got much quicker?

Boris Johnson: It is our duty to secure the best possible deal for citizens of the United Kingdom. What Canada does is a matter for Canada, and I have no knowledge of what deal the Canadians may or may not have secured. It is important for the House to understand that this is an Executive order that caught many Departments of the American Administration on the hop, as it were, and it has taken them some time to elaborate the policy that we now have.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): Given that Donald Trump is the democratically elected President of our closest ally and our single biggest trading partner who is carrying out a promise that he made to the American people in their general presidential election, I commend the Foreign Secretary for standing firm on the state visit, which is absolutely in our national interest. After all, if pursuing policies that the UK Government did not agree with or pursuing policies in a ham-fisted manner barred any country from a state visit, no country would ever get a state visit.

Boris Johnson: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend. To the best of my knowledge, both Nicolae Ceausescu and Robert Mugabe have been entertained by Her Majesty the Queen, and I think most Members would concede that it is our duty and the right thing to do to make preparations now for receiving our friend, our partner, the leader of a long-established great democracy and our most important ally.

Mr Speaker: What a great relief it was for those of us who did not have to meet either of those two people.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Foreign Secretary share my concern that the reciprocal ban imposed by Iraq on US nationals may damage the bids to further increase stability and security in that fragile country?

Boris Johnson: I am very aware of that particular problem, and I have already heard representations from Iraqi politicians. There are, as the hon. Gentleman will know, specific exemptions for those involved in politics or diplomacy, and I hope that their applications will be treated expeditiously by the US.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that while we can of course say that we would not have such a policy in the UK, interfering in the affairs of another country can be counter-productive, as President Obama found out when he tried to influence the outcome of the EU referendum last year?

Boris Johnson: That is entirely right. As things turned out, I was rather grateful for President Obama's intervention. If I may say so to the House, I think we have got the balance just about right. It is very difficult, and we have had to be clear with our American friends and partners, but we have also had to secure important protections for duals and for UK citizens.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): The Foreign Secretary referred earlier to matters of taste. Well, I personally find a man who refers to grabbing a woman by the pussy very distasteful. A tearful constituent called me yesterday to say that he was devastated by the Prime Minister's failure to condemn the actions of President Trump. Does the Foreign Secretary agree?

Boris Johnson: The hon. Lady will know very well that the Prime Minister has herself said several times that such language is unacceptable.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): I thank the Foreign Secretary for coming to the House and answering questions so fully. I also thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing such a debate so that we can move swiftly on to the Pension Schemes Bill afterwards.

If the Foreign Secretary had a very special friend who had been invited to a big party, which would be the better way of influencing them: banning them from the party, or taking their hand and saying to them quietly what you would like them to do?

Boris Johnson: My hon. Friend has made the point very elegantly. We do not agree with this policy, we do not support it, it is not something that we would do ourselves, but we think that the best way to effect change and influence the White House is to engage, and to be as positive as we possibly can.

Mr Speaker: My keenness to accommodate colleagues is undiminished, but may I very tactfully say that if people feel that they are going to add further insight to our proceedings with their contributions they can of course continue to stand, but it is not compulsory to do so?

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): The Prime Minister wants to do business with President Trump, presumably in the same way that she does business with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, Muslim majority countries that are not on the banned list. Not a single terrorist attack on United States soil has come from one of the seven countries on the list, yet 90% of the 9/11 hijackers were from Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Has the Foreign Office made any assessment of a potential conflict of interests between the President's personal business dealings and his domestic policy?

Boris Johnson: I am afraid that the hon. Lady must have been momentarily thinking of something else when I pointed out earlier that those seven countries had already been singled out by the Obama regime for very substantial visa restrictions.

Mrs Flick Drummond (Portsmouth South) (Con): In March, I shall be attending a United Nations conference in New York. Can the Foreign Secretary assure me that

I, as a British subject born in Yemen, and others like me will not be detained for questioning at the airport's immigration area?

Boris Johnson: Yes, I certainly can. If my hon. Friend has any problems, she should get on to us.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Ceausescu, Mugabe and, for that matter, Putin did indeed make state visits, but none of them was invited to address both Houses of Parliament. Whose idea was it that Mr Trump should be invited to do so? Was it the Foreign Secretary's, the Prime Minister's, or whose?

Boris Johnson: I like the way the Labour party is obsessing about points of protocol, but all this has yet to be determined.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): The Foreign Secretary has said that British citizens should be treated on an equal basis regardless of religion or ethnic origin. May I say this to him? When I entered the United States before becoming a Member of Parliament, I was stopped by United States immigration officials and asked what country I had been born in. I was born in Pakistan, but I am a British national. Does the Foreign Secretary agree that anyone who experiences the same treatment should write to the Foreign Office, so that we have a record of it and can make the appropriate representations to the United States?

Boris Johnson: I assume that that took place under the Obama Administration. Obviously I should be happy to receive correspondence about it, but, again, my hon. Friend and every other possessor of a United Kingdom passport will be free to travel to the United States without let or hindrance.

Mr Speaker: Pithiness personified, perhaps, by Mr Pound?

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): I am sure that, as a man of catholic literary tastes, the Foreign Secretary will be as familiar with that great book "The Art of the Deal" as I am. In the book, Mr Trump says that a good negotiating position is to start with something so utterly outrageous that it will incite fury throughout the world, and then move to something that may initially seem outrageous, but by comparison appears almost reasonable. As a responsible Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Gentleman will have analysed possible future actions by the President. What conclusions has he drawn?

Boris Johnson: I think the conclusion that anybody looking at the President's electoral rhetoric and what he is in fact doing will draw is that his bark is considerably worse than his bite. I think we have every opportunity to do a very good deal with him on all sorts of things, not least free trade.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): What assessment have the UK Government made of the risk to which the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) referred a few minutes ago, namely that the Islamophobia being propagated in America may make it easier for Daesh to recruit terrorists to operate in the United Kingdom?

Boris Johnson: I understand the phenomenon to which the hon. Gentleman alludes, and we all need to work harder, and to work with our American friends and partners, to tackle that sense of exclusion and isolation which can drive extremism.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): When it comes to refugees, women's rights or torture, we are either on one side or the other. Can the Foreign Secretary explain how many refugees we will take to offset the ban and how many women's organisations will receive additional funding from us to offset the cut in their funding from the US Government, and will he rethink that state visit—that honour, that highest honour?

Boris Johnson: As I said earlier, this country has a proud record of taking refugees, and, indeed, of funding international organisations and of campaigning for female victims of sexual violence in conflict. We have done, I think, more than any other country in the world in that regard, and we continue those pledges. As for the hon. Gentleman's point about the state visit, which has been made repeatedly this afternoon, I repeat: Her Majesty the Queen has extended that invitation, it is right and proper that it should go ahead, and it will.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): Could the country come to the conclusion that the Government and Foreign Secretary's response to this abhorrent and pernicious policy shows that they are so desperate for a post-Brexit trade deal with the United States that they are willing to become an apologist for the Trump Administration?

Boris Johnson: I think that any fair-minded person would, having listened to what has happened over the last 48 hours, understand that far from supporting the policy, far from acquiescing in the policy, and far from approving or agreeing with the policy, we have worked with the incoming Administration to modify that policy and to secure important protections for UK nationals and for dual nationals.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I refer the House to my entry in the register of Members' interests. Given that a number of psychologists have now suggested that President Trump displays traits of narcissism and may be dogmatic in policy approach, how will the Foreign Secretary seek to reason with him, and will the Foreign Secretary be seeking psychological opinion himself?

Boris Johnson: Irrespective of the psychological traits of various world leaders, in which I am sure the hon. Lady is an expert—I have not had a chance to consult her register of interests to discover whether she is indeed a psychologist—we will work with the President, and indeed with all our friends and partners, to get the best outcome for our country. The partnership with the US is absolutely vital, not just for our stability and security but for that of the entire world.

Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab): This order stigmatises not just on the basis of nationality, as the Secretary of State says it does; it stigmatises on the basis of faith. This is a Muslim ban, and that has been admitted by those the American President asked

to help him implement his Muslim ban legally. Why is the Secretary of State persisting in pretending that these people are not doing the very thing that they themselves are telling us they are doing?

Boris Johnson: To the best of my knowledge, the President has himself dissociated himself from that characterisation of this policy, and I just remind the House that these seven countries do not comprise the entire Muslim world, and indeed, they are the very countries that were singled out by President Obama for thoroughly restrictive visa regulations.

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): Given that the Trump Administration seem intent on trading in man's inhumanity to man, when was the first time the Secretary of State called his opposite number to express his disquiet?

Boris Johnson: As the hon. Gentleman may know, my putative opposite number has not been finally confirmed in office yet, but we have had abundant conversations with representatives of the Trump Administration about this policy.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): I wonder whether the Foreign Secretary could comment on the blog that has just come up from Gary Gibbon at Channel 4, which states that the Prime Minister was "told a US refugee ban was coming"

prior to the signing of the Executive order. Can the Foreign Secretary confirm or deny that fact?

Boris Johnson: I do not comment on confidential conversations between the Prime Minister and the US President, but I can tell the House that as soon as we had a full understanding of the measure that the US had brought in, we decided to intercede to get the protections that we needed.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): So when the Prime Minister visited the United States and Trump held her hand, did he whisper sweet nothings or did he tell her what his intentions were? Will the Foreign Secretary remind the Prime Minister that "no deal is better than a bad deal"?

Boris Johnson: I am afraid that I could not quite make out the earlier part of the hon. Gentleman's question, but I totally agree with the last bit.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Holocaust survivors have said that this reminds them of the 1930s, so is this a time for appeasement or a time for standing up for British values?

Boris Johnson: I think that it is time for perspective and time to stop demeaning the holocaust.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): I was in Washington last week with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. While we were there, members of NATO, high officers of state in the United States, congressmen and senators took us to one side and said, "Stand by us, because our values are under attack under this Administration." Does the Foreign Secretary not appreciate that what

[Mrs Madeleine Moon]

comes out of this Chamber and the statements that we make are important for those Americans who want to fight to retain their values?

Boris Johnson: I thank the hon. Lady for what she is doing with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. It is important that we talk to our friends and partners in NATO about the vital importance of that organisation. She is right to suggest that we have many friends on Capitol Hill who agree profoundly about the importance of NATO—as, indeed, do many in the new Trump Administration—but the way to nail down those arguments is to engage with that Administration in the way we are doing.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): The ban affects the resettlement of refugees from seven countries, many of whom had been waiting in the camps for years and who had been cleared and were ready to go to the US before the ban came in. How will the Foreign Secretary use this much vaunted special relationship to speak up for the rights of those people, who are themselves the victims of war?

Boris Johnson: We have made our position clear on this policy. We believe that the US has a proud record of taking in refugees; it has already taken 12,000 refugees from the Syrian conflict, and I hope that it will think again.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): Does the Foreign Secretary not share my concern that, although extending this invitation to the President might earn us some short-term brownie points from the new Administration in Washington, it will lose us the respect and trust of many more countries with which until recently we shared the common values of decency, tolerance and respect?

Boris Johnson: I will turn the hon. Gentleman's entire proposition on its head: I think that other countries around the world are looking to us to engage with the new American Administration in order to reflect their concerns and to get across our key messages on NATO, on trade and on the values that unite us.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): The shameful lack of an immediate condemnation and the insular, complicit platitudes from the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary are a disgrace to this House. The Government often talk about their global influence, but they do not seem to have the necessary influence—or perhaps the guts—to condemn this disgraceful racist order. Why does the Foreign Secretary seem unable to condemn the impact that it will have on some of the most vulnerable people on the planet simply because they are Muslims?

Boris Johnson: I must say in all candour to the hon. Lady that it strikes me that her question was composed long before she came to the House for this statement and heard what I have had to say. Any fair-minded person listening to what I have had to say about the measure and about what the UK Government have done over the past 48 hours would not conceivably have put things in the way that she did.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that, regardless of the exemption for UK nationals, the Trump presidency is tainted by this bigoted, immoral ban, that the Prime Minister is tainted by her hand-in-hand association and that he is tainted by his craven complacency? [Interruption.]

Boris Johnson: A ministerial colleague makes from a sedentary position the important point that the leadership of the Labour party is currently in the hands of somebody who advocated talking to the IRA not so many years ago, and possibly still does. We are advocating engagement with the Government of the most powerful nation on earth, on which the security of the world depends.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Can the Foreign Secretary not understand why the measure is perceived as discriminatory against Muslims? The seven countries have Muslim majorities and the President himself said that those of minority faiths from those countries, such as Syrian Christians, will be exempt from the order.

Boris Johnson: I do not think that there is much between our perspectives on this. I have said repeatedly this afternoon that I believe the measure to be divisive, discriminatory and wrong, more or less parroting the hon. Lady's words—in fact, she parroted me. That is my view. In so far as the measure may turn out to be counterproductive, which is the view of many hon. Members, we are also making that point.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Foreign Secretary accept that such action is exactly what ISIS wants and plays into its false narrative that the west is anti-Muslim? What President Trump has done is not only immoral, but a threat to our national security. That is why we cannot be seen to endorse it.

Boris Johnson: Everybody understands the scope and extent of the challenge that we face from radical Islamic extremism. I understand the hon. Gentleman's point about the danger of pushing people into a corner and making them feel more isolated. He is quite right to raise that. However, we are working with a huge coalition of Muslim countries, many of which are completely unaffected by this measure, to defeat that extremism and radicalisation.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): Did the Foreign Secretary at any point in his conversations raise the Geneva convention and the US Government's obligations, or was that left to Chancellor Angela Merkel?

Boris Johnson: At the risk of repeating myself, and as I have said several times already this afternoon, we have expressed our clear views about the policy in respect of both refugees and migration from the seven named countries.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) raised an important point a few moments ago to which the House did not get a full answer. It would appear that the Prime Minister was told in her talks about the

refugee ban, so will the Foreign Secretary confirm whether that was the case? If so, what was her advice to the President?

Boris Johnson: I think that I gave an answer a moment or two ago. I do not comment on the confidential conversations that take place between the Prime Minister and her opposite number. We have worked with our friends in the White House, the State Department and the Department of Homeland Security to understand exactly how the measure is to be implemented and to ensure that we secure the protections that this country needs.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): James Rottger, my constituent, emailed me to say that being received with the pomp and ceremony of a state visit will be presented by Trump and his cronies as a ringing endorsement from the UK and therefore, unfortunately, Scotland. Does the Foreign Secretary appreciate that we are judged by the friendships we keep and by the way in which we react to our friends?

Boris Johnson: I understand the feelings of many people in this country and around the world. They have expressed themselves. I have seen the numbers on the petition. I will repeat my point to the House: it is our job as a sensible Government to work with the most powerful democracy in the world, the leadership of which is absolutely indispensable for our security and for the stability of NATO and the western alliance. That is what we are going to do. Just as every other President before him who has come to the UK, it is entirely right that Donald Trump should receive a state visit.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): Does the Foreign Secretary realise that the special relationship with the Americans is partly based on the strength of our leadership and its candour, rather than its weakness and compliance? Does he recognise how much it undermines that special relationship when we have a Prime Minister fawning over the President, rather than standing up to him?

Boris Johnson: It is obvious to the meanest intelligence that we have not complied meekly with this policy but have sought changes and improvements so as to protect the rights of UK nationals and of dual nationals who may have been born in the seven countries that have been identified.

Natalie McGarry (Glasgow East) (Ind): A country must be judged by the company it keeps. How will the Secretary of State answer should history judge that it took the Prime Minister so long to condemn President Trump's Executive order because, after cosying up to him, she set off to sign trade deals to arm the increasingly dictatorial and out-of-control President Erdogan?

Boris Johnson: I refer the hon. Lady to what I said earlier, but I would add that, while the repercussions of that Executive order were being felt in the US alone, the Prime Minister was in transit to Turkey for another

very important visit where she secured a fantastic deal for this country—an agreement to supply Turkey with British-made fighter planes.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): The US has been a leader of so much that is best in the world, and this policy has let the US down and let the world down. Will the Foreign Secretary confirm whether he knew that the Prime Minister knew about it in advance? Was he asked to brief her and, if so, what did he say that she should say in response before the Executive order was signed? If he did know, did he make any preparations in advance of this coming into force?

Boris Johnson: I have answered that question already, with great respect, and I do not comment on the conversations that take place between the Prime Minister and her opposite number.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): More than 4,000 of my constituents have signed the petition against the state visit, more than 100 of them in the two hours since the Foreign Secretary took his feet, so he is clearly not convincing many people. If the state visit does go ahead, what opportunity will they have to protest peacefully and visibly?

Boris Johnson: I am delighted that 100 of the hon. Gentleman's constituents have been waiting with bated breath for him finally to get that question—I cannot remember what it was—off his chest. I hope he will forgive me. The views of his constituents are important, and they clearly disapprove of the prospect of a visit by the President of the United States. I must humbly and respectfully say to them that I think it is in the interests of this country that, as with every other President of the United States, Donald Trump should come to the UK.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for coming to the Floor of the House this afternoon. Does he agree that it is striking that supposedly the largest democracy on earth has excluded from this Executive order the four nations whose citizens have killed the most American citizens in the American homeland over the past 40 years? If this was a decision of defence, it is clearly lacking because there is not the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, there is not Egypt, there is not Turkey and nowhere is there the United Arab Emirates. Is the United States making a big mistake?

Boris Johnson: The hon. Gentleman cannot have been listening when I pointed out—I think I am now pointing it out for the third time—that the list of the seven countries in question was drawn up not by the Trump Administration but by the Obama Administration when they applied their own thoroughly restrictive measures on people travelling from those countries.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the Foreign Secretary and to colleagues.

Points of Order

5.48 pm

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I find myself in the unfortunate position of having to make this point of order, of which I have given prior notice to you and to the right hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames). I understand that during my response from the Scottish National party Benches to the Foreign Secretary's statement, the right hon. Member for Mid Sussex, who has always afforded me courtesy and respect, was making "woof, woof-sounding" noises at what I was saying, which of course I find extremely disrespectful. This is an opportunity, through you in the Chair, for the right hon. Gentleman to set the record straight if that is not the case. If it is the case, perhaps you would be able to rule whether that is in order.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her point of order and for giving me the courtesy of advance notice of it. The right hon. Gentleman is in his place and of course I would want to hear from him.

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Like you, I thank the hon. Lady for her kindness in warning me that she was going to complain of this. I thought that in her question to the Foreign Secretary she snapped at him a bit at the end, so I offered her a friendly canine salute in return. No offence was intended, and I apologise to the hon. Lady if she was offended. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I think we should leave it there. I thank the right hon. Gentleman for what he has said.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I wish to raise a point of order about the certification by the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union of the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill under section 19(1)(a) of the Human Rights Act 1998. He made the following statement:

"In my view the provisions of the...Bill are compatible with the Convention rights"—

the convention being the European convention on human rights. His statement is incorrect, having regard to the terms of the Supreme Court's judgment, which made it clear that the triggering of article 50, for which the Bill provides, will affect the rights of "UK residents granted through EU law"

and that withdrawal from the EU will remove some of their existing rights, including the right to freedom of movement. This means that the provisions in the Bill will interfere with the rights of UK residents under article 8 of the convention, which guarantees the

"Right to respect for private and family life",

and with the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of national origin set out in article 14. If I am correct, that means that the provisions of the Bill are incompatible with the convention and that the Secretary of State has made his declaration of compatibility in error. I seek a ruling to this effect and/or clarification on what procedure I might follow to ensure that this mistake is rectified and that the declaration is withdrawn before the Second Reading debate of the Bill.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. and learned Lady, to whose point of order I shall come momentarily. I do not wish to dwell on the previous matter, but my response was, if truth be told, incomplete. I thanked the right hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames), and I stand by that, for his courtesy in remaining for the point of order, which was proper, and for his apology. However, I neglected to respond to a particular part of the point of order from the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh), which was: would such a statement have been in order? The short answer is no, it would not have been in order; it is discourteous and that expression should not have been used. That said, the right hon. Gentleman has apologised, with considerable grace and very succinctly, and for today we must most certainly leave it there.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I call Hannah Bardell on a point of order.

Hannah Bardell: On a point of order—

Mr Speaker: I beg your pardon, but I am getting ahead of myself. So enticed was I by the prospect of hearing a further point of order from another hon. Member that I neglected to respond to the previous one.

The hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West has raised her point of order, and I thank her again for her courtesy, but the issues to which she refers are matters for debate. However, what I would say to her is that the Joint Committee on Human Rights not infrequently reports to both Houses on the human rights implications of Bills, and I have a feeling that this Bill may be no exception.

Hannah Bardell: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Last Friday, the world lost a giant of British politics, and I feel that I must put on record my sorrow and sadness, and that of my constituents and I am sure of the whole House, at the passing of the former MP for West Lothian and for Linlithgow, Tam Dalyell. He served this House and his West Lothian constituents with immense dedication and distinction for some 43 years. Latterly, he was Father of the House, and he was known locally, in particular, for his absolute commitment to his constituents. Our thoughts at this very sad time should go to his wife, Kathleen, his daughter, Moira, and his son, Gordon, as well as their wider family and friends. Tam brought us the West Lothian question, which, for the time being, remains unanswered, and he was famous for grilling the then Prime Minister, Mrs Thatcher, about the sinking of the *Belgrano*. I know he will be a desperately sad loss to his colleagues and friends across the political spectrum, particularly those in the Labour party.

On a brief personal note—

Mr Speaker: Order. May I gently say to the hon. Lady that I absolutely respect her sincerity and very proper generosity of spirit in taking the opportunity, but I hope she will understand when I say that I have to be sensitive to the wider interests of the House? What she has said already has been very powerful, and I think it will be widely echoed across the House. I have, of course, written to Tam's widow, Kathleen and to both of the children to express my condolences. He was a

parliamentary giant whose contribution was enormous. He never held ministerial office but achieved a great deal, and we thank him greatly for that service. I hope the hon. Lady will not take offence, but we must move on.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Is it discourteous to the House for the Foreign Secretary to leave during an application for an emergency debate in his area? I appreciate that this did not come up on the screens, but it had been widely telegraphed. Indeed, in case there was any doubt about it, I wrote him a note to tell him it was coming.

Mr Speaker: The short answer is that these are matters upon which Members can form their own views. As to whether there is anything disorderly about the conduct of the Foreign Secretary, the answer is no, there is nothing disorderly about it. The Foreign Secretary was here for exchanges lasting approximately an hour and a half, and the question of which Minister is fielded by the Government is a matter for the Government. They have fielded the right hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan). The hon. Lady can form her own view of him, but he is certainly not disorderly; nor is he in any way, on any occasion that I have ever observed him, remotely dishevelled.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. How do we get on the record our thanks to you, Sir, for allowing that statement to run for so long that everything was discussed that could possibly want to be discussed? We do have important other business, such as the Pension Schemes Bill [Lords], to continue with. How do we get that on the record?

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has found his own salvation. If he is implying that the appetite for commentary, and possibly even speech making, on a matter of immediate interest has been satisfied, I can say only that he is a braver man than I am.

On the assumption that points of order have indeed been exhausted, I call Mr Edward Miliband to make an application for leave to propose a debate on a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration under the terms of Standing Order No. 24. The right hon. Gentleman has up to three minutes in which to make such an application.

Changes in US Immigration Policy

Application for emergency debate (Standing Order No. 24)

5.57 pm

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): I seek leave to propose that the House should debate a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration: the need for repeal of President Trump's discriminatory, divisive and counterproductive ban on entry to the United States for people from seven predominantly Muslim countries and the indefinite ban placed on Syrian refugees.

I am supported in this application by the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) and a number of other hon. Members. This ban has provoked outrage around the world and in our country, and I believe it to be of sufficient urgency and importance to qualify for immediate debate under the Standing Orders of this House. Notwithstanding the statement we have just had, I believe that it is right, given the gravity of the issue, that this House has a proper debate today on these matters, so that Members from across all parties can express their views.

The ban is not an attack on terrorism; it is an attack on those of a particular religious faith: Muslims. It is clearly discriminatory, it represents a repudiation of the 1951 UN Geneva convention on refugees and it will not make the world a safer place—it will make it a more dangerous one. From the exchanges earlier, we can see that there is a host of unanswered questions relating to UK residents who have passports from the countries concerned. Given our close, historical alliance with the United States, it is particularly important that this Parliament speaks up—preferably with one voice—to seek to get this ban revoked. An emergency debate would represent an important opportunity to do this; indeed, it is for an eventuality such as this—a matter of pressing and immediate importance—that the Standing Orders were designed. So I ask you, Mr Speaker, to grant this application under Standing Order No. 24 for an emergency debate.

Mr Speaker: I have listened carefully to the application from the right hon. Gentleman and I am satisfied that the matter raised by him is proper to be discussed under Standing Order No. 24. Has the right hon. Gentleman the leave of the House? The answer is that he does—that is clear from the evident demonstration of compliance with the requirement of the Standing Order entailing the standing of no fewer than 40 Members.

Application agreed to (not fewer than 40 Members standing in support).

Mr Speaker: I must advise colleagues that the debate will be held immediately as the first item of public business today. It will last for three hours and will arise on a motion that the House has considered the specified matter set out in the right hon. Gentleman's application.

The scheduled business for today will take place afterwards and, under Standing Order No. 24(7), may continue for the same time beyond the moment of interruption as that taken by the emergency debate. Obviously, there is no list of speakers because Members

[Mr Speaker]

were not to know whether such a debate would take place. Therefore, analogous to Report stages in debates on Bills, Members who wish to catch the eye of the Chair should simply stand in order to do so.

Changes in US Immigration Policy

Emergency debate (Standing Order No. 24)

6.1 pm

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the need for repeal of President Trump's discriminatory, divisive and counterproductive ban on entry to the United States for people from seven predominantly Muslim countries and the indefinite ban placed on Syrian refugees.

May I place on record my thanks to you, Mr Speaker, for granting this debate? It is right that Members from both sides of the House of Commons have a clear opportunity to address these pressing issues. I will seek to keep my remarks brief to allow others to contribute to the debate.

I thank the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) for co-sponsoring this debate. Throughout the past couple of days he has acted with great dignity and great eloquence, as recognised on both sides of the House. He and I are approaching this debate in the hope of sending a clear and united view from this House about President Trump's measures.

I should say at the start that this debate is not about our respect for the United States or our friendship with that country. I have lived there and I have friends there, and the declaration of independence is one of the most powerful political documents. Since its foundation, the United States has been built on the back of immigrants from around the world. Indeed, inscribed on the Statue of Liberty is the phrase:

"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free."

It is precisely the role of the United States historically, and our friendship and unique relationship with America, that gives us a special responsibility, given what has transpired over the past few days.

At the heart of this debate are three simple questions. First, is it right for President Trump to ban indiscriminately people from certain countries of the world from entering the US, and to indefinitely ban Syrian refugees?

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman is making an eloquent speech, as usual, but will he tell the House who gives the most funds to support Syrian refugees? Is it not the United States?

Edward Miliband: The US plays a role and this country plays a very important role, but that is really beside the point of whether the US should impose an indiscriminate and, as the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon—my hon. Friend for the purposes of this debate—said to me over the weekend, an indefinite ban in relation to Syrian refugees. I shall come to that later in my speech, as I am sure will other Members.

The second question is crucial: will the President's actions make the world a safer place or a more dangerous one? My contention is that they will make the world a more dangerous place, and that on its own reflects our national interest in this matter. The third question follows on from that: what is Britain's responsibility in speaking up on these issues?

I shall discuss those three questions briefly, but let me say first that Americans and, indeed, people in this country are fearful about the threat from ISIS and wider terrorist networks. Those fears are understandable

and we must respond to them. There is no dispute about that. I support measures that keep our citizens, and those of the United States, safe, but it is not enough to say that we are fearful, or that our citizens are fearful; we then have to weigh whatever actions are proposed or taken. Understandable fears cannot be an excuse for the suspension of reason and rationality—that applies to the Trump Administration in a whole number of areas. The only way to understand the ban is that it represents the suspension of reason and rationality. Indeed, it has perversity, discrimination and divisiveness at its heart.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): One of the key aspects is the dramatic effect of the ban on those who had boarded aircraft, ready to go to the United States with valid visas, only to arrive and be told that they had to go back. It is that physical, emotional effect that is the most damning part of what is being proposed.

Edward Miliband: My right hon. Friend speaks with great eloquence on this issue and the wider issues raised. One of the most chilling things—I am sure that other Members found this as well—was that the accounts of what happened to individuals over the weekend sounded like the results of the actions of a tin-pot dictatorship. They did not sound like what we would expect or hope for from the United States.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I share the right hon. Gentleman's concerns, but does he agree that we have a responsibility to act and speak responsibly in this Chamber? The seven countries of concern were identified by the Obama Administration, and restrictions were placed on migration in 2015.

Edward Miliband: The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon will perhaps say something personal about that, but I say to the hon. Gentleman—this is very important, because President Trump is trying to sow confusion on this issue—that President Obama's action was about the visa waiver scheme in relation to those countries. It was most emphatically not about a blanket ban on individuals from those countries coming to the US.

The countries selected for the ban are Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Syria, Sudan and Yemen. There is no question but that those countries, in their different ways, are extremely dangerous places, but does a blanket ban on people from those countries make any sense? In my view, it does not. If we read the Executive order—it is worth reading it, along with the annotations to it—we see that it falls apart at the first hurdle. Section 1 of the order, right up at the front, states the rationale for the President's proposals. What does it cite? It cites the 9/11 attacks on America—absolutely appalling events that shocked us all—but none of the 9/11 attackers came from the countries on which the ban has been imposed. Saudi Arabia, Egypt and others are not on the list, so the very justification offered in the Executive order frankly falls apart.

Nobody is against the proper vetting of people from those countries—the strongest security checks—but a blanket ban cannot be the answer. I do not think I can do better than to read the words of Chancellor Merkel, who said earlier:

“The necessary and decisive fight against terrorism does not justify a general suspicion against people of a certain belief—in this case people of Muslim belief or people from a certain country.

That way of thinking is against my interpretation of the basic tenets of international refugee support and co-operation.”

Chancellor Merkel put it incredibly well. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) said, we have seen the dreadful results of this blanket ban playing out over the past few days.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend share my disappointment that the statesmanship that has been shown by Chancellor Merkel was not shown in our name by our Prime Minister this weekend?

Edward Miliband: The intention of the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon and I is to maintain as much unity as we can in this debate so that we send a clear message. I would have liked the Prime Minister to be much clearer, much earlier, and I would still like a clearer message from the Government.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): Is there not a danger that the ban could increase hate crimes in this country and elsewhere? Is there not another danger that it will give ammunition to the violent extremists? It will almost be a recruitment sergeant, as we have learned from other experiences—for example, in Ireland.

Edward Miliband: My hon. Friend puts it very well, and anticipates what I am going to say. What message does this send to a quarter of the world's population? What message does it send to Muslims around the world? It sends the message that they are not wanted in the United States because of their religious faith. What more of a recruiting sergeant, as my hon. Friend says, could there be for ISIS and others?

I was saying that we have seen the dreadful results of the order over the past few days, and I will briefly mention some of them. One of the first people detained, I believe for 19 hours, was an Iraqi interpreter who had worked with the US military for 10 years. If that is not a perverse result, I do not know what is. There are instances of green card holders being handcuffed and held in detention for 16 hours. A five-year-old was apparently detained for several hours, and then there is the issue—it is welcome that the Foreign Secretary clarified this—of dual citizens, including our own, such as the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon and Sir Mo Farah, being caught up in this.

As bad as the substance of the Executive order—“cavalier” is not putting it nearly high enough—is the appalling way in which the US Government have gone about this. It is the action of a tin-pot dictatorship. I think that the Foreign Secretary acknowledged in his statement when responding to a question from one of my hon. Friends that people had been caught on the hop. This draconian measure was imposed without even consulting the people responsible for its implementation.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): My right hon. Friend is making an extremely powerful speech. I think that everyone in the House loves, admires and respects America and its democratic traditions, and is saddened by what has happened. One concern is the fact that the federal court rulings often do not appear to be implemented in the airports and points of entry. The message about respect for the rule of law is one that we all endorse and want to be heard. We want to get that message out.

Edward Miliband: My hon. Friend speaks very eloquently. I noticed that the Prime Minister told President Erdogan that human rights and the rule of law were incredibly important. The same thing applies to President Trump. All of us have to make that clear, and it is good to see in the Chamber the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), who—I do not want to cause him trouble—issued a good statement earlier today. He is nodding.

Sir Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that in one way the Executive order is not a surprise, because it was a key plank of President Trump's election campaign last year? Simply because it was an election pledge does not in any way suggest that it is right.

Edward Miliband: That is completely right. The person who coined the phrase that people were taking Mr Trump seriously but not literally has turned out to be wrong, because the President is acting literally. Whether he talked about this in the campaign or not, we all have a responsibility to decide both how we respond and the strength of our response. I will come on to why it is important that we speak up.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Edward Miliband: I am conscious of the fact that other Members want to speak in the debate, but I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Robert Jenrick: I do not wish to diminish the topic that we are discussing, but my wife, who is a British citizen, was born in Israel. She will not be able to travel to Malaysia, where many people in this country go on holiday, and she will not be able to travel to 17 countries in and around the middle east. If the right hon. Gentleman cares so passionately about this—and I do not dispute that he does—what does he intend to do about that?

Edward Miliband: I agree with the hon. Gentleman about what he says. These are definitely important issues. I do not want to sound like the old man of the sea, but I recall the debate on intervention in Libya in which I supported the then Government. A Back-Bench hon. Friend got up and said that they could not support the measure—and different people had different views on intervention—because there were many other terrible things happening in the world, so what were we going to do about them? Two wrongs do not make a right. This is, after all, supposed to be our closest ally and the people who are supposed to uphold human rights and the rule of law all around the world. It is hard to lecture other countries on respect for human rights if the President of the United States fails to do so.

I would like to mention a specific case that brings home the lunacy of the proposal. I read yesterday about the case of an 18-year-old called Mahmoud Hassan from Syria. He was recently accepted for a degree in engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The letter that MIT sent him described him as

“one of the most talented and promising students in one of the most competitive applicant pools in the history of the Institute.”

That young man from Syria who wants to study engineering at MIT said:

“Now Trump's orders will prevent me from going there. My dreams are basically ruined.”

I hope that on the question of students, as on the issue of green cards, the US Administration find a way of changing their position, but that brings home the reason why a blanket ban is nonsense. There are countless other examples, and doubtless other hon. Members will want to discuss them.

I would like to deal briefly with the issue of whether or not this is a Muslim ban. It clearly is. That was the President's original intention. Rudolph Giuliani said on television yesterday—I paraphrase—“Donald Trump rang me up and asked how we could get a Muslim ban and make it work. I said, ‘Here's a way we can make it happen.’” As for the Executive order itself, we all recognise the persecution, in particular, of Christians in the middle east. It is important to take special note of that and, indeed, that is already done in the way in which refugees are handled.

The Executive order singles out the possibility that minorities from predominantly Muslim countries will receive special treatment, which draws into the order the idea that this is being done on the basis of religious faith. It is a ban aimed at Muslims.

Dame Rosie Winterton (Doncaster Central) (Lab): What my right hon. Friend is describing emphasises why it is important that we as a country can contribute to, and serve as members of, organisations such as the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights, otherwise we will lose the ability to join other nations to make exactly the points he is making.

Edward Miliband: I completely agree with my right hon. Friend. I would like—and perhaps the Minister will ponder this—a more co-ordinated European response on this issue. We are still members of the European Union, and if there is any area where Europe should speak with one voice, this is it. I do not see why there could not be a European Heads of Government meeting to discuss the issue and Europe's response. It is important that President Trump knows that there is a co-ordinated and clear voice from Europe on this issue.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, along with how abhorrent this is to many people looking on, we must save a thought for the staff in the embassies and consulates around the world? I worked for a time with the US State Department in the consulate in Edinburgh, and I know how strong the feeling is in many offices. It is difficult for staff to have to execute the order and serve on the front line.

Edward Miliband: The hon. Lady makes an important point. Lots of people who are trying to implement the order are wondering why they have to do so. Apparently, on Friday night some of them were saying to people who were victims of the proposal, “You'd better call President Trump if you don't like this.”

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): Like the right hon. Gentleman, I am concerned. Will he clarify the difference between orders from President Obama's Administration and those from President Trump's?

Edward Miliband: Well, there is a huge difference. President Trump's order is a blanket ban on people from seven different countries. President Obama's proposal—if I am allowed to say so, the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon has had personal experience of this—was a specific issue about the visa waiver scheme. It was not about saying that there would be any kind of blanket ban on people coming into the country.

My final point on why the order is such a terrible thing for President Trump to have done is one that other hon. Members will want to talk about: the ban on all refugees from Syria. I recommend a piece that my brother wrote on the matter in *The New York Times*. Refugees are the most thoroughly vetted people in the world, with up to 36 months of vetting and screening by the Department of Homeland Security, the FBI, the Department of Defence and others. There has been summary detention of the innocent, clear discrimination on the basis of faith, and a decision to depart from the UN convention relating to the status of refugees. This ban is neither rational nor fair, and it will not make the country or the world safer; indeed, quite the opposite. I can do no better than to quote Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham, who yesterday said

“we fear this executive order will become a self-inflicted wound in the fight against terrorism... This executive order sends a signal, intended or not, that America does not want Muslims coming into our country. That is why we fear this executive order may do more to help terrorist recruitment than improve our security.”

I believe they are right.

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab): I am sure that I am not alone in saying that my office has today been besieged by phone calls from tearful, upset constituents asking, “Why has the world abandoned us when someone is basically saying that we are all terrorists?”

Edward Miliband: My hon. Friend puts it incredibly well. In fact, I was about to come to that point. We already see the implications of the order playing out. We are in partnership with the Iraqi Government against ISIL, and today we have seen their response to the Trump ban, as the Iraqi Parliament has asked its Government to retaliate against the measures of the US Administration. As my hon. Friend said, we should think about what this order signals to 1.6 billion Muslims all around the world. It sends the message that they are not welcome. Indeed, it precisely buys into the clash of civilisations narrative that politicians from across the political spectrum have tried to avoid ever since 9/11.

Regarding our responsibilities, the United States has always been our oldest and closest ally, and some will say that this is not a matter for us as long as our citizens are protected. I profoundly disagree. It is absolutely a matter for us because the fundamental and dangerous betrayal of values that this measure represents is an affront to us all—the Muslims living here and every other citizen of this country—and it will make the world a more dangerous place. Allowing the measure to stand and shrugging our shoulders will amount to complicity with President Trump. These actions are not normal, rational or sensible. President Trump is a bully, and the only course of action open to us in relation to his bullying is to stand up and be counted.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): My right hon. Friend is making a powerful case about why the order should be challenged. Does he share my despair that

it has become apparent today that our Prime Minister knew about this before she walked into a room, looked President Trump in the face and chose to say nothing?

Edward Miliband: I heard my hon. Friend ask the Foreign Secretary a powerful question earlier, and she makes an important point. On the wider issue, I understand the need for a trade deal with the United States—although a whole set of issues surrounds that deal—but we cannot, on the basis of our keenness to get a trade deal, shrink from speaking truths to the most powerful man in the world. That would just be the wrong thing to do.

The only course of action open to us regarding this Executive order in the United States is to act on the basis of our values. That is the purpose of the debate, which I thank you again, Mr Speaker, for granting, and that is the purpose of the motion before the House. I hope it will be approved by hon. and right hon. Members.

6.24 pm

Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting the request made by my friend, the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), and I to discuss this critical issue. I thank hon. Members of all parties in this House, and people beyond, for their private and public messages of support during the past 72 hours of anguish for my family.

In February last year, my wife and I had our visa waivers revoked in the wake of heightened security measures undertaken by President Obama's Administration because of our status as Iraqi-born individuals, although we are both British citizens. The precaution seemed fair at the time. We were required to present ourselves for interview at the US embassy in order to guarantee the future security of our travel to America. That was understandable, but none the less uncomfortable. It was not, though, nearly as uncomfortable as this weekend has been for my family and me.

I learned that ability to travel to the United States—a country that I revere so much for its values, for which I have such great affinity, affection and admiration, and to which I have sent both my sons to university—was to be denied to me. I learned that this great nation had put in place measures that would prevent my family and me from travelling, studying and feeling welcome there. I was concerned about the next time I would see my boys, given our reluctance to let them fly home in case they were prevented from returning to university. My wife and I despaired at the thought that, had one of our sons again been taken as seriously ill as he was last year while at university, we would not be able to go to him when he needed us most. Similar sentiments have been felt by many families in the UK and around the world over the weekend.

I fully recognise that I am speaking from a position of great privilege: I have been very lucky as a businessman, and I am hugely privileged to represent Stratford-on-Avon and to have a strong platform from which to state my views. But we need to remember that many people do not have this platform or this voice, many of whom, through no fault of their own, will be seriously affected by the policy and will still be unsure how it affects them or their families. I praise our Prime Minister for the manner in which she spoke up for those people in the

[*Nadhim Zahawi*]

United Kingdom. She rapidly instructed our Foreign and Home Secretaries to make representations to their US counterparts. I am relieved that their endeavours have had some success, at least in the British case, but sadly and regretfully, the order remains in force.

Every country is undeniably entitled to set its own immigration policy, control its own borders and do what it thinks is in the best interests of its citizens' safety. On those issues alone, no nation should interfere, but the UK has an obligation to speak out and to be a critical friend to the United States of America because of the ramifications of the order for the internal stability and security of our country and the rest of the world. The order undermines what our Prime Minister said so eloquently in her speech to Republicans of both Houses of Congress last week in Philadelphia about the need not only to defeat Daesh on the battlefield, but to defeat its ideology and the ideology of those who support it.

I know that I will have vast amounts of support from hon. Members across the House when I say that the Executive order is not only wholly counterproductive in combating terrorism and the narrative of Daesh, but will worsen the situation, playing into the hands of those who would see more terrorist atrocities, not less. Those sympathetic to Daesh will link the order to abhorrent recent events—most notably, the burning of a mosque in Texas and yesterday's tragic shootings at another mosque in Quebec, Canada. They will link it to rhetoric surrounding the so-called Muslim ban, and to the President's comments revealed by the former mayor of New York, Rudy Giuliani, to which the right hon. Member for Doncaster North referred. On Fox News on Saturday night, Rudy Giuliani confirmed that the then presidential candidate approached him and, after announcing his intention to impose a total shutdown on all Muslims entering the USA, instructed him to

“Put a commission together, show me the right way to do it legally.”

Over the weekend, pro-Islamic State social media accounts have already begun to hail the order and the President's comments as clear evidence that the USA is seeking to destroy Islam. They have even called it the “blessed ban”. Articles in Daesh's English-language publication *Dabiq* have consistently said that the intention behind Daesh's attacks on the west has been to provoke an anti-Muslim backlash. This Executive order has done exactly what it wants; it has, in effect, put at the disposal of Daesh and its supporters a useful recruiting sergeant to radicalise more impressionable young men and women, creating the danger of more home-grown terrorism, not less. This blanket order will marginalise many moderate Muslims, warping their perception of the west and giving Daesh's claims that the US is the enemy of Islam more credibility where there should be none. This marginalisation will continue into the UK, presenting further threats of radicalisation here, too. This must not be allowed to happen.

I was delighted that at their joint press conference our Prime Minister and President Trump pledged to renew the special relationship between the UK and the USA—a relationship that has proven so beneficial for both countries and the world. The uniqueness of the special relationship has meant that the Prime Minister and our Foreign and

Home Secretaries have rightly been able to convey their concerns to the President's Administration, with some success.

If this strategy of calling for a sensible review of the order is to continue, with the intention, I hope, of replacing it with a reasoned, measured, evidence-based alternative, then we cannot accept calls for a cessation of relations with the President—or, I might add, the postponement of his state visit here—until this order is revoked. We cannot possibly have a constructive discussion with the President unless we maintain exceptionally close relations and dialogue. For this reason, I think we should welcome President Trump to the United Kingdom at the earliest opportunity, so that we might personally engage in meaningful dialogue with our closest ally in the hope of a change in stance.

My message to the President would be this. He is a big man—a powerful individual—and what he says and does has profound effects throughout the world. In his last statement, he spoke of his compassion. As a Christian, he should reconsider this order and look at the evidence that suggests that it will have precisely the opposite consequences to the ones he intended to achieve. He should think again on his policy to impose an indefinite ban on thoroughly vetted Syrian refugees who are in desperate, desperate need. The America I know would welcome them; it would be a cradle of comfort, and would not seek to reject them or others like them. Lastly, he should always, in everything he does, remember the values on which his great country was built.

6.33 pm

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) for calling for this Standing Order No. 24 debate, and the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) for making such a very moving speech on such an important issue.

There is a brave seven-year-old called Bana Alabed, a Syrian refugee who has drawn the support and praise of the whole world for tweeting from Aleppo throughout the bombing—tweeting about her reading, her friends and the fact that she wants to be a teacher, and tweeting a desperate plea for peace. She and her mother are now in Turkey, and she is continuing, as a seven-year-old, to be an ambassador for peace. She has been tweeting again about her wish to meet up with friends from across the world who have supported her in this. Giving a voice to refugees from all over world, she has already met international campaigners and leaders, yet she has been banned from the United States indefinitely for being Syrian—and she is just seven years old. That is the destructive impact of this ban.

With the flick of a pen, the President has banned not only Bana Alabed but a Syrian family who had spent many years building up their savings, got all the visas correct, and been given clearance to come to the United States as refugees to join family in Pennsylvania; they were turned away at Philadelphia airport on Saturday morning and sent back. They had done everything right, but they were turned away. This comes from a country that has always led the world in welcoming the poor, the hungry, those fleeing persecution and the persecuted—the huddled masses—to its shores. That is what makes this Executive order so tragic for all of us.

What is happening right now also feels so tragic because, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North said in his powerful speech, we cherish the values that the United States has always shared with the world—the values that we, too, have tried to champion. The Executive order bans refugees from Syria indefinitely, those from other countries for at least several months, and everyone from several Muslim countries, but there is a readiness to exempt those who are not Muslims.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Members who secured this debate. Does the right hon. Lady share my concern about the case of the Glasgow vet, Hamaseh Tayari, who was denied even a transit visa through the United States because of the confusion that this policy has caused? Does she welcome the support that Glasgow University, where she is a vet, has offered? Is she aware that Glasgow University educated James McCune Smith, who was the first black doctor? He was born a slave in New York in 1813, and after his education in Glasgow returned to the United States and had a very important career as a medic and an educator. Does she wonder what sort of opportunities would be allowed to the likes of him if this kind of policy remains in place?

Mr Speaker: Order. That intervention was rather long. I encourage colleagues to contribute for approximately five minutes each, but that will not be much help if Members who intervene choose to imitate those who have the Floor.

Yvette Cooper: The hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) is right. There are so many of these irrational cases and personal stories that make no sense for the United States or for us.

For the Foreign Secretary to have said earlier that this is not a Muslim ban is the worst kind of diplomatic obfuscation. The Trump Administration themselves have made it clear that it is a Muslim ban. The fact that it targets particular countries but has a potential exemption for those who are not Muslim shows the prejudice and discrimination that lies at the heart of this, and it is something for which President Trump campaigned for very many months.

Mr Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op): It seems that while UK nationals with dual nationality may be admitted to the US, the European Commission cannot at the moment verify whether that would also apply to those from other EU member states. Could my right hon. Friend comment on that?

Yvette Cooper: There is a whole series of unanswered questions about what happens not just in the case of dual nationals or UK citizens, but EU citizens and other nationals who may be resident in the United Kingdom and want to travel to the United States.

The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon described his personal experiences. I know that everyone in the House would want to stand with him against any sense of discrimination that he feels and wrongly faces. I think he would agree that, as he said powerfully, this is not simply about the rights of British citizens—it goes so much further and wider. It is about the shared values that have underpinned generations of co-operation between this country and one of our closest allies. Under our democracy and our common humanity, we have both

built into our written and unwritten constitutions a condemnation of discrimination. We have worked together, over very many years, against prejudice and hatred, so it is deeply immoral for this ban to target Muslims in this way, and we should not be afraid to say so.

We have also worked together on international policy on refugees—to support the Geneva convention and the UN's work, and to resettle refugees, including Syrian refugees from all over the world. The US has always played a historic role in resettling those refugees. For the United States to, in effect, pull out of the Geneva convention and that international co-operation is deeply damaging to a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees programme that all of us should want to champion. We should be prepared to speak out about that.

The ban also threatens our security. It is immediately counterproductive to prevent from entering the US those Iraqi citizens in the Iraqi Government and armed forces with whom the US may need to work in the fight against IS. Inevitably, the Iraqi Parliament has responded by saying that American citizens will be prevented from entering Iraq. We need these countries to work closely together, and with us, in order to defeat terrorist extremists. We should be fighting against them together, and not be divided.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Obviously, most people in this country are appalled by the actions of the President of the United States in relation to the Muslim community. Having said that, on immigration, only about 15,000 refugees have been taken by the United States, so it is not as though it has been swamped.

Yvette Cooper: It is true that, as a proportion of the United States population, the number of Syrian refugees who have gone there is relatively small. However, as a proportion of those who need support and resettlement, that contribution has been important, so it is very damaging to our international support for refugees for the United States to pull out of that co-operation. That is why the United Kingdom Government have a responsibility, not to just say a few words under pressure in this House, but to raise concerns directly with the US Administration, and why so many Members are concerned and frustrated. The Government delayed making any response or criticism. We hear now that the Prime Minister was told about the ban before it happened on Friday, yet she did not speak out about it, even when the Turkish President, standing alongside her, was prepared to do so. The British Government were prepared, rightly, to raise the issue of human rights with Turkey, but they did not raise concerns about what President Trump was doing.

There are limits to what the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary are prepared to say, even now. When I asked the Foreign Secretary directly whether he had urged the US Administration to drop the ban, he refused to say. Frankly, from everything he did say, we can only conclude that the UK Government still refuse to ask the US Administration to drop this ban, abandon this targeting of Muslims and do their bit again to help refugees. I hope that the Minister will put me right and say that we have got it wrong, and that Ministers have, privately behind the scenes, been urging the US Administration to change their policy. It is crucial that

[Yvette Cooper]

they do so. That is the point of having a special relationship and a good friendship: being able to speak the truth to power and say the difficult things. If Ministers are not prepared to do that, what does that say to British Muslims and others around the world who feel targeted? And what does it say to those whom President Trump may target next? This could be only the start—we do not know. This is what President Trump has done within just a few days of taking office. Where will he go next? What will it take for us to be prepared to speak out, if our Government are not prepared to speak out yet?

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): Does the right hon. Lady agree that, given that this is a brand-new relationship between our Prime Minister and the President, now is the time to set the ground rules? This is the beginning of the relationship and we need to set out, for all the world to see, what we consider to be appropriate in terms of behaviour and policy.

Yvette Cooper: I certainly agree with the hon. Lady. It is immensely important to establish the principles on which we will work.

I will explain why I think the state visit matters. I want the Prime Minister to meet President Trump frequently, and I want her to influence, persuade and challenge him. I also want President Trump to hear the views of people across Britain and to understand the strength of feeling about a country that we care about, but with whose actions we disagree. I am deeply worried that it will be not a normal visit by a Head of Government, but a ceremonial state visit involving our royal family, who for so long have united the country and whom we have tried to ensure are kept separate from politics and the deep, divisive arguments that countries across the world sometimes have.

By rushing into this state visit, I fear that the Government will do the opposite of what they want to achieve, and that instead of it being a celebration of friendship and shared values and a sign of increased co-operation, it will show huge divisions and our huge concern about what President Trump is doing. It will look like an endorsement of a ban that is so morally wrong and that we should be standing against.

We should also remember that the Executive order was signed on Holocaust Memorial Day. If ever there was a day to remember why we need to have the courage to speak out against prejudice and hatred, Holocaust Memorial Day is it. The Prime Minister's words in the book of remembrance on Holocaust Memorial Day state:

“Our commitment to remember the Holocaust is about more than words—it is about action. It is about raising awareness, spreading understanding, ensuring the memory of the Holocaust lives on, and standing up to prejudice and hatred wherever it is found today... Together we will educate every generation to learn from the past and to take responsibility for shaping a better, brighter future in which through our actions, as well as our words, we truly never forget.”

That really is a responsibility not just on all of us, but on our Prime Minister, who was told on Holocaust Memorial Day about this ban, which targets Muslims because of their faith and turns away refugees who are fleeing genocide and persecution. Just as we have been

advised so many times to speak out when we see prejudice and discrimination, there is an obligation on the Prime Minister to speak out now.

I, like many, feared that the decision to offer President Trump a state visit was too hasty, because we did not know what he would do or the direction in which he would take his country. Now that we do know, I urge the Prime Minister and the Foreign Office to work with the US Administration to find an alternative way and to make this an ordinary visit, so that they can hold discussions and debates, and so that we can put pressure on the United States to change its position. The United States is proud of its constitution and of the words on the Statue of Liberty, which proclaim:

“Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe...
Send these...tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

It is because we want our countries together to be able to lift the lamp beside the golden door that the Prime Minister and the Government should speak out now.

6.48 pm

Sir Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con): May I begin by congratulating the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) on securing this timely and important debate? It is with a degree of sadness that we have to have it in the first place.

America has a proud tradition of being a nation of immigrants. People fleeing torture and persecution from around the world have sought refuge on the shores of the United States and, metaphorically, I suspect that Miss Liberty is holding her head in shame because of the events of last Friday. The Executive order is shameful and immoral, but, as I said in my intervention on the right hon. Gentleman, it should not come as a surprise to any of us. Throughout the campaign last year, President Trump made it plain that, as well as building a wall, he was going to ban all Muslims—not security threats, but a religious grouping. It was rather frightening, if one looked at the audiences to which he made that pledge throughout the United States—north, south, east and west—to see the reaction of the crowds. That shows us that not only is he honouring his election pledge, but he is playing to a gallery of people who are prejudiced in favour of this sort of action. That is very sad, because it will not achieve what I assume he wants it to achieve, apart from gaining a potential narrow party political electoral advantage with a core base.

America should be stronger together, and it should be building bridges, not walls. The Executive order will alienate moderate Arabs and radicalise further those on the radical wing of the Arab world, at a time when we should be building bridges to enable us to expose the evil and violence of some of the terrorists who come out of the middle east, and working with moderate Arabs to end the evil threat not only to us, but to moderate Arab opinion in the middle east.

Mr Jim Cunningham: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Simon Burns: No; I do not have time. The Executive order will result in further radicalisation. It will do the exact opposite of what some people think it will do.

It will not make the United States any safer; it will make it a more dangerous place. That is an irony, and it is unacceptable.

I take issue with some of the comments I have heard during this debate and during the statement, in that I think it is absolutely right that the British Government continue the work of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to build bridges with President Trump so that we can, through engagement, seek to persuade him and to minimise or reduce the danger of his more outrageous policies. We can do that only by being a candid friend, but we have to be a candid friend.

I believe that very little would be achieved by cancelling a state visit to which the invitation has already been extended and accepted. It is part of a process of seeking to engage, encourage and persuade. There is, however, one area at which we should look very carefully. Some will remember that in 1982 or 1983, President Ronald Reagan had a state visit to this country, but it was decided by the then Thatcher Government that there should not be an address to the joint Houses of Parliament.

Similarly, I remember, as a Member of this House, the state visit of President George W. Bush. Apart from a sojourn in Durham at Trimdon Labour club, I believe, for lunch with the then Prime Minister, all President Bush did was to travel in the Beast from Buckingham Palace to No. 10 and back again. There was no address to the joint Houses of Parliament. In the circumstances, I think that that was rather wise. We and the Government—and you, Mr Speaker—should think very carefully before considering such an address as part of the programme for a state visit by President Trump, because it might not go as well as everyone would naturally expect.

In conclusion, this ban is nasty, it is immoral and it will not succeed. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and his deputy, my right hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan), as well as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, have a key role to play because the ban will last for 90 days, which in theory means that it is part time and transitory. I am not convinced that that will be the case in reality. The challenge for the Government is to do all they can to influence President Trump about its counterproductive nature and the danger that it will pose in radicalising rather than pacifying those who espouse radical extremist thinking; and to persuade him that there are better ways than this very blunt weapon to pursue a policy of reconciliation. The best way to do so is to communicate and negotiate with the reasonable elements in the middle east and work together to overcome the threat to this country, the United States and elsewhere.

6.55 pm

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) on securing this timely debate. I have listened to it, and I now feel rather emotional, speaking as a Muslim Member of Parliament. People have talked about refugees, but I will talk, as a Muslim woman, about Islamophobia. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) asked earlier, how do Muslims feel? The words of the President of America go to the heart of every Muslim in the country.

I will start by sharing an experience from this weekend, when I hosted the Jewish Board of Deputies in my office in Bradford. I shared with them a publication from the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, “Path to Genocide”, which sets out the stages along that path. In stage 1, “classification”:

“The differences between people are not respected. There’s a division of ‘us’ and ‘them’. This can be carried out through the use of stereotypes, or excluding people who are perceived to be different.”

Stage 2 is

“a visual manifestation of hatred. Jews in Nazi occupied Europe were forced to wear yellow stars to show that they were ‘different’.”

In stage 4, “dehumanisation”:

“Those who are perceived as ‘different’ are treated with no form of human right or personal dignity. During the Genocide in Rwanda, Tutsis were referred to as ‘cockroaches’; the Nazis referred to Jews as ‘vermin’.”

This weekend, I went to the Holocaust memorial service at Bradford cathedral. Rudi Leavor, who leads the Bradford synagogue, shared his story of how he fled Nazi Germany. His father, who was a dentist, took the family away and they fled persecution. As they left on the train, they saw a family on the platform who were the last to wave them off; that family did not survive.

For me, the matter is very personal. It is personal because if my daughter decides to wear a hijab, what are the chances of her not being persecuted? We have seen videos and read news reports of hijabs being ripped off and of women being thrown down steps just because of what they are wearing, and here is the so-called leader of the free world telling us that it is okay to ban Muslims. Donald John Trump says that he is tackling terrorism with his Executive order, but the fact is that the chance of being murdered in the US in a terrorist attack committed by a refugee is one in 3.64 billion each year. More people have been killed in America by gun crime than by people from the countries that have been banned. If the President really wants to save Americans from death, he needs to look at gun crime.

How do American Muslims feel right now? They are as entitled as anyone else to representation by their President, but they are being singled out and victimised by him. What about the 700,000 asylum seekers and 3.25 million refugees who have sought refuge in America since 1975? Having contributed and been accepted, how do they feel about now facing the blame for everything that is wrong? America, the self-proclaimed land of immigrants—proudly and rightly so—now turns its back on those who do not fit the President’s accepted mould, not because they are a threat but because they are deemed to be less worthy than others.

My skin colour is a few shades darker. That does not make me a terrorist, and it does not make me a threat. The colour of their skin does not make the Muslims in this world a threat to America or to western democracy. The thing that poses a threat is the Executive orders issued by the so-called leader of the free world, who incites hatred, demonises Muslims, sees women and others as second-class citizens and courts organisations such as the Ku Klux Klan. That is what creates terrorism—what threatens democracy, the world we live in and our children’s future—not Muslims, and not refugees.

We do not differentiate refugees on the basis of their religion; we support them because they are fleeing persecution and war. They do not choose to leave their

[Naz Shah]

homeland or to leave their surroundings. Bradford is a city of sanctuary—I am proud to come from a city of sanctuary—that hosts Syrian refugees. Can hon. Members imagine what they would feel like if we in this House ordered that we would not take any more refugees or any more Syrian refugees? That would fly in the face of what this House stands for.

I am a Muslim from Bradford West, and I have the privilege to stand here today and contribute, as many hon. Members have, but what do we really stand for? Before I get rather emotional, I will finish with the words—the famous words—of Pastor Martin Niemöller:

“First...they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a socialist;

Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me”.

I do not want to be on the wrong side of history when there is another genocide; Srebrenica happened in my lifetime.

Where does the slippery slope really lead when we demonise Muslims and those seeking refuge on our shores? Offering refuge is what being British stands for, and this House cannot abdicate its responsibility and stand silent about what is happening with our closest ally. We must engage with it, and try to stop and reverse this Executive order. We cannot stand by silently: to do so would be the greatest shame of our nation.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. May I gently point out that if we are to accommodate all colleagues, it will be necessary to have an informal limit of approximately five minutes? I ask Members not to exceed that limit from now on.

7.2 pm

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) and my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) on securing this debate. It was of course your decision to allow it, Mr Speaker. If the emotion we have already heard in the British House of Commons is anything to go by, what on earth will the effect of the order be right around the world, particularly in those nations on the list or in those that might be on any future list?

The right hon. Member for Doncaster North and the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee, the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), carefully put forward the more obvious and ludicrous consequences of such an ill-thought-out measure. I very much want to compliment my fellow member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon, on combining what was undoubtedly an emotional speech with calm rationality and reasonableness in making an immensely powerful case to the American Administration. I want to use the rest of my speech to turn to the case that our country should make to the American Administration as a whole.

I did not agree with the critique of the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee about the actions of the Prime Minister. I am not entirely sure that her suggestion that the Prime Minister was aware of this and had a chance to make her views known during her visit to the United States can be substantiated. As far as I understand it, that is not the case, but the Minister will be able to confirm that in his winding-up speech.

We need a strong voice into the White House, and we have secured it, although it may have taken the prospect of a state visit to ensure that the Prime Minister was the first foreign leader to visit the White House. During that visit, she was able to secure the pre-eminent European requirement of the visit, which was the President of the United States overturning—audibly and verbally, in answer to her challenge at the press conference—his purported position on NATO. That is of immense importance not just to the United Kingdom, but to the whole security of Europe.

This goes to the heart of what we are to do about this particularly unwise Executive order. On the previous day, the Prime Minister had addressed the Republican caucus in Philadelphia, where she was very warmly received. My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon has already referred to the values that she spoke to in her remarks to the caucus. We have to remember that the Administration is not just the President. One of the failures of the order was the failure to consult the other Departments in the United States. There is a separation of powers in America: the President is not the whole Administration. The effect of our Prime Minister's early visit is that she is in a place to ally herself with the Secretaries of the various Departments that make up the Cabinet in the United States and to be an important ally in internal debates in the Administration. Such a debate ought to have taken place on the order and there should have been proper consideration, but that process plainly did not take place.

We also have allies on the Hill. The success of her speech in Philadelphia is shown by the position taken by Senators McCain and Graham. They have made an outstanding joint statement, which ends:

“Ultimately, we fear this executive order will become a self-inflicted wound in the fight against terrorism. At this very moment, American troops are fighting side-by-side with our Iraqi partners to defeat ISIL. But this executive order bans Iraqi pilots from coming to military bases in Arizona to fight our common enemies. Our most important allies in the fight against ISIL are the vast majority of Muslims who reject its apocalyptic ideology of hatred. This executive order sends a signal, intended or not, that America does not want Muslims coming into our country. That is why we fear this executive order may do more to help terrorist recruitment than improve our security.”

Those arguments were eloquently made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon in his very remarkable speech.

It is not only in Congress that we have allies. The legal system of the United States is already cranking into action, and judges are already ruling against the legality of the Executive order. I very strongly suggest to right hon. and hon. Members in the House, as well as to the wider public, that we need to be effective in advancing the interests of the United Kingdom and the values of the liberal democracies that both we and the US are. Such values—of the rule of law and, in the United States, of the separation of powers—are already beginning to make themselves felt.

Our Prime Minister is to be congratulated on the fact that she will now be listened to by President Trump because of the actions she has taken, as our Foreign Secretary and Home Secretary have plainly already been listened to as well. There is very much more work to do to get the order rescinded and recast in an intelligent, sensible way so that it advances the interests of both us and the United States, and we need the kind of relationship that will enable that to happen.

7.8 pm

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) on securing this debate and on putting the case so eloquently, and I join others in congratulating the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) on bringing home so movingly the pain that this has caused to so many people.

My mother was a proud American from Ohio. Her forebears made the journey across the ocean to seek a better life, and they found safety and opportunity in equal measure. Perhaps that explains why those of us who have a family connection with the United States of America felt, I must confess, a sense of shame and rising anger as events unfolded this weekend. We have seen that passion expressed in this debate, which tells us something about the nature of the decision that we are objecting to. It is precisely because we have such respect for the United States of America that we yearn for something better—much, much better—than this, and why we have a responsibility as friends to speak out.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Has the right hon. Gentleman noted that Donald Trump's mother was a migrant? She was not just from Scotland but from my constituency. Donald Trump's first cousin's wife was my English high school teacher, but we can leave that to one side.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned shame. As a Hebridean, I feel utter shame at how Donald Trump, the son of Hebridean woman, is behaving on the world stage. It is absolutely disgraceful and shameful. I hope he rescinds and changes the measure—not recasts, but rescinds it.

Hilary Benn: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. We hope he rescinds the measure.

I want to make three very quick points, the first of which is that however much the Foreign Secretary may seek to argue that this is not a ban on Muslims, our fellow Muslim citizens and our constituents, and my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah) and I, know that it is. Why do we know that it is? We know because Donald Trump said during the course of his election campaign that that is what he wanted to do. The fact is that people listen to that. They see the order. They know he is talking about them. Imagine the conversations in families when children say to their parents: "What is it about us that means that country doesn't want us?" What message does that send to the next generation? Frankly, the message it sends is offensive, divisive and misguided.

Secondly, I agree absolutely with the point made by the hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) that the order will not help us or anyone else in the fight against the brutal ideology of Daesh. Instead, it will act as a recruiting sergeant for Daesh. I simply observe that our

security is too important to be damaged in that way when populism triumphs over reason, as has happened in this case. Our best defence against the lethal obscurantism of Daesh is to cleave ever more strongly to the values that make us proud to be British.

My final point is about the international rules-based system. Why did we create these institutions after the end of the second world war, including the United Nations? We knew that out of the ashes of that terrible conflict, we needed to work together to observe and uphold certain principles to enable humanity to thrive in the world we were seeking to create. Article 3 of the refugee convention states:

"The Contracting States shall apply the provisions of this Convention to refugees without discrimination as to race, religion or country of origin",

and the truth is that the order offends against article 3 of that convention. We have other worries—the Paris climate agreement and the Iran deal—but they are all expressions of the international rules-based system that we have fought so hard to create and sustain.

I conclude by saying this: if we are going to deal with the challenges we face as a world as this century unfolds, we must seek and strive to bring people together and not to drive them apart. That, after all, is the very principle on which the United States of America, which we respect so much, was founded.

7.13 pm

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): It is very difficult to follow the excellent and wise words of the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn). I add my congratulations to my new friend the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), and my dear friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), who so ably represents his constituency.

Mr Speaker, I agree with everything that has been said, and you will be pleased to know that I do not intend to repeat any of it. One danger of these sorts of debates is that we become like an echo chamber—we fall over one another to agree, exposing in us in some cases large "L" Liberal values, but in most of us small "l" liberal values, as we unite in condemnation of this Executive order for all the reasons that many other hon. Members have expressed.

Sir Mo Farah said that the Executive order was based on prejudice and ignorance flowing from Donald Trump, but many others in that great nation unfortunately no doubt support what he has done. We must be honest that, in this country, we too suffer from much of that prejudice and ignorance. It is all well and good for hon. Members to talk as we do, but we must now ensure that we face up to the reality in our country where, unfortunately, too many people share some of the views we see mirrored in the order.

I would love to say that such things are a fancy in my constituency. We have welcomed four Syrian refugee families to Broxtowe. I am very proud of that. I am a Conservative as it happens—it really does not matter—but everybody on my council has come together to give those four families the sort of warm and generous welcome that we would expect. I do not know whether the situation is the same in America, but it is worth remembering the tough bar for Syrian refugees coming to our country. I praise our Government for the generosity and good work we have done in bringing so many

[Anna Soubry]

Syrian refugee families into this country, but they have to pass quite a high test. They are among the most vulnerable refugees—they have suffered either sexual abuse or torture.

It gives me no pleasure to say this as someone who has spent almost the entirety of my life in Nottinghamshire, but one of those four families did not come straight to my constituency. They started off in another town in the county of Nottinghamshire and had to leave it, such was the prejudice and lack of welcome and the blatant hostility towards them. I am proud that my constituency has taken them in. I am equally proud that our deputy mayor, Halimah Khaled, happens to be a Muslim. I have always thought of it in that way—somebody happens to be a Muslim, happens to be a Jew, happens to have brown skin, happens to be gay or happens to be straight.

I remember once seeing a documentary that shocked me to the bottom of my boots. I must have been about 11 years old. A black woman explained what it felt like to see a sign that said, “No dogs, no Irish, no blacks.” I understood how she felt, but I found it shocking that anyone would discriminate against someone because of the colour of their skin. When we were in our salad days as student politicians back in the ’70s, I genuinely thought we had made great progress over the decades. The attitude was that nobody cared what colour or race someone was.

All those wonderful things had begun to flourish in our country, but something has happened—and it has happened not just in America, but in our country. I gravely fear that that spirit of tolerance has gone from too many. Seeds that I had thought lay dormant, or had been destroyed by the power of tolerance, have germinated and grown, whether in the EU referendum campaign or the presidential campaign. If we are not careful, they are in danger of flourishing.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Sir Simon Burns) rightly said that our Government have a role in challenging the American President, taking him on in his views and seeking to change them. Each and every one of us in the House has a duty to stop just agreeing with one another. We have to take those messages out into our constituencies, build the campaigns of tolerance, peace and understanding, and abolish stereotypes. We have to do the hard job that lies ahead of us to ensure that the absolutely fundamental British value of tolerance once again dominates our society. If we do not, we are in danger of finding that too many people in our own nation support this abominable Executive direction from the President. It is our job to ensure that tolerance is always the overriding principle at home and abroad.

7.19 pm

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I thank the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) and the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) for securing the debate. It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry). I have followed her in other debates, but not on anything as important as this.

As a child, a long time ago, I listened to my parents with little understanding when they talked of their lived history. As an adult, I listened in shock to my father

when he told me that he had helped to liberate a concentration camp. He told me that only once and never spoke of it again. In spite of the Foreign Secretary’s outrage at the repetition of references to the holocaust, I feel absolutely no shame in linking my family to what happened then and to what is happening now.

My grandchildren will wonder how I felt after this Executive order was signed and what effect it had on people in Scotland, the United Kingdom and across the world. I am able to record in *Hansard* that I feel fearful, upset, distressed and very, very angry. My condemnation of this vile act will matter little in the great scheme of things, but I expect the UK Government to utterly condemn this Executive order. I do not expect the Foreign Secretary to tell me, as the Foreign Secretary did, that he has mitigated it as far as UK passport holders are concerned. That is his duty. If this Government think that trade with the US matters more than the human rights of refugees and world citizens, then I feel even more affronted. If this Government want to be a world leader, they should show leadership and they should do it now.

I had the great privilege of helping Dr Ghaith Rukbi, a Syrian refugee resident in Lebanon, into my constituency. He spoke to and worked with local GPs to help to prepare them for more Syrian refugees who will be arriving shortly. If a wee place like Motherwell and Wishaw can take in Syrian refugees, what on earth is the United States doing with this order?

In the meantime, does the Minister agree with the former head of the CIA that this order will have national security implications for the UK and the wider world? It is important that we take this into consideration.

I do not agree that the state visit should take place, and I certainly do not agree that President Trump should be afforded the honour of addressing both Houses of Parliament.

Scotland and the US have a deep friendship based on shared values, and we must all speak up for those values, including tolerance, equality and providing for those in need. The Prime Minister must be clear about our obligations, both as a good global actor and under international law. It is important that we take them forward.

I will mention the contributions of only two hon. Members who have spoken. I was deeply moved by what the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon said, and by the contribution of the hon. Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah). That in no way lessens what other Members have said. The right hon. Member for Broxtowe is correct: we sometimes just become an echo chamber, but it is important that the word goes out from here. It is important that people take this to heart, and go out and increase tolerance and understanding right across all our constituencies.

7.24 pm

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): I join other hon. Members in congratulating the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) and my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) on securing this important and timely debate. It is also a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows).

First, it is important to note that it is entirely for the US Government to determine their immigration policy. During the presidential election campaign, Donald Trump repeatedly stated that he would introduce this measure.

In fact, he promised a measure that would go far further than what he is currently enacting. We should therefore be under no illusion that it is both within his power and his mandate to follow it through.

As the Executive order affected British citizens, it was right for the Foreign Secretary to intervene. I was pleased that he confirmed, having spoken to his US counterparts, that UK citizens and dual nationals are unaffected. However, I want to be clear: I believe that this is a misguided policy. The simple fact is that terrorist attacks, committed both in the US and in Europe over the past decade and more, have been carried out not by immigrants and refugees, but by radicalised nationals. It is important to note that on average nine people a year have been killed by Islamic extremists in the US since 9/11. Conversely—this point has already been made—on average 12,843 people are killed by guns in the US every year. Some would argue that the priorities are in the wrong order. Not one refugee from the countries included in the President's travel ban has killed anyone in terrorist attacks on US soil. Further, the decision to ban refugees from war zones such as Syria and Yemen will serve only to force vulnerable men, women and children to remain at risk of persecution and death. It is also remarkable that the US is banning people from Iraq, a country it is supporting militarily against Daesh.

I have to be clear: the steps announced will not keep America safe. I fear it will serve simply to divide communities and give radical extremists yet another propaganda tool with which to turn vulnerable citizens against the United States. To use the words of the President, this will do nothing more than create more "bad dudes". As I said, this is a decision for the President of the United States, but I strongly appeal for the Executive order to be revoked. I hope that the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary make the strongest representations to that effect.

I just want to raise one final point. Of course we should speak out and I very much welcome this emergency debate, but if we are to speak with authority and credibility then we must be consistent in our condemnation. As I said to the Foreign Secretary this afternoon, 16 countries forbid admission to Israeli passport holders. In recent years, we have granted state visits to the leaders of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, all of whom forbid admission to Israeli passport holders. If we genuinely believe that banning individuals on the basis of their nationality is wrong—I very much hope we do believe it—then let us condemn these policies wherever they raise their ugly heads.

7.27 pm

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Colchester (Will Quince), who made an excellent contribution. I, too, want to praise my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) and the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi). Both of them do their families very proud. I know that the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon spoke on behalf of all those in our country who have ever travelled abroad and felt that sinking feeling as they approached the immigration desk. It is not something we speak a lot about, but I know, sadly, that it is a common phenomenon. There will be people the hon. Gentleman will never meet, but who will feel comforted by the words he has said this evening.

I want to make three brief points on Muslims in this country; on the importance of Syria and Iraq in the middle east; and on populism.

My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) made a very moving intervention earlier about Holocaust Memorial Day, and on the poignancy and horror of what we witnessed over the weekend. The hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows) said that her own contribution would matter very little, but I profoundly disagree. What I have observed over this weekend is an outpouring of distress and dismay from all quarters. Of course, British Muslims will feel this most keenly, but all of us in this country—whatever our background, whatever our faith, or of no faith—stand with them whether they are British Iraqis, British Syrians, British Somalians or British people who are descendants from the affected countries. I say this to our friends in America: we are Brits, all equal, and we will not be divided on the basis of our faith or wherever we have come from.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali) also spoke very movingly earlier. If anyone is questioning, wondering or thinking about whether these events have an effect on Muslims in this country, I would encourage them to listen to the tone of this debate. It is incumbent on all of us, Muslim or not, to stand shoulder to shoulder in solidarity and in the best traditions of my party, and show them our support.

That is particularly true for those who have been working recently on issues connected with Syria. When I heard about these events over the weekend, my first thought was for the brave and brilliant people whom I have had the honour to come to know as part of our campaign to protect human life in Syria. Many of them are Syrian nationals and would have good cause to want to travel to the United States in order to make representations on behalf of that humanitarian cause for vulnerable people in Syria. Where does this order now leave them?

I would like to ask the Minister for Europe and the Americas—I do not feel that the Foreign Secretary gave a very substantial answer to my earlier point—what representations the Foreign Office has made to the Americans about the need for those representing humanitarian causes to be allowed access to America. That applies whether they are Syrian nationals, Iraqi nationals or even US nationals who will now no doubt face equal trouble accessing places in Iraq, Syria and other areas affected by this ban. We should ask ourselves this simple question: does this Executive order help or hinder peace and security efforts in that troubled region? I think that the answer to that question is glaringly obvious and staring us in the face: it is a total disaster for peace and security in that region.

I understand that a gentleman who played a particular role in the referendum campaign has recently gone on the radio to say that this is just the cause of "loony lefties". To those commentators who say, "Donald Trump is a perfectly fairly elected President of the United States who is entitled to do this", I say that this issue will affect the security of each and every one of us, including some of the most vulnerable people on our planet, and it cannot stand.

Finally, on populism, the past year has been very difficult. I always believe that we should look to the future and think about what our values tell us about

[Alison McGovern]

how to approach the modern world as it is, not as it once was, but unfortunately I feel that what we are witnessing in our world is an old, old story—that in times of economic trouble, there are always forces in our world, who I think of as the far right and the hard right, who want to turn up and tell ordinary working people in America, Europe or wherever and say, “No, your troubles and your wages failing to rise are not the fault of the economic system or Governments or companies or anyone else; they are the fault of people who are just like you, but happen to be Polish; they are the fault of people who are just like you, but happen to be Muslim; they are the fault of people who are just like you, but happen to be from another part of the world.”

That tendency and the susceptibility of people to want to believe an easy story when the truth is much more complicated is always exploited by the purveyors of hate. Those of us who stand against that cannot give in to populism. We cannot kow-tow to prejudice; we cannot say, “Yes, you are probably right, so let us try to do what you want.” We have to be very clear with people that we are all, underneath it all, fundamentally the same. We need the same ability to work together, to learn together and to have hospitals for when we are sick; it does not matter where people come from, they need the same things in life. No amount of populist rhetoric designed to divide us and make us fight each other rather than work together will change that.

7.34 pm

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I thank the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) and the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) for bringing this emergency debate before us. It is also a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern).

We must stand tall for principles of inclusion and equality, and a ban on individuals linked in a simplistic manner to their religion or country of origin is not evidence based; it is surely discriminatory. I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, because prior to my time here I was accredited by the Scottish Risk Management Authority to undertake violence risk assessments where the courts were considering the order of lifelong restrictions. As part of that role, I was trained to undertake violence extremist risk assessments. This type of risk assessment involves structured clinical judgments and is grounded in research and an evidence base. Assessment is based on risk factors known to predict violence and extremist violence. It has often been utilised in the United States and in Northern Ireland, and some of our security forces have been trained in its application.

The measure of an individual's risk to the security of a country requires assessment of intelligence information about that individual's belief systems, their contact with terrorist organisations, their behaviours and activity, their access to arms and a number of other pertinent risk factors. The people qualified to determine who possesses and poses true risk factors are in the intelligence and security forces. They have access to this information and can analyse it formally, as they have been doing over many years in order to highlight individual risk indicators.

A blanket ban on individuals based on heuristic characteristics of race and religion is therefore misguided. In my opinion, it will unfortunately be unlikely to reduce risk, and it may aggravate extremist beliefs and attitudes, feelings of persecution and the marginalisation of individuals who may already be in the United States and able to pose security risks there. This could strengthen extremist views on the part of a few, because it is radicalised groups, not a countrywide phenomenon, that the world has to deal with. This order will only strengthen feelings against the United States and against the west. If we do not condemn it, it will breed contempt.

In conclusion, I believe this is misguided policy. It lacks a true evidence base, it is not a national response, and it may fuel risk and be counterproductive. It does not protect the United States or the west, and we must do all we can to voice our consternation about this policy and its lack of humanity and validity. Let us call instead for evidence-based security approaches as the United States goes forward—approaches that respect human dignity across the world.

7.37 pm

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): I join others in congratulating my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) and the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) on securing this incredibly important debate. There is a reason why thousands of people have taken to the streets of Britain tonight to express their concern about this ban and what it says about our world, and particularly to ask what we are going to do about it.

I do not disagree with a word said by the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry)—it is a shame that she is no longer in her place—about sometimes challenging the agreeability of our debates in this place, so in the spirit of what she said, let me bring some discord to our discussions. I feel very strongly that the central question facing us tonight is what people in positions of power will do. We have seen what the leader of the free world in his first week in office has chosen to do with that power. We now have to ask ourselves as elected representatives in the United Kingdom what we will do by return.

I do not disagree with the hon. Member for Colchester (Will Quince) about respecting the fact that this man is an elected politician, but just because he won an election does not absolve him of responsibility for the consequences of his behaviour—and nor does it absolve us of responsibility for the consequences of not acting. With that process in mind, I wish to make four quick points. We have to speak up, and we must do so not just because of the impact on people in our communities described in the incredibly eloquent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah), but because of what it says about us as a society. When we are indifferent to hatred and intolerance, we are participants in it.

This is about hatred. This is a ban on people on the basis of their religion or their nationality. No form of this ban could be acceptable. There is no way of modifying it to make it plausible. It is simply hatred, and we should be clear about that, because not being clear about it suggests that there are circumstances in which we might seek to ban people and restrict them on the

basis of their religion or nationality. It suggests that we would do the same—that we would allow there to be different classes of citizen in our communities, in our country, in our world. We must be very clear about the fact that there is no acceptable form of this ban, and only the need to challenge it.

The question is, how do we challenge that? This is where I disagree with my Conservative colleagues. Absolutely, we must engage; absolutely, we must speak up. That is why I read with despair that our own Prime Minister had the opportunity directly to look the President of the United States in the eye, in a private meeting, and say, “Look, this is not right. This will be counter-productive. This will not achieve what you want, and it will divide our nation.” She clearly has not done that. The opportunity to engage was on the table, and she did not take it. I think that that damages all of us in the United Kingdom who defend the importance of our Government in leading such engagement.

The Minister may disagree with me, but I feel very strongly. *[Interruption.]* If the Minister wants to intervene and confirm that the Prime Minister raised this issue with the President of the United States directly, I will happily take an intervention, but if he cannot confirm that, what I say stands. I felt ashamed on Saturday night when the Home Office, the Foreign Office and No. 10 refused to make a statement. It was damning for us as a nation when the world was calling out for leadership.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an incredibly powerful speech. Did this not feel so abhorrent to so many of us because it came only a few days after Holocaust Memorial Day, a day on which we pledge that when we see prejudice and hatred we will stand up in the face of it, and was not our Prime Minister’s failure to do that deeply shaming to our country?

Stella Creasy: I could not agree more. One of the messages that I want to send from the House tonight is that we do not recognise that as the kind of leadership that we want in our country. Something clearly has to change, even if the Prime Minister did not know about the ban before she walked into that room with Donald Trump. What cannot continue is our saying that it is simply a matter for the United States. What cannot continue is our saying, “Well, if we can be sure that it will not affect our citizens, we will not worry about the implications of the ban elsewhere.” That is not good enough. That is not the British way.

The question for us is how best to express that and how best to engage. There is a world of difference between wanting to debate directly with President Trump whether he has done the right thing, not just for his own country but for our world, and rolling out the red carpet and giving him the same treatment that we gave Nelson Mandela, or, indeed, the Queen Mother when we laid her in state. There is a world of difference between wanting to debate with someone and engage with him, and wanting to indulge him. Let me say this to Conservative Members: to many of us, it looks like indulging and endorsing President Trump if nothing changes now that we know of this ban—now that we know of his intention and his deliberate actions to target Muslims in our world. If nothing changes, that will say more about us as a nation than it says about him.

The question for all of us is whether we should use the power that we have, as elected representatives of people in positions of authority, to send that message. It is whether we should join our citizens who are not just on the streets tonight, and who have not just signed that petition, but who are asking what has become of us as a world. They are people who recognise that diversity is a strength. They are people who recognise the words of a former American President, Franklin Roosevelt, who argued that a nation does not have to be cruel to be tough.

I am proud of my country; I am proud to be a patriot; I respect the rights of other countries; but that does not mean that I must be silent when things go wrong. The silence of our Government, the mitigation, the quibbling, the laziness with which people are approaching this issue and the tardiness of the response do not reflect the best principles of being British.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): The hon. Lady is making many pertinent points, but does she not think that it is good for British politics that we have a Prime Minister who thinks before she speaks, rather than spewing out whatever comes into her mind on Twitter? Is that not a good thing for British politics and, indeed, for the world?

Stella Creasy: As one who often goes on Twitter, I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was referring to that.

There are some things that should not take too much thought. Sometimes something is just wrong, and we need to say that it is wrong. We do not need to judge the angles. Of course we need a trade deal with America, but we should not be trading our values to secure it. Indifference to cruelty of this kind damages not just our nation, and not just our nation’s standing, but our world. It makes it harder for us to stand alongside those people in our communities tonight who are fearful of the division that we are seeing as a result of this ban. It makes it harder for us to advocate our values, and to take on other countries that also ban people. It makes it harder for us to do our job. We are people in positions of power. We need to hear the voice of our communities who are saying that this is not the world that they want, and act accordingly.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. There are—four, five, six—nine Members wishing to speak. Let me explain to the House that each of the Front-Bench speakers should have an opportunity to speak for 10 minutes or thereabouts, and the Minister should conclude by 8.59 pm, because the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) has the right to reply at that point. We must work on that basis. If everyone speaks for three or four minutes, we shall be fine, but if Members speak for longer than that, they will be preventing others from speaking.

7.46 pm

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): “We should seek to engage with our American friends,” the Foreign Secretary repeated over and over in his statement. He justified that, with no sense of irony, on the grounds

[Liz Saville Roberts]

that engaging with such powers is the most effective way to influence them—this from the man who led, with great gusto, a campaign to persuade us to turn our backs on our closest and largest economic relationship.

Our actions in this place are inherently passive. As we heard earlier, this is an echo chamber. Passivity is easy. Passivity is amoral. Passivity means risking nothing. However, our passivity will weigh heavily on many others. It will weigh heavily on the people who are trapped, the people who cannot see their families, the people who are stranded, and the people who are fleeing with nowhere to go. This is not even just about the immediate physical ramifications of the policy. The atmosphere of hate, fear and anger that it feeds also stokes the flames of radicalism. It is not a policy that builds peace and security. We are told that this is a relationship that is worth holding on to, but a relationship in which one party stands by and watches with automaton-like levels of dispassion as another wreaks calamitous harm is not a healthy—never mind special—relationship by any stretch of the imagination.

The Government's approach to the Trump Administration's draconian policy is, perhaps, a product of their own making. "The only way you're going to make a deal you want is if you are coming from a position of strength". Those are not my words, but the words of the new leader of the so-called free world. Boxed into a corner by the Government's self-imposed Brexit boundaries, we are forced to creep, cap in hand, to people whose values now run directly counter to those professed by the House. I will therefore not be compelled by duty to kowtow to Mr Trump and his prejudiced Administration if he is invited to address us. I hope that the Minister will listen to the 1,469,828 signatories of the petition that is lengthening with extraordinary speed even as we speak, and will decide that perhaps this visit should be treated in a different way.

It strikes me that at present the Chamber is, for once, dominated by women, which would be an interesting observation with which to end my speech, but let me end with a question: how many of their great British values can the Government sacrifice in their quest for a new special relationship?

Mr Speaker: That was a splendid example, to be followed. It is not for me to comment on the content of the hon. Lady's speech, but the length was admirable.

7.48 pm

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) and the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) for securing the debate. We have heard some excellent speeches.

I shall keep my own speech short, I promise, but I want to begin with the timely words of the rather exceptional Karen Pollock, chief executive of the Holocaust Educational Trust. She said:

"We've spent the past week remembering the Holocaust, reminding ourselves where hatred leads, that words matter, that we cannot stand by. As we see injustice and witness prejudice and discrimination, we should not only feel confident to, but a duty to speak out."

As Ms Pollock would tell us, the holocaust started with words of hatred and built from there. President Trump has a history of Islamophobic rhetoric. In 2010, he implied that Muslims were a threat to the security of his country and had a collective responsibility for the 2001 World Trade Centre attack. In 2012, he said that the world had a "Muslim problem." In March last year, he said:

"I think Islam hates us."

He has spoken approvingly of blanket surveillance of all Muslims and the idea of a registry of Muslims in his country. There are chilling similarities here with the *Judenkartei*: first words, and now actions.

In recent days, we have seen the attempt to put into place the ban on Muslim movement into the US. This is part of an initial package of measures designed to restrict the freedoms of migrants, and—let us face it—to demonise them. There is an escalating pattern of deeply unjust and very worrying behaviour, and it is clear from this debate that many hon. Members share my concern about where it might lead.

Trump's behaviour does not only affect US residents; it is a matter of justice, security, and basic dignity, for people here at home. Like many of my colleagues in this House, I am sure, I have received lots of messages from constituents worried that their ability to travel to the US will now be curtailed. If only it was only that, because these words and actions have had a much greater effect: they fuel fear, and provide perceived permission to acts of hatred. Global media coverage extends their reach; they simply cannot be contained.

We must stand up, with a clarity of purpose and in solidarity, in condemnation of these actions and the ideas that underlie them. They are already harming innocent people around the world, whether directly or indirectly by encouraging hatred, but I worry that they could do so more. They reflect, in their beginnings, the injustices that so many of us recently remembered and recommitted to prevent.

7.52 pm

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I am grateful for the opportunity to express my views on this issue on behalf of the many constituents who have contacted me in the last 48 hours to register their disgust at the actions of President Trump. The petition, which many of my constituents have signed, calling for Donald Trump to be prevented from making a state visit to the UK has to be one of the fastest growing petitions ever, with the number of signatures approaching 1.5 million. The popularity of this petition shows the disdain and horror that the people of the UK feel towards the US President and his hateful and bigoted policies.

When this House previously debated Donald Trump, I called him an idiot. The truth is that he is something far worse; he has in a very short time managed to prove himself an incompetent, unthinking tyrant who in less than two weeks in office has already caused massive disruption to thousands of people, mass demonstrations against his policies and untold damage to the reputation of the United States, a country that I love but whose chosen path is deeply worrying to the rest of the world.

Each and every day, families live in fear because they have had the audacity to flee a war-torn country. Victims of these hateful and poisonous acts look to authority

figures and lawmakers to help solve these issues and to protect them, not turn them away from the gates of sanctuary.

Trump's immigration ban will send a message to bigots, bullies and racists the world over that their views are not only legitimate, but entirely correct. In other words, anyone who may look, speak or act differently is not to be trusted.

We need to be absolutely crystal clear in opposing the imposition of blanket bans on people on the basis of their birthplace, nationality or religion. This ban is divisive, and fails to distinguish between appropriate measures to deal with extremism and terrorism and the millions of people who wish to go about their lives in peace and safety, including refugees who are running away from the terrorists. It will lead to innocent people being detained at airports and, as many Members have said, will play straight into the terrorists' hands.

The Prime Minister must be clear about our obligations as global actors under international law to oppose a ban based on people's origin or faith. Securing exemptions for UK citizens is not enough, and if that is the limit of our ambition, I am ashamed.

It is our collective responsibility to speak up for tolerance, equality and providing refuge for those in the greatest need. I strongly believe that it would be wrong for a state visit by President Trump to go ahead while his Administration maintain a blanket ban on refugees and citizens of certain countries travelling to the United States. I commend everyone who has signed this petition and people protesting all over the UK against President Trump tonight.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil), I feel the burn of shame at President Trump's Scottish roots. I would have hoped that, in this Burns season, Trump remembered the words of Robert Burns in his famous verse, "A Man's A Man for A' That", which finishes with the refrain:

"That Man to Man, the world o'er
Shall brothers be for a' that."

The vast majority of people right across the UK are crying out for their Prime Minister and Government to exhibit a much stronger and more principled position on this Executive order. We have been told time and again from the Dispatch Box by Ministers that it is imperative that strong or special relationships are maintained so we can make direct representations to our friends on issues such as human rights violations. I disagree, but let us see the Government prove their worth. This so-called special relationship has never been so important. The Prime Minister cravenly rushed across the Atlantic at the earliest opportunity to be the first world leader to meet the President, a decision she was warned against, and one that looks worse and worse as each baffling pronouncement is made from the White House. If this relationship is to mean anything, let this House and the protestors both outside this building and right across the country send a strong message to President Trump that we will not stand in silence and bend a knee to hate, wherever, and from whatever building, that hate emanates.

7.56 pm

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I also want to thank the right hon. and hon. Members who have secured this debate this evening.

Speakers at Hounslow's civic commemoration of the holocaust this morning reminded us of the importance of compassion and refuge in the face of hate. Council leader Councillor Steve Curran celebrated the diversity of the people in that room—people from all backgrounds from all over the world—and made the link between Hounslow welcoming people in the room and all the people who live in Hounslow now from all over the world. They have included Sir Mo Farah, who arrived and was welcomed in Hounslow aged eight in about 1990.

We also heard from Susie Barnett, who was born in 1938 in Hamburg. She told us of her family's moving and incredible story, of fleeing the hate and discrimination of Nazi Germany at the end of 1930s and arriving separately in the UK as refugees. That family story of personal relationships and tragedy brought home to us the link between world events and what happens to families and ordinary people in these circumstances.

After the service this morning, I thanked Susie for her moving story and was able to tell her about the petition demanding that the invitation to President Trump be withdrawn. I told her that while she was speaking the tally on that petition tipped over the 1 million mark. She said, "Right, when I get home this afternoon, I am going to sign it." That petition is still being signed at the rate of 10 signatures every second, and by the end of this evening the figure could hit 1.5 million.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) referred to the rules on movement and the safety of refugees that emerged from the ashes of world war two. The President of the United States is trying to rewrite these rules. He is fuelling fears, and a local Muslim activist phoned me this morning worrying about the implications of the feelings that President Trump is spreading in the US: what will that mean for the Muslim community here in the UK and in Hounslow?

The Executive order was directed at Muslims and at refugees, but the President is also effectively demonising many others—Mexicans, women, refugees from all over the world and now, we hear today, green activists, who among other things are trying to save the American bald eagle, symbol of the United States. We have to stand up against this prejudice, before it leads to mass injustice.

I shall finish with a quote from Martin Luther King, written when he was in jail:

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

8 pm

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): What an extraordinary few days these have been, and what an unedifying tack this Government have taken. Every Member of this House will no doubt have heard from large numbers of their constituents who are appalled and concerned, and I am sorry that when the Foreign Secretary had the opportunity to respond earlier, he chose to minimise those concerns. The events in America are alarming. Even in the very recent past, it would have been utterly impossible to imagine this happening. The values that this Government tell us they espouse have been utterly lacking in the statements they have made, and where is the global leadership that they speak of?

[Kirsten Oswald]

If the special relationship is worth a jot, the UK Government should be using it to their full advantage. This Executive order is disgraceful. It is racist, inhumane and dangerous, yet the Foreign Secretary told us earlier that it did not discriminate against Muslims and that it did not constitute President Trump's promised ban on Muslims. That is frankly ridiculous. What on earth will it take to make this Government really speak out, and why has the Prime Minister so failed to do so? We have heard today that the Prime Minister might in fact have known about the Executive order before it was put in place. We have no idea whether the Foreign Secretary knew, because he repeatedly sidestepped that question here today. If the Prime Minister was aware of this disgraceful, racist Executive order before it was published, and her reaction was simply to say that it was a matter for the USA and, astonishingly, to invite President Trump for a state visit, that is utterly shameful.

To add to the many concerns that people already had about President Trump's thoughts on groups including women, Mexicans and people concerned about climate change, he has now brought this order to bear. We have responded by looking the other way and inviting him for a state visit. It utterly beggars belief that that is the Government's priority, when the Executive order is clearly so wrong and so illogical and has such horrible implications for the Muslims caught up in it, for those in peril who would have sought sanctuary and for people all over the world who are going to be affected by this order fostering Islamophobia. This is a disgraceful state of affairs.

To conclude, the national security arguments of the Trump Administration are simply wrong; they are nonsense. Rather than keeping America safer, this measure will make us all much less safe. A state visit in these circumstances is just not appropriate. Let us not look away from what is happening. We say that all the time in this place. Now, let us actually have the guts to stand up to this terrible, dangerous policy. We must do this.

8.3 pm

Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab): I should like to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) and the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) on securing this debate. I agreed with the entirety of my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North's speech and with much of what the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon said, although I disagree with his more fulsome praise for the actions of this Government over the past 48 hours. I would take issue with that, but I was very moved by his personal experiences and his personal reaction to the ban. I commend his speech and his efforts on this matter.

I want to return to a point made when the Foreign Secretary was taking questions earlier, following his statement, about the importance of recognising that this is a Muslim ban. Other Members have made that point as well, but it is so important that we send a clear message and that we call it exactly what it is. We seem to be living in an era when the truth and facts are challenged at every moment. I was struck by a recent film, "Denial", which is the story of how Professor Deborah Lipstadt had to take the holocaust denier, David Irving, to court

in order to prove the truth about the holocaust. It really focuses the mind on the importance of speaking up for the truth at every moment and calling out those who deny it.

Many people are trying to divert us from the truth by saying that this Executive order is about nationality. It is not about nationality. The President of the United States made it very clear in his campaign that he wanted to ban Muslims from entering the United States. Rudy Giuliani was on Fox News recently—not one of those organisations that the President likes to accuse of distributing "fake news"—saying that he had been asked by the President of the United States to put together a commission to work out how to enact the Muslim ban legally. These people are not hiding in plain sight; they are telling us in clear words on national television that is broadcast around the world exactly what they believe, exactly what they stand for and exactly who they are.

Sir Simon Burns: Does the hon. Lady also remember that, during the Democratic national convention in late July last year, Trump was tacky enough to attack a Muslim gold star mother whose son had died in the service of the US army protecting his fellow soldiers from certain death?

Shabana Mahmood: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for making that important point and reminding us about Humayun Khan. In normal circumstances, that action would have been enough to ensure that someone lost an election and received the opprobrium of everyone, everywhere. It is a sign of what we have come to that that did not happen.

It is important that we stick to our principles and that we hold the line in relation to the truth, because that is what is at stake here. Everyone in this House must be unashamed and unafraid to do that. We have to hold the line when people scream at us on social media that things are not as they seem and that the President suddenly changed his mind and does not think that it is a Muslim ban. We also have to hold the line when people try to divert us and when the "alt-right" go on the marches they are now so famous for. We have to hold on to the truth.

James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Shabana Mahmood: I will not, because of the time. I do apologise.

I want to make a point about British values. As a British Muslim parliamentarian, I have spoken a lot in this House about British values. I have also heard a lot from this Government about British values. In fact, I have often felt that the Government feel that the British Muslim community needs to do more to uphold those values. We have heard famous phrases such as "muscular liberalism", and we have been told that we need to give strong and vocal support to our respect for democracy, the rule of law, equality and tolerance for everyone and every group in this country. We are told that we as a community have to step up to the plate and call out behaviours that do not match with our British values. If we as a community fail to do that, we have the threat of the Prevent strategy hanging over us. As I watched the Prime Minister's limp, weak and shameful response to

this Muslim ban, I hope I can be forgiven for wondering whether the British Government would consider referring themselves to their own Prevent strategy for failing to provide that strong, vocal, muscularly liberal defence of our British values.

I am reminded of the recent Casey review of integration in our communities, one of whose recommendations was held up by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. It stated that we could increase “standards of leadership and integrity in public office, by...ensuring that British values such as respect for the rule of law, equality and tolerance are enshrined in the principles of public life and developing a new oath for holders of public office.”

I wonder how many members of the Government would feel, if they had taken such an oath, that they had fulfilled that promise by calling out this behaviour on the part of the American President in the way that they should have done. I feel that they have not fulfilled any such promise, and that they have therefore undermined the very case that they make for our own values. That is a real shame.

I have a final point about the personal impact that the ban is having on Muslims around the world, particularly the almost 3 million British Muslim citizens. As a British Muslim, I can tell you, Mr Speaker, that people among my family, friends and community feel terrified. They fear that this is a portent of what is to come. We live in an age of supremacists. Whether the Muslim supremacists of ISIL or the white supremacists who think they have achieved their life's dream with the new Administration in the White House, supremacists are on the rise around the world. In this age of supremacists and their success, we have a duty to call them out, to stand up to them and to say, “Not on our watch.” We have a duty to provide comfort and security to all our minority communities. We will not let them down. We will not stand by. We will stand up and be counted.

8.10 pm

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): I thank the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) and the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) for securing this debate. Like so many colleagues, I agree that what President Trump has done is absolutely appalling. It is a prejudiced, xenophobic, Islamophobic policy and a horrible, sad episode in the history of a country with such a strong and proud record of welcoming migrants and refugees.

Remarkably, it has not even been six months since President Obama hosted his international summit aimed at encouraging states to pledge more resettlement places for refugees. The background to that summit was that more than 65 million people have been forced to flee their homes—the highest number since the second world war—more than 21 million of whom have had to flee their countries altogether. Presciently, President Obama warned world leaders that

“if we were to turn refugees away simply because of their background or religion, or, for example, because they are Muslim, then we would be reinforcing terrorist propaganda that nations like my own are somehow opposed to Islam, which is an ugly lie that must be rejected in all of our countries by upholding the values of pluralism and diversity.”

That of course is exactly the disastrous mistake that President Trump has just made.

In 2015, the US accounted for 60% of global refugee resettlement places. With President Trump in office, it is now more imperative than ever that other Governments step up to the plate, reject the narrative that he has capitulated to, and send a message loud and clear that we will stand up for and defend to the hilt the precious international system for the protection of refugees established by the Geneva convention of 1951. The question is whether the Prime Minister and this Government will step up to the plate. It is fair to say that I have some doubts, but I dearly and sincerely hope to be proved wrong.

The Government can start proving me wrong today by putting on the record their unequivocal backing for the refugee convention, by abandoning talk of redefining the convention's fundamental terms, by emphasising their commitment to resettle 20,000 vulnerable Syrians. If possible, which it is, they should do more and expand the scope of refugee family reunion and provide safe legal routes for those escaping persecution. Most importantly of all, will the Government commit today to ensuring that the Dubs scheme for relocating unaccompanied child refugees from Europe will remain in operation in the long term while the refugee crisis continues to unfold? What could be a stronger and more fitting rebuke for such a terrible and divisive decision?

8.13 pm

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I begin by saying:

“I am heartbroken that today President Trump is closing the door on children, mothers and fathers fleeing violence and war. I am heartbroken that America is turning its back on a proud history of welcoming refugees and immigrants—the people who helped build your country, ready to work hard in exchange for a fair chance at a new life.”

Those are not my words, but the words of a Nobel prize winner. Her name is Malala. She probably knows more than anyone here the difference between true Islam and the poisonous perversion that we see in the hatred of Daesh and others. It is heartbreaking beyond words that the leader of what was once the free world does not know the difference between them.

Make no mistake, however much his supporters and apologists may want to dress it up, Donald Trump has explicitly made the connection between being a Muslim and being much more likely than anybody else to be a danger to fellow human beings. That is offensive not only to Muslims; as a Christian, I find it an offensive, repugnant way of running a country. I have heard people praise Mr Trump for his Christianity. I am sorry, but I was brought up to see the best in everybody, and I cannot see any Christianity in the early days of his presidency. If the lord and saviour whom we both follow was to turn up today at the American border, he would not be allowed in. He would have a Palestinian passport and no valid birth certificate and would not be able to prove that he was a Christian because he had not invented Christianity yet. That is the extent to which the depraved, racist ideologies of one man have poisoned a once great nation.

I heard Government Members complain about repeated references to the Holocaust, but the hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) nailed that point perfectly. There are similarities between how Trump has been talking about Muslims for years and how others talked about Jews in the 1930s. If those similarities are not clear enough for anyone in here to understand, they should

[Peter Grant]

not be involved in politics at this or any other level. I found the comments of the hon. Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah) immensely powerful and I want to say something in response to her quote. They came for the Muslims, and I am not a Muslim. They will come for Jews, and I am not Jew. They will come for the gays, and I am not a gay. They will come for the Mexicans, and I am not a Mexican. But, by God, I will speak up and I will join, hand in hand, with the thousands who are in Whitehall right now and in towns and cities the length and breadth of these islands and across the world.

America is our friend, but Donald Trump will never be my friend unless he mends his ways enormously. Friends sometimes do things that are so abominable that we have to say, "You stop that right now or our friendship is over." We have to ask the Government what is the price of the continued friendship. If we are not prepared to stop that friendship now, how far down the slippery slope does he have to take us before we say, "No more"? If we go too far, it will be too late to stop. Last week at Prime Minister's questions, I quoted prose by Robert Burns, but I never thought I would have to quote the same words again. He said that that whatever damages society, or any least part of it, "this is my measure of iniquity." This is an iniquitous action by an iniquitous President, and I will never cease to speak out against it.

8.17 pm

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): I join the others who have commended the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) and the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) for the way in which they secured and introduced this debate. Many important points have been made and much has been agreed on, but there is clear disagreement on some points.

My issue with the Prime Minister is not so much that she was holding Donald Trump's hand when she met him on Friday; it was that she stayed her hand when it came to responding to the Executive order. A clear, unequivocal response should have been given and none was available. That sent a dangerous signal to many people who are worried, fearful and angry, both here and across the world. We have heard hon. Members refer to the fact that the Prime Minister visited the Republican congress before she visited the President. I do not believe that the terms in which she spoke as Head of Government in such a partisan setting were appropriate. She commended them for having swept all before them and for renewing America with strength. Donald Trump's idea of renewing America with strength was demonstrated the next day by this Executive order. This is the drive-by prejudice, xenophobia and racism that pass for governance in the Trump age, and this President now has the fastest-ever invitation for a state visit, which appals and disgusts many people. None of the excusers here today can answer that point.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if this country goes ahead and welcomes Donald Trump with all the pomp and ceremony of a state visit, that will be seen in the eyes of the world as appeasement of a President whose policies directly discriminate against our constituents? When we

come to consider the massive public petition about this visit, we should have the conviction to review and rescind that invitation if circumstances do not change.

Mark Durkan: I fully accept the hon. Gentleman's point. To those who are saying that we cannot reconsider the invitation, I say that we should. We should not be afraid of offending the narcissism of this man when we are prepared to offend the fear and disgust that we know many, many people feel about this Executive order and other statements and practices of the early Trump presidency. Let us be very clear that it is about the signal that is sent if it goes ahead as a state visit, with all the pomp and ceremony that that allows. It is not just about the message that it sends to Muslims or to the countries that are subject to the ban; it is about the message that it sends to people here and in America. It is also about the signal that it sends to the people in America who have honestly been trying to stand up and be progressive and supportive of refugees. President Trump is almost indicting the sanctuary cities in the States. He is now listing them as almost un-American for the support they are prepared to accord refugees and the stand that they are prepared to take on human rights. He is criticising civic and pastoral leaders in America. What signal do they get if Donald Trump is received and applauded here?

How many of us have stood at different events in this House and said, "We will show racism a red card. We will show sectarianism a red card"? Well, we are not showing them the red card by inviting President Trump here on a state visit. The invitation should be reversed if we want to send a straight and clear message.

Mr Speaker: I call the Front Bench speakers to wind up. If each could take no more than 10 minutes, or thereabouts, that would be excellent.

8.21 pm

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan). I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) and the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) for securing this debate.

As we stand here this evening, we should remember that, across the country, our fellow citizens have been protesting President Trump's decisions. It would be remiss of the Government not to take note of the strength of feeling on this issue or of the petition, which now has around 1.5 million signatures.

We heard moans and groans from some Government Members when it has been mentioned that the Executive order was signed on Holocaust Memorial Day, a day when millions join together to remember the Jews, homosexuals, Gypsies, disabled and others killed by the barbaric Nazi regime. The Foreign Secretary said earlier that to refer to the events of the 1930s and '40s in this context was to "trivialise" that tragic period of world history. Well, here is what the Anti-Defamation League, which was set up

"to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all"

said of Trump's actions this weekend:

"More than most, our community knows what happens when the doors to freedom are shut."

The holocaust did not begin with mass murder; it began with the demonisation of communities based on their religion and beliefs. It began with “othering” minorities, and it began with institutionalising racism in the laws of the land. To ignore those facts would be a real insult to those who strive so hard today to uphold the values of inclusion, tolerance and freedom in the face of oppression.

Imagine how it feels to be a Muslim on this day, anywhere in the world. Imagine how it feels to be a young Muslim, a Muslim child, in these days, looking at the television wondering about the President, “Is he speaking about me?” Yes, he is. It would give such people great comfort to hear so many of the wonderful speeches that we have heard from both sides of the Chamber today, and I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah), who is now in her seat, for her personal perspective of Islamophobia and hijabs. I am pleased to have secured an Adjournment debate this week on World Hijab Day, which should be celebrated, and on the right of women to wear or not to wear a hijab as they please, without fear or favour. In any event, women should be able to wear what they want, regardless. That is how it should be.

I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon, who said that he would welcome President Trump as soon as possible and that he hopes for a change in President Trump’s stance. I appreciate those sentiments, but I remind the hon. Gentleman that we had a debate in Westminster hall when Mr Trump was a Republican candidate. At that time, many well-wishing Members on both sides of the House suggested that it would be all right and that he would change his ways: “Let’s get him to the United Kingdom, take him for a curry and take him to the mosques, and his attitude will change.” I fear that I do not share the hon. Gentleman’s sense of optimism.

The Government have an opportunity to demonstrate true leadership. Remember that we are speaking up for what is right. It is President Trump who is wrong, so what are we afraid of? What is the point in any of this if we cannot use this platform to say what we believe is the right thing to do? And standing up against what he has done is the right thing to do.

Scotland has taken in more than 1,200 Syrian refugees through the Syrian resettlement programme, and that is more than a third of the total number taken in by the whole United Kingdom. The response by Scottish national and local government and by our third sector to the refugee crisis has been exemplary. In my constituency, Syrian refugees have been involved in Burns suppers and have attended local football matches. That is what this country should be about.

We should compare the Prime Minister’s lack of immediate reaction with the reaction of Angela Merkel or Justin Trudeau, or with the strong statements by the First Minister of Scotland. As I have said, the Prime Minister has failed the important first challenge that she faced.

Over and above all of that, the Executive order does not make the US or the UK any safer; quite the opposite. To quote John Kerry’s remarks prior to the ban, when Trump announced his policy in 2015:

“It exhibits an attitude by one American who is running for the highest office of our land about a willingness to discriminate against a religion... It says to those in Islam who are trying to exploit people and recruit foreign fighters and otherwise, it says

look, look at America. Here they’ve got a guy running for president who is waging war against Islam.”

Of course, President Trump’s words have been picked up by the leader of Daesh, who quite disgustingly is referring to this as a “blessed ban”. How appalling.

That is why the Government need to answer the questions from earlier today. What are the national security implications for the UK of this Executive order? Does it make us safer or, as so many experts have stated, does it make us more likely to be at the other end of terrorists whose ideas will be bolstered by Donald Trump’s remarks?

Lastly, I am hugely concerned about the impact of the order on the work of international organisations like the UN and the work to uphold international treaties like the Geneva convention. As Chancellor Merkel said:

“The...refugee convention requires the international community to take in...refugees on humanitarian grounds. All signatory states are obliged to do so. The German government explained this policy in their call yesterday.”

What action have the Government taken to uphold these vital international treaties?

President Trump’s actions are inhumane, racist and immoral, and let us tell him that they are. I welcome the fact that the House is now treating the threat posed by him with seriousness, which is what it deserves, but without leadership from this Government in standing up to these despicable policies, I fear that we may have some very deep and dark times ahead of us. I hope that the Minister will attempt to change my mind.

8.28 pm

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): This has been an extraordinary debate, in which we have seen the House at its best. Let me begin by congratulating my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) and the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) on securing it, and on the immensely powerful and important statements they have both made, not just today, but since this hateful policy was announced on Friday night. Tellingly, they and others, from Chancellor Merkel to Sir Mo Farah, were able to see immediately that this policy is abhorrent and reprehensible, and to condemn it, whereas as far as the British Prime Minister was concerned it was not a matter for comment, and almost three days later she has still not condemned it. She has only told us that it is not a policy she would pursue—that is not condemning it. As my right hon. Friend and the hon. Gentleman both know, this is not a time for cowardice. It is not a time for staying silent or for going for trade deals at almost any cost; it is a time to stand up for what is right. So many Members have talked tonight about the desperation that forces people to flee from war, terror and persecution, and the terrible consequences that befall the world when we bar the door and turn our backs on those most in need.

Many have pointed out that it added grotesque insult to grave injury for President Trump to announce this policy on Holocaust Memorial Day. On that day, we among millions of others remember the 900 Jewish refugees on the MS St Louis who were turned away from the United States and forced to return to Antwerp, plunging them back into the holocaust from which 254 of them would never emerge. It was of course in the aftermath of those

[Emily Thornberry]

horrors that the 1951 Geneva refugee convention was agreed, which was renewed afresh and signed by the United States in 1967. That convention enshrines the principle that all signatories should give shelter to those fleeing war and persecution, regardless of their race, religion and nationality. The Executive order could not be a more calculated demolition of that principle.

We learned on Saturday that Chancellor Merkel had to explain the convention in her phone call with President Trump, but we have to do more than explain it. It is incumbent on every other signatory to that convention to press the United States to live up to its commitments and its obligations, so I support my right hon. Friend's call for a European Heads of Government meeting to consider a united response to this Executive order and to the breach of the refugee convention. I urge the Minister to respond to those calls when he speaks.

Given the response of the Minister's boss to my earlier questions—perhaps, more honestly, I should say the lack of response—may I ask him to address urgently the issue of the position of UK residents who are foreign nationals and not passport holders but residents? I am thinking in particular of those with indefinite leave to remain, thousands of whom will now find themselves discriminated against simply because of their country of origin, even though many are here precisely because they have fled the terror and religious extremism that the Executive order purports to prevent. Whether these people are Somali or Sudanese, Syrian or Yemeni, Iraqi, Iranian or Libyan, they are our constituents. They work hard, they pay their taxes, they are raising their families here and they call the UK their home. They are part of our communities and we have a duty to stand up for their rights as well. So may I ask the Minister as a first step to tell us how many UK residents he believes will be affected in this way, and what advice his Department and the Home Office are offering them?

Frankly, this is a debate I never thought we would need to have; the very idea that we would be looking at a new American President, just a few weeks into the job, not just aghast at what he has already done, but debating how much worse things could get from here. How long ago it seems since the Foreign Secretary was telling us to be optimistic about the new presidency and was saying that this President shared our values and we were being premature in judging him. How naive that looks now.

Yet this is the President for whom the Government are preparing to roll out the red carpet and welcome on a state visit. I was checking the figures today and I found that since the first state visit of President Reagan in 1982 the quickest period between inauguration and making a state visit to Britain was 17 months—that was for President Obama. The average has been 25 months, with both President Clinton and President George W. Bush having to wait almost three years. So why the indecent haste for this most indecent of Presidents?

This is a President who has made lewd and vile comments about the Duchess of Cambridge; who has said that he does not want to meet the Prince of Wales, because someone might finally stand up to him about climate change; and who has banned thousands of our residents and millions worldwide from visiting America simply because of their nationality and their religion. And President Trump thinks that we should put on a

parade for him while that grotesque ban is still in place! If it goes ahead, it will be a national shame, which is why the Opposition will oppose having a state visit in such circumstances. We will certainly oppose any suggestion that President Trump is given the honour of addressing both Houses of Parliament.

Last week, the Prime Minister promised to speak frankly to President Trump and tell him where she disagreed with him, but we heard nothing of the sort from Washington. We heard nothing about climate change or respect for human rights and women's rights. We heard nothing about punishing war crimes in Syria, the nuclear deal with Iran, or the illegal settlements in the west bank. We got the same stony silence from the Prime Minister when she was asked about the Executive order. Three times she was asked the question in Ankara, and three times she ignored it. Was she told about it by President Trump? There have been reports on "Channel 4 News" that she was. The Secretary of State ducked the question; perhaps the Minister will enlighten us and answer directly: did the President tell the Prime Minister about the Executive order when they met?

The Prime Minister referred in Washington to a special relationship based on our shared history and interests, but she has to realise, and needs to make President Trump realise, that it is also a relationship based on shared values. If the President is going to discard those values, whether by embracing torture or ignoring climate change, or by demonising people as aliens and terrorists based simply on their religion and nationality on the very day on which we remember the holocaust, the Prime Minister must be willing to tell him frankly: "Mr President, you are wrong. This is not who we are." The fact that, almost three full days after the announcement, we have yet to hear a word of condemnation from her own mouth is not just shameful, it is cowardly. Some iron lady she has turned out to be.

8.36 pm

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): First, I thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this special debate, even though it followed 90 minutes of questions to the Foreign Secretary on the same topic. It is important that we have been able to air our views. It is no part of my comment tonight to find partisan difference or to argue with the fundamental moral arguments that have been put to the House today.

I commend the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) for pressing this issue. The House has every right to speak out. We are seen throughout so much of the world as the voice of democracy and as a lighthouse of justice and decency. It is in that vein that we have witnessed a debate of the highest quality that I hope will be noticed and listened to, and I hope that all those who have participated will feel proud of the contribution they have made on a very important issue.

We witnessed the most deeply moving speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi). It was clearly a moment of deep personal emotion for him. It illustrated what has fired us up today, along with millions of other people. There is a moral dimension to this issue, as we have been discussing, but perhaps we have not emphasised quite enough the intensely personal dimension for the individuals whose lives are going to be affected. That is what we must understand when we debate this issue.

From my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Sir Simon Burns), with his encyclopaedic knowledge of US Presidents, we have learned about previous presidential visits to the UK. I acknowledge my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) for mapping out some of the broader strategic issues within which this very difficult issue has to fit. One of those is, of course, our relationship with the one superpower in the world, our closest historical ally, with which we have very close interests that affect all our constituents. I urge the House to appreciate that the Government have to see it from that perspective.

Perhaps, in addition to the fervent moral arguments we have heard, I can map out some of the practical side. On Friday, after the Prime Minister had left Washington, the President issued his Executive order banning the citizens of seven countries from entering the US for a period of 90 days. We know which countries they are: Syria, Iraq, Iran, Somalia, Yemen, Libya and Sudan. The order makes clear that no US visas will be issued to citizens of those states, and that anyone who already has a visa will be denied entry. I acknowledge the point made by the right hon. Member for Doncaster North that that is a significant extension of and is different from the list drawn up by the Obama Administration when those countries were withdrawn from the US visa waiver programme in 2016. What President Obama did in December 2015 was amend the visa waiver. From January 2016, it did not include individuals or dual nationals who had, in the previous five years, been to Syria, Iraq, Iran or Sudan. In February last year, the new provisions were extended—this is the origin of the list—to people who had travelled in the previous five years to Somalia, Yemen or Libya, but were not dual nationals of those countries. It is true that President Trump's Executive order is more extensive and sweeping, and it is altogether of a different order.

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): The House has yet to debate what Brexit means in practice, but after the events of this weekend can we at least all agree that the last thing that it should mean is biting your tongue in the hope of doing trade deals and thereby abandoning all the values that this country has long held dear?

Sir Alan Duncan: I do not think anyone would disagree with that. This is not just about trade deals, although trade deals matter; it is part of a broader relationship in which many other things matter, too. But let us focus on the one topic of this emergency debate, which is the immigration policy of the United States in what is only the second week of the presidency of President Trump. Obviously, we have very strong views, but we are not empowered to make a decision as such, because the immigration policy of the United States is a matter for the United States.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): I grew up listening to my father talk about the dangers of powerful and deeply divisive rhetoric like that of Enoch Powell. Is the Minister not concerned that when the President of the United States is invited on a state visit, there is a real danger that his rhetoric will be deeply divisive and threatening to many Muslims in this country? Will the Minister ensure that if the Government pursue the policy of rolling out the red carpet rather than having some other sort of official visit, there is proper protection against dangerous rhetoric that incites people to violence?

Sir Alan Duncan: I fully appreciate what the hon. Lady says. Indeed, we have debated such issues on many occasions. I have been in the House for nearly 25 years, and I think I am well known as someone who has defended Muslims at home and abroad throughout that period. To turn on a sixpence, when I was Minister of State, Department for International Development, I had to focus more than £1 billion from the growing DFID budget on Syrian refugees; perhaps my one pleasure amid the challenges that we faced was being able to say that that was 25 times more than was provided by the French.

Let me concentrate on what the Government had to do in response to the announcement of the Executive order. It had a serious effect, and there were serious consequences for some British citizens. It is the Government's duty to protect the interests of British citizens and, where we are able to do so, make sure that we get things changed so that they are not detrimentally affected. That is what we decided we primarily had to do, why the Foreign Secretary spoke to the US Administration, and why my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary spoke to General Kelly, the new Secretary of Homeland Security, to seek clarification.

One of the points that I ask the House to understand is that we did not appreciate right from the start all the implications of the Executive order. It was announced as the Prime Minister left Washington to fly overnight to Turkey, and during the next day it was full steam ahead in Turkey, so I think the House ought to row back from the personal attacks on the Prime Minister.

Let me make it clear what has resulted from those contacts: we have successfully protected British citizens. It would have been ill advised to be diplomatically offensive in a way that would have reinforced any detriment to British citizens. Instead, we have achieved something.

Andy Burnham: Get out of it! Achieved what?

Sir Alan Duncan: I will tell the right hon. Gentleman exactly what we have achieved. We have achieved an outcome in which all British passport holders remain welcome to travel to the United States, which would not have happened if my colleagues in Government had not made the contacts they did.

Yvette Cooper *rose*—

Sir Alan Duncan: No, I will not give way. I am going to explain this.

We have received assurances from the US embassy that the Executive order will make no difference to any British passport holder, irrespective of their country of birth or whether they hold another passport—*[Interruption.]* The right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) has asked, "What about residents?" I am holding her back from intervening so that I can answer her question. We are advised that the only material change for the UK is that citizens of any of the seven designated countries who do not hold a British passport but are legally resident in the UK will still be able to apply for visas, but that they may face additional screening at their port of entry into the United States. I apologise for making the right hon. Lady wait to intervene.

Yvette Cooper: The Minister is making a thoughtful speech, and I welcome the work that Ministers have done to safeguard the interests of British citizens. However, may I ask him about the wider points? Has the Foreign Office made representations to the US Administration to lift the refugee ban in the interests of international refugee policy, and to stop the targeting of Muslims in the interests of our shared values and common security?

Sir Alan Duncan: Given that the emergency debate has had me rushing to the Dispatch Box at short notice, I have not been involved in any such discussions so I cannot give the right hon. Lady a categorical answer, but one can speculate on what political events might now unfold. Executive orders are, at least, limited for 90 days. They are a command from the president to instruct Congress to do something, so the order will now move to Congress within the democratic process of the United States. They have their democracy as we have ours, and this will ultimately be their political decision. I have no doubt that there will be strong political voices within the United States, as we have heard today in this House and, indeed, outside it.

I reiterate that the order is not the kind of policy of which this Government approve or would ever introduce. As the Foreign Secretary said in his statement earlier, we have already made very clear our anxiety about measures that discriminate on grounds of nationality in ways that we consider to be divisive and wrong. Indeed, it does not really help—although it is true—to say that, although all the countries listed are Muslim countries, the list does not include all Muslim countries. In fact, the vast majority—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali) might just listen to the point I am trying to make. Although the vast majority of the Muslim world is not mentioned in the Executive order, the political language around it is unacceptably anti-Muslim. As such, it is divisive and wrong, and will cause an effect in the entire Muslim community.

As the Prime Minister expressed during her visit to the States last week, the point of having a special relationship is to have frank and honest discussions on all issues, whether we agree or disagree. We do not hesitate to state that, although US immigration policy is ultimately a matter for the US Government, we do not agree with this kind of approach. It would be wrong to think that the relationship means that we agree on every issue. That has never been the case throughout the history of the special relationship. One could cite the example of former Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson not joining the US in fighting in Vietnam.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon clearly said—frankly, he has spoken in today's debate with extraordinarily personal and moral authority—we should not forget the indispensable nature of this country's alliance with the US. In defence, intelligence and security, we work together more closely than any other two countries in the world. America's leadership role in NATO, which the Prime Minister was able to reaffirm and reconfirm in her visit, is the ultimate guarantor of security in Europe. The President told the Prime Minister of his 100% commitment to NATO. The trade relationship is of importance; we export more to the US than any other nation. The relationship is overwhelmingly to our benefit. I believe very strongly that the Prime Minister's visit to the White House last week underlined the strength

of that transatlantic alliance. Where we have differences with the United States, we will not shy away from them, and we will express them clearly, as I have done today, but I also echo the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister in repeating our resolve to work alongside the Trump Administration in our mutual interest.

8.51 pm

Edward Miliband: First, I thank all right hon. and hon. Members for contributing to this debate. I thank you, Mr Speaker, for making the debate possible, because it showed a wish to make sure that this House was relevant to the issue of the day and the issue of the moment. I particularly commend the speeches—forgive me if I do not mention all the excellent speeches we have heard—by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah), my right hon. Friends the Members for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) and for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), and my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern). My friend, the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), spoke incredibly movingly and eloquently. We also heard from the right hon. Members for Chelmsford (Sir Simon Burns) and for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), and the hon. Members for Colchester (Will Quince) and for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows). There were many other excellent speeches, including from the Front Benches—my own and others.

The main thing I take out of this is that we achieved our purpose, which is to show that on the merits of this issue there is remarkable unity across this House. There is no division on the Government or Opposition Benches about the fact that this ban is basically a repugnant, abhorrent thing. It is a very good achievement for the House to have set that out.

The second question, though, is what happens next? In a good contribution, the Minister came a bit closer to raising that issue. The question is whether we classify this a kind of normal, run-of-the-mill disagreement—“They do their thing, we do our thing”—or as something much, much more serious. I urge the Minister to take back to the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister the strong feeling across this House that this is not some run-of-the-mill thing—“They do our policy and we do ours”—but incredibly serious. It is incredibly serious because of the values that it speaks to, which offend this House of Commons, and because it takes us down a slippery slope. Someone pointed out that we are only two weeks into Donald Trump's presidency. My goodness, it feels like a year, really, and we still have at least three years and a lot of a year to go. There is a real danger of a slippery slope.

Thirdly, this policy is going to make us less safe, not more safe—it is more dangerous for our world. I really hope that the Minister takes back the message that this is not run of the mill but deadly serious, and that we expect a response from the Prime Minister, including speaking to the President, that is proportionate to the feeling of this House of Commons.

I apologise for having briefly gone outside because I was due to speak at the event that was taking place, although I never quite made it to speak. There were tens of thousands of people, I think, or thousands of people. One must not get into crowd size estimates given recent experience; I do not want to do a Trump—[HON. MEMBERS:

“Millions!”] There were millions of people outside. I think there is a feeling across this country, from the petition to the people outside, that this ban is not in our name. This House of Commons has said that today and I hope that the Government will reflect that in the weeks and months ahead.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the need for repeal of President Trump’s discriminatory, divisive and counterproductive ban on entry to the United States for people from seven predominantly Muslim countries and the indefinite ban placed on Syrian refugees.

Mr Speaker: For the record, that was passed unanimously.

Pension Schemes Bill [Lords]

Second Reading

8.55 pm

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Damian Green): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Let me start by placing the Bill in the context of the Government’s overall record on pensions. This Government have delivered radical and much-needed changes to our pensions system to make savings easier, fairer and safer for all. Since 2010 the pensions landscape has seen a revolution not only in state support, but in the ways in which people can save and access their pension savings.

We have removed the default retirement age, helping people to live fuller working lives. That is good for people’s wellbeing and their retirement income, and it benefits individuals, employers and the economy. We have made it easier for them to understand their state pension, and by setting the full amount at £155.65 a week we will lift more pensioners out of means-testing in the future. Together with the reviews of the state pension age, those changes are creating a sustainable system as a foundation for people’s private retirement saving.

We have increased private long-term savings by introducing automatic enrolment. More than 7 million people have already been automatically enrolled into a workplace pension, and more than 370,000 employers have declared that they have met their automatic enrolment duties. This is the cornerstone of our private pension reforms and it reverses the decade-long decline in pension savings prior to its introduction. It is a programme that works and it helps people achieve a more financially secure later life.

I am grateful to the many independent observers who have commented on the success of the policy. The Work and Pensions Committee has recognised that automatic enrolment has been a “tremendous success”. The National Audit Office, reporting on automatic enrolment in November 2016, found that the

“programme is also on track to deliver value for money in improving retirement incomes in the longer term”.

Findings of a report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, which was also published in November 2016, suggest that automatic enrolment is having a huge relative impact on those with the lowest participation rates in workplace pensions before its introduction, in particular those aged between 22 and 29—a group that has seen a 52.1 percentage point increase in pensions saving—and those in the lowest incomes quartile, who have seen a 53.9 percentage points increase. Moreover, the institute found that automatic enrolment is having an effect well beyond our target eligible group, in particular those earning under the £10,000 threshold, and that some employers are paying above minimum contribution rates.

Women are benefiting, too. In 2011, only 39% of eligible women employed in the private sector were in a workplace pension; by 2015, the figure had increased to 70%. By 2018, we estimate that 10 million workers will be newly saving or saving more into a workplace pension as a result of this change, generating about £17 billion in additional pension saving each year by 2019-20.

[Damian Green]

The Government's introduction of pension freedoms in April 2015 allows those aged 55 and over to access their pension savings with more flexibility. People with defined contribution pension schemes can now choose to use those funds in the way that is most suited to their circumstances, whether by drawing down the income, taking out an annuity, taking a lump sum or using some combination of those options. Since the introduction of pension freedoms, more than 1.5 million payments have been made, with £9.2 billion withdrawn flexibly in the first 21 months.

That is the landscape; let me turn to the Bill. Our focus now is to make sure that the regulatory landscape continues to be effective in protecting members so that everyone can have confidence in their pension scheme. Automatic enrolment requires employers, small and large, to provide pensions for their workers, in many cases for the first time. Automatic enrolment is helping to ensure that tomorrow's pensioners have greater security and an asset base in later life. Many employers have selected master trust pension schemes because they can offer scale, good governance and value for members.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way and for his earlier comments. Although we may have differences on the adequacy of the Department's responses to some of the Select Committee's reports, its response to our report on this issue is immensely encouraging. I think that some Members of the Committee will want to endorse the Secretary of State's proposals, which implement some of our recommendations to defend the hard-earned savings that many people are making, sometimes for the first time, by auto-enrolment. We do not want the cowboys to get hold of those funds.

Damian Green: I am extremely grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his words. Throughout his intervention, I was expecting "but" to appear at any moment, and it did not. We can be as one on the matter, and I will seek to improve our responses to future reports of the Committee that he chairs.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): I am grateful to the Secretary of State, but—if I may use that word—would he accept that the Bill is a missed opportunity to put right the severe problems in the plumbing and mechanical services industry pension scheme? For example, my constituent Chris Stuhlfelder wants to pass on his business to his employees after a lifetime of work in the industry, but he risks losing the lifetime rewards of that work just in order to secure the pension scheme for liabilities that are not directly his. Will the Minister table amendments to deal with that?

Damian Green: I acknowledge the problem faced by the hon. Gentleman's constituent and others in the same scheme. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Richard Harrington), has met the hon. Gentleman's constituent. We are looking, with representatives of the employers and the scheme, to see what we can do about the issues that they have raised, and we are exploring alternative methods to help employers in such schemes to manage their employer debt. The hon. Gentleman

will be aware that this is a complex area of legislation, so it is important that we get it right. As I hope he knows, we are on the case.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): I really welcome this legislation, but I am not the only one. I do not know whether the Secretary of State is aware of the comments of Morten Nilsson, the CEO of NOW: Pensions, a huge master trust. He has said:

"When we entered the market we were shocked at how easy it was to set up a master trust. It was simply a case of sending a form off to HMRC and The Pensions Regulator, nothing more."

I am very glad that the Government are looking to address that serious issue.

Damian Green: My hon. Friend raises an important point, which is at the heart of the legislation. The strong and quick growth of master trusts in response to the success of automatic enrolment has been in danger of running ahead of the regulatory system. In the Bill, we are catching up and making sure that the regulatory system is adequate to deal with these trusts, which will be hugely important in 20 years' time. We hope and expect that auto-enrolment will carry on, so the funds under management will increase hugely in the decades to come. It is really important to have the regulation right from the early days of the new system.

Automatic enrolment requires employers to provide a pension for their workers. It is, as I have said, helping to ensure that tomorrow's pensioners have greater security and an asset base. Many employers have selected master trust pension schemes because they offer scale, good governance and value for members.

James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): As well as being equitable for employees, will the schemes be equitable for employers? In the past, one of the problems of pooled defined benefit funds was that employers had ongoing liabilities beyond their initial contributions. Will the master trusts include only defined contributions and limit employers' liability in the longer term, so that it is just an amount that will be put in, rather than an ongoing liability?

Damian Green: The purpose of the regulatory system we are introducing in the Bill is precisely to ensure that there are checks and balances to avoid some of the problems we have seen in traditional schemes. My hon. Friend may be aware that we are about to produce a wider consultation on defined benefit schemes, so some of the problems he rightly identifies will be addressed in that consultation.

There has been very fast growth in the use of master trust schemes. In 2010, there were about 200,000 members in master trust schemes in the UK. By December 2016, there were over 7 million members, and £10 billion of assets in 87 master trusts. The schemes are regulated by the Pensions Regulator in accordance with occupational pensions legislation, but that legislation was developed mainly with single employer pension schemes in mind. The master trust schemes have different structures and dynamics, which give rise to different risks. We have worked closely with the Pensions Regulator and engaged with other stakeholders to see what essential protections

are needed. We believe that the measures in the Bill, while proportionate to the risks, will provide those protections.

The Bill introduces a new authorisation regime for master trusts. Under the new regime, the trusts will have to satisfy the regulator that they meet certain criteria before operating, or achieve those criteria if they are already operating. The criteria have been developed in discussion with the industry, and they include the same kind of risks that the Financial Conduct Authority regulation addresses in relation to group personal pensions, with which master trust schemes have some similarities.

Master trusts will now be required to demonstrate five things: that the persons involved in the scheme are fit and proper; that the scheme has financial sustainability; that the scheme funder meets certain requirements; that the systems and processes relating to the governance and administration of the scheme are sufficient to ensure that it is run effectively; and that the scheme has an adequate continuity strategy. The Bill sets out these criteria so that it is clear to master trusts and other stakeholders what the new regime will entail. Schemes will have to continue to meet the criteria to remain authorised. The regulator will also be given new powers to supervise master trusts, enabling it to intervene where schemes are at risk of falling below the required standards.

The Bill also places certain key requirements on master trusts and provides additional powers for the regulator where a master trust experiences key risk events, such as the scheme funder deciding to withdraw from its relationship with the scheme. The Bill requires a scheme that has experienced such an event to resolve the issue or to close. This requirement, along with the regulator's new powers, supports continuity of savings for members, protects members where a scheme is to wind up or close, and supports employers in continuing to fulfil their automatic enrolment duties.

On the introduction of the Bill in the other place, the Pensions Regulator said:

“We are very pleased that the Pension Schemes Bill will drive up standards and give us tough new supervisory powers...ensuring members are better protected and ultimately receive the benefits they expect.”

In welcoming the Bill, the Pensions and Lifetime Savings Association commented that

“tighter regulation of master trusts is essential to protect savers and ensure that only good master trusts operate in the market”.

It went on:

“This is an important Bill that will provide the appropriate safeguards for the millions of people now saving for their retirement through master trusts.”

As I have said, we continue to engage with stakeholders on aspects of the detail to be made in regulations. We anticipate the initial consultation to inform the regulations will take place in the autumn, and it will be followed by a formal consultation on the draft regulations. Our intention is to lay the regulations during the summer of 2018, and the authorisation and supervision regime is likely to be commenced in full that year.

However, the Bill also contains provisions that, on enactment, will have effect back to 20 October 2016, the day on which the Bill was published. These provisions relate to requirements to notify key events to the Pensions Regulator, and constraints on charges levied on or in respect of members in circumstances relating to key risk

events or scheme failure. That is vital for protecting members in the short term and will ensure that a backstop is in place until the full regime commences.

The Bill makes a necessary change in relation to the existing legislation on charges. We are keen to remove some of the barriers that might prevent people from accessing pension freedoms.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): I am pleased that my right hon. Friend has come to the section about charges. He will know of the transparency campaign I have been pushing. I am extremely grateful for the efforts that he and the Under-Secretary of State for Pensions, who is sitting to the left of the Secretary of State, have made in introducing more openness into pensions schemes. I should be grateful to hear more on how he will approach that.

Damian Green: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his campaign. Transparency is a key area. Hidden costs and charges often erode savers' pensions. We are committed to giving members sight of all the costs that affect their pension savings. He asks for more detail. We plan to consult later in the year on the publication and onward disclosure of information about costs and charges to members. In addition to the Bill, other things are clearly required to give greater confidence in the pensions system. Greater transparency is clearly one of the steps forward. I completely agree with him on that.

As I was saying, we are keen to remove some of the barriers that might prevent people from accessing pension freedoms. The Financial Conduct Authority and the Pensions Regulator indicate that significant numbers of people have pensions to which an early exit charge is applicable. The Bill amends the Pensions Act 2014 to allow us to make regulations to restrict charges or impose governance requirements on pension schemes. We intend to use that power alongside existing powers to make regulations to introduce a cap that will prevent early exit charges from creating a barrier for members of occupational pension schemes who are eligible to access their pension savings. The FCA will introduce a corresponding cap on early exit charges in personal and stakeholder pension schemes in April this year.

The Government intend to use that power together with existing ones to make regulations preventing commission charges from being imposed on members of certain occupational pension schemes when they arise under existing contracts entered into before 6 April 2016. We have already made regulations that prohibit such charges under new or amended contracts agreed on or after that date. That will fulfil our commitment to ensure that certain pension schemes used for automatic enrolment do not contain member-borne commission payments to advisers.

In conclusion, we believe that the Bill is an important and necessary legislative step to ensure that essential protections are in place for those saving in master trust pension schemes. With many millions of members enrolled in such schemes, it is important that we act now to ensure that members are protected equally whatever type of scheme they are in. The measures proposed in the Bill have been developed in constructive consultation with the industry and other stakeholders, so we have confidence that they are proportionate to the specific risks in master trusts and will provide that necessary protection. In turn, that helps to maintain confidence in

[Damian Green]

pension savings, and particularly in automatic enrolment. By making it easier for people to save through a workplace pension, the Government are building a culture of financial independence and long-term saving.

The Bill will also ensure that people are not unnecessarily dissuaded from taking advantage of the pension freedoms by high early exit charges. The Government have given people greater flexibility to take their pension savings, rewarding those who have worked hard and saved for their future. This is a focused Bill that specifically concentrates on the action we must take to cement the reforms we have already made, and I commend it to the House.

9.13 pm

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for outlining the content of the Bill. In addition, I pay tribute to my colleagues in the other place who have already scrutinised the Bill.

The Opposition recognise and support the need to ensure that there is adequate regulation for master trusts as they have developed since the introduction of auto-enrolment, but the point made about the missed opportunity was right.

As the Secretary of State set out, the Bill focuses on defined contribution occupational pension schemes alone, defining regulation of master trust schemes which provide centralised workplace pension funds for several companies at the same time and have largely emerged as a result of the development of auto-enrolment in pensions. It gives the Pensions Regulator responsibility to authorise those schemes that meet certain criteria. It also provides for a funder of last resort in cases where a master trust fails. Sadly, this is something we hear too much about with too many other pension schemes. Finally, the Bill gives the Pensions Regulator the ability to withdraw authorisation from a master trust and sets out the criteria for triggering such events should a master trust face difficulty.

As I said, the measures in the Bill are slightly overdue. In April 2014, it was estimated that master trusts accounted for two-thirds of people who had been auto-enrolled. Master trusts operate on a scale that is unprecedented in occupational pensions and most are run on a profit basis. Currently, however, they are not subject to the same regulation as contract-based workplace pensions. There is no requirement for a licence to operate and limited barriers to entry. There is also little guidance on who can become a trustee and no infrastructure in place to support the wind-up of a failed trust.

Given that the savings and pensions of millions of employees and their employer contributions are at risk, we cannot allow this to continue. We support the Bill, which is vital to putting the auto-enrolment system on the strongest possible footing, but we will look to strengthen it where we can, for example by building on our amendment on the funder of last resort. By protecting members from suffering financial detriment, while promoting good governance and a level playing field for those in the sector, the Bill should ensure that the system is a secure and trusted means of saving in the future.

Before I come on to specific elements of the Bill, I would like to expand on how disappointed I am, and how millions of others will be, with how limited the Bill

is. Perhaps the Secretary of State will surprise us, but I think this is likely to be the only pensions Bill in this Parliament. Significant issues are already arising relating to both state and occupational pension provision. It is therefore disappointing, if we are to see no other Bill, that those issues are not being addressed.

One key issue is that of the WASPI women: the Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign. These women, and some men, have been left behind by the Government's poorly managed accelerated equalisation of the state pension age. Over 2.5 million women born in the 1950s made their plans for retirement only to find that their retirement age had been quietly pushed back by the coalition Government.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. I gently remind the hon. Lady that we are discussing what is in the Bill, and not what is not in the Bill. It is quite a narrow Bill.

Debbie Abrahams: I am grateful to you for reminding me, Madam Deputy Speaker. It was a debating point in the House of Lords. As I said, it is not likely that there will be another pensions Bill in this Parliament, so I hope you will give me some latitude.

Frank Field: There was a hope among some of us on either side of the House that the Bill might be blocked tonight, temporarily, until we got justice for the WASPI women. Unfortunately, as I understand it, Labour was not willing to do that and the Scottish National party in particular was not willing to do that, as they are pleased with the Bill and want it to go through. May I make a plea to my hon. Friend that, should the next pensions Bill come, as it assuredly will, and before all the WASPI women are taken up to the new state retirement age, Labour thinks tactically about trying to get them justice, rather than merely talking about it, as I have to?

Debbie Abrahams: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his remarks. We recognise the importance of the Bill in tightening the regulation—or lack of it—on master trusts and the vulnerability that that lack places on the millions of people who are being auto-enrolled. It is therefore important that the Bill goes through. My point is that if it is the only pensions Bill in this Parliament, it has serious omissions. Those omissions should be on the record, as should our objection to the fact them. If I could just have a few moments to mention—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady has made the point that she feels those issues have been omitted, but they are not in the Bill. If she could now move on, I would be very grateful.

Debbie Abrahams: I am grateful for that ruling, Madam Deputy Speaker. Although we have made significant improvements in terms of pensioner poverty, I have to say it is a disappointment that there are still outstanding problems. Under our pension system, of which we should be guardians, one in seven pensioners still unfortunately lives in poverty. We are the fifth richest country in the world, so we should be able to ensure that our pension system provides dignity and security in retirement. Currently, it does not. For me, this a significant failure of our pension system and highlights a particular failure in the Bill.

I could also talk about the missed opportunities surrounding the Cridland review of the state pension age, which has not been brought to this place, and there are lost opportunities when it comes to the defined benefit Green Paper. It was due later this year, but it has now been decided that it will not be brought to this place for scrutiny in connection with this Bill.

I will move on, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I know I am testing your patience. *[Interruption.]* That is a bit unkind. Closer to home and in relation to the Bill, it does very little to build—*[Interruption.]* Do any Conservative Members want to intervene? Okay, I will carry on.

The Bill does very little to build on the success of Labour's auto-enrolment policy by ensuring that saving into master trusts is accessible and encouraged for a number of groups currently excluded from auto-enrolment provision. I recognise that the Government have announced a review of auto-enrolment, but again, why is this not in the Bill?

Let me speak briefly about the issue of low-income savers' access to saving in master trusts. Under the policy of auto-enrolment developed by my party, working people would be automatically enrolled in a master trust scheme once their earnings hit the trigger of just over £5,000. The logic of this proposal was that people would begin to save towards an occupational pension at the same earnings level at which they began to pay national insurance contributions. The coalition Government increased this earnings threshold to £10,000, denying millions of low earners the automatic right to save towards a relatively low-cost occupational pension through a master trust. Given the generational crisis developing in our pension system, we believe that more needs to be done to include low earners in savings provision and encourage retirement planning.

That is also true for the self-employed. Self-employed people currently make up to 15% of the workforce, and since 2008 have accounted for over 80% of the increase in employment. There is much evidence to suggest that the self-employed are not saving as much as other sectors of the workforce. Research by the Association of Independent Professionals and the Self-Employed found that four in 10 self-employed people did not have a pension. Despite that worrying evidence, there is little obvious means by which a self-employed person could begin to develop a savings pot within a master trust. Once again, this is not sorted out in the Bill. There are other examples, such as people with multiple jobs and carers, of those who do not have access to, and the benefit of, an occupational pension scheme.

The Secretary of State has just announced that there are gaps in the Bill, relating to its failure on a number of different issues. We are shocked by the vast amount of detail missing from the Bill, when that detail is necessary to achieve what the Government have set out to do. The Secretary of State mentioned that secondary regulations will not be laid before the end of the year. Once again, the Government are, in respect of some important protections, presenting a skeleton Bill, with much of the detail left to secondary legislation.

Although we generally support the Bill, despite its narrow scope, there are a few aspects that we will look to strengthen and a few gaps that we believe need to be plugged. These can be considered broadly under three themes: improved governance, strengthened member

engagement and greater transparency. The Bill includes a number of clauses that provide a framework for the effective governance of master trusts. We welcome, in particular, the authorisation criteria set out in the Bill. However, it does not address a number of core principles, the first being scheme member representation.

Unlike defined benefit schemes, defined contribution schemes provide for the risk of saving and investment to be borne by the scheme member. On that basis, we believe that scheme members should be represented among the trustees of master trust pension funds. It is, after all, their money, and they have a direct interest in ensuring that a sound and sustainable investment strategy is delivered at good value. That surely stems from the basic democratic principle that those on whose behalf decisions are being made should have a say in those decisions. It would also be a necessary step towards greater transparency in the pensions system, which the Under-Secretary of State for Pensions himself confirmed that the Government would pursue following Labour's campaign.

Furthermore, providing for a certain number of member-nominated trustees would not be a particularly new or unique arrangement. Mandated member representation already exists in the pensions system: trust-based pension schemes are required to ensure that at least a third of the board of trustees is member-nominated. Why should master trusts not be subject to the same requirement, especially in the light of the increased risk borne by scheme members?

Let me say something about transparency. For too long, people have been encouraged to put their faith—and, perhaps more important, their money—in a distant savings pot, and have been given very little information about where the money is invested, the performance of their savings, and, importantly, how much the investment is costing, in terms of the costs and charges that they will incur. Neither the scheme trustees nor the scheme members have been able to ascertain adequately whether they are getting value for money. I remember that in 2015, the former Financial Secretary to the Treasury promised the Work and Pensions Committee that if there was not openness about costs and charges, the Government would introduce legislation. Well, it has come a little bit late. Why has it taken so long?

In almost any other market, people wishing to purchase goods or services are given basic information about performance and costs before they do so. That basic principle is a necessary requirement to ensure that they receive value for money, but it is not operating in our pensions system. The Financial Conduct Authority has therefore published an interim report, which recognises a number of significant failings in the competitiveness of the asset management market. Its recommendations have important implications for the transparency of pension funds, especially in relation to the costs and charges being extracted from pension savings by investment managers.

We are pleased to see that part 2 of the Bill attempts to prevent excessive fees from being applied should a scheme member wish to take advantage of the Government's pensions freedom reforms. However, the Bill does not refer to transaction costs, the charges applied by asset managers when they are making new investment decisions. There is a great deal of work to be done to tackle the problem of opaque and excessive

[Debbie Abrahams]

costs and charges being extracted from workers' savings by investment managers. Currently, the Bill merely scratches the surface. It must become a stronger vehicle for change in this regard.

We believe that, alongside member-nominated trustees, a member engagement strategy is required to ensure that master trusts are communicating properly with those whose money they are investing, and that they play their part in driving informed saver choices on a bedrock of transparent information. The Pensions Regulator's voluntary code of practice for defined contribution schemes asks trustees to provide "accurate, clear and relevant" communications for scheme members as good practice. We believe that proper member engagement should not merely be a voluntary requirement placed upon trustees, but should form part of the regulatory framework. That would help to ensure that scheme members can make rational and informed choices about their pension savings, creating a more sustainable system.

There are other elements in the Bill whose purposes we want to strengthen or clarify: for instance, the definition of the scope of a master trust, what happens to non-money purchase benefits under this Bill, a number of issues relating to the pause clause, and the status of the scheme funder as a separate entity.

We welcome the Bill, but we see it as a wasted opportunity. So much is being introduced after the event. There will be no opportunity for another pensions Bill; the provisions will be delegated to statutory instruments.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Simon Kirby): How do you know?

Debbie Abrahams: That is what we have been told. That is what we have been led to believe by the Government. Given how long overdue this Bill is, this is likely to be the only opportunity that we have to raise this, and it should have been brought to this House.

We need to develop a sustainable and secure pension system that drives down pensioner poverty and delivers dignity in retirement for all, and I am afraid that this Bill falls well short of that.

9.30 pm

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams). It is probably a fair sum-up to say that we might have liked the Bill to address most of the things that she complained about and most of the things that I might not like, rather than the measures actually in it, which I think get a broad and generous welcome. None the less, this is a necessary Bill that contains the right measures, and we hope it will have a speedy passage through this House.

I want to start by saying that the master trusts, or the more extensive use of them, are a welcome development in the pension landscape. It is hard to see how auto-enrolment would have worked if we had not had the extensive use of master trusts, because what we would not have got is especially small employers setting up their own pension scheme and trying to manage and administer it, or at least act as trustees of it. What we had to see in this situation was much larger trusts in the market that employers could effectively sign up to but

not incur the ongoing costs and complexity of trying to be involved in their day-to-day running. So these things are attractive, but it is right that we make sure they are well regulated and we do not create situations where savers are disadvantaged by them.

It is probably quite brave in the pension world to have tried voluntary regulation or self-regulation, but that is effectively what we have had since 2014 with the master trust assurance framework. I perhaps should declare a sort of interest. The framework was drawn up by the Pensions Regulator with the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales, of which I am a member. It is disappointing that, having had that assurance framework in place, so few of the master trusts in the market signed up to it and followed all the requirements. Indeed, very few of them went through the full audit process required. So it was clear that we had to move to full and proper regulation set out in statute for these master trusts.

This is particularly important in a situation where effectively we in Parliament and the Government are perhaps not quite forcing people to save into these trusts, but strongly encouraging that, and two thirds of those who have been auto-enrolled have ended up in one of these trusts. It is therefore key that we make sure they are in high-quality schemes that look after their interests and we do not let them either be ripped off or just be a victim of a poor-quality trust that delivers poor returns. While there has perhaps been no sign of that from the major master trusts, anyone who has experience of the pensions industry will know that if we do nothing they will eventually become a problem. So it is absolutely right that the measures in this Bill ensure that trusts are set up and operated by people who have the skills and expertise to do that, and that there is a process for managing trusts, checking their performance, and making sure no issues arise as the years go on. That is because it is not realistic to think that either the employers that have signed up their employees for these schemes or the members themselves will have the skills, the ability, the time or the inclination to be doing that ongoing monitoring. That needs to be done by qualified people. That again is an advantage that master trusts have over insurance-based products. There are some skilled people here whose job is to represent the members. The advantage of having a trust is that there is at least that protection: when decisions need to be taken, there are some people who should have the right skills to act in the savers' interests.

It is timely to be moving forward with these proposals as we suspect that by the time we get them fully in place we will have completed the first phase of auto-enrolment. We might find in the industry that people have set them up but do not have the number of members they thought and therefore not the level of income they thought. Perhaps the charge cap means that they do not have the income to be sustainable, or perhaps the changes that give people choice when they retire mean that they will not hit retirement date and then move their money into an annuity—that they will just leave the pot and not draw it down for a while. That would still be a cost on those schemes which needs to be addressed.

Julian Knight: My hon. Friend is making the important point that we have to avoid zombie funds being created as a result of the master trusts, and one way of doing

that is through the role of the Pensions Regulator. Does my hon. Friend agree that the fact that a master trust will have to prove that its business model is sustainable is key to that interaction with the Pensions Regulator?

Nigel Mills: Yes, that is the point I was trying to make. Even master trusts that have been set up entirely properly and with the best of intentions could find, by the end of auto-enrolment, that they were not going to be viable in the long run. We need to ensure that there is a clear, well managed route so that, rather than having zombie funds sitting around delivering a poor return, we can get them moved into the higher quality, better performing ones. We need to ensure that this market works for everyone.

One element that people might not have considered is that we have not yet found a solution for people who end up with multiple very small pots spread across the landscape. I suspect that that could present a cost to the system that we will want to manage our way out of in order to create a sustainable situation. Overall, master trusts are a good thing, but they will need to be well regulated if they are to create confidence in the system and ensure that savers do not get a bad deal.

There are a few other things that I think I can just about sneak in as being within the scope of the Bill. We have ended up with slightly different arrangements for master trusts and insurance-based products, and I wonder whether it is sensible to have so many different regulators in the industry trying to do the same thing. Should the Pensions Regulator really be responsible for regulating all pension schemes, however they are structured, rather than letting the Financial Conduct Authority do some? Should we try to get equivalence between schemes that are trying to do the same thing but end up having subtle differences? Perhaps it would be better to say to all savers and all members of pension schemes, “Your scheme is regulated by the Pensions Regulator. Yes, there will be a cut-off with the FCA at some point.” That would be better than having uncertainty about who is responsible for which scheme.

Looking at master trusts more generally, there is a need to think through the position in the decumulation phase. The market might already be seeing that master trusts can be used for decumulation as well as accumulation. Decumulation is a very different model, and it is perhaps harder to see the business case for that than for the accumulation phase, with its ever-growing pots and more income. With decumulation, we have ever-dwindling pots and seemingly less income from the fees. We need to think through whether master trusts are intentionally aimed at the decumulation phase where members treat them as a kind of bank account from which they can draw money when they want to. The secret will be to ensure that savers have access to the right advice, and it is a pity that the Bill does not address the future of the various advice schemes, but I am sure that we will get to that at some point. In summary, this is a welcome and necessary Bill, and I am sure that it will be very effective. I look forward to its making progress in the House.

9.38 pm

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills), who has made some good points about the importance of advice and about the decumulation phase. I hope that we will have an opportunity to come back to those matters at a later stage.

I welcome the Government’s initiative in bringing forward the Bill. A desire to create trust in pensions savings should unite us across the House. We want all workers to be able to attain a standard of living that will be consistent in allowing them to save while in work in order to have dignity in retirement, secure in the knowledge that a regular income from a state pension and a workplace pension will allow them to enjoy their retirement without financial worry and without living in pensioner poverty. In our view, pensions savings are the best way for most workers to achieve that dignity in retirement. We need to deliver the appropriate level of protection for savers, and the Bill is an important step forward in that regard, albeit one that could be enhanced through constructive amendments in Committee.

Given the growth in master trusts and the desire to ensure that we protect savers’ interests, the Bill is overdue in some regards. Auto-enrolment has led to a significant increase in the use of master trusts. The impact assessment published this month informs us that some 200,000 savers were in master trusts in 2010, increasing to 4 million by 2015. According to estimates from the Pensions Regulator, that may now have risen to 4.3 million savers with around £8.1 billion of assets in master trusts. When we take into account the Government estimate that 10 million workers will be in auto-enrolment schemes by 2018 and that they will be saving as much as £17 billion by 2019-20, with the vast bulk of them in master trusts, the need for robust, effective protection is clear.

The master trust market has grown rapidly, with as many as 84 such trusts in operation today. While there are a small number of larger trusts, it is clearly a fragmented market, with risk of failure in certain cases. Indeed, the Work and Pensions Committee called for stronger regulation in March 2016 when it concluded that:

“Gaps in pension law and regulation have allowed potentially unstable trusts onto the market. Should one of these trusts collapse, there is a real danger that ordinary scheme members could lose retirement savings. There is a risk that faith in auto-enrolment as a whole will be undermined.”

That is a stark warning and underscores the requirement to take this Bill forward. We need to regulate to remove the prospect of inadequately resourced schemes collapsing and to offer protection against scammers entering the marketplace. The warning signs are already there. Two small schemes have already collapsed, affecting 7,500 members. It is currently extremely easy for anyone to set up a master trust and accept savers’ funds, and there is no established mechanism for responding to the collapse of a master trust.

The rules of many schemes currently allow the use of members’ funds to wind up a scheme should it collapse. That is simply not acceptable. As a consequence of the Bill, there will be a requirement for master trusts to be approved, requiring minimum standards of trustees and obliging schemes to prove access to capital that can be used in case of wind-up. There has been widespread support for the need for such a Bill. The Pensions Regulator welcomed the announcement of new powers to regulate master trusts and said:

“We have been calling for a significantly higher bar regarding authorisation and supervision, and we are pleased that today’s announcement proposes to give us the power to implement these safeguards.”

The ABI has said:

“We have previously called for tighter regulation of Master Trusts, and are supportive of the proposed direction set out in the Bill.”

[*Ian Blackford*]

The Pension and Lifetime Savings Association welcomed the Bill as

“essential to protect savers and ensure that only good Master Trusts operate in the market.”

I concur with all those remarks.

Some of the Bill’s requirements may have unintended consequences and require further attention. As the Bill represents a significant change in the role of the Pensions Regulator, the Government must ensure that the regulator is adequately resourced to deliver accordingly. Addressing some of the following concerns could go some way to getting the Bill watertight and satisfying the concerns of many stakeholders. My first point relates to clause 8. If a scheme funder is an FCA and PRA-authorized insurer, the ABI contends that it will already have to comply with solvency II and therefore the regulations under clause 8 should not apply as they would be onerous and costly. The Government should clarify whether they have assessed that potential impact and whether the additional regulation adds a further safeguard, making the provision necessary.

Clause 9 requires the Pensions Regulator to be satisfied that a master trust has sufficient financial resources to meet the costs of setting up and running the scheme and to protect members in the event of wind up. A master trust must therefore hold capital equivalent to six to 24 months’ worth of running costs. However, it is argued that there is little clarity over how that provision would be applied. The TUC argues that there is an assumption that other master trusts would have an appetite to absorb a collapsed rival’s book of business, but that may not always be the case, particularly if costs are involved. Some savers are more attractive to providers than others. In the absence of greater clarity over the robustness of the proposed capital regime, the TUC contends that clause 9 should be retained. It was accepted in the Lords and provides that the Secretary of State can

“make provision for a funder of last resort, to manage any cases where the Master Trust has insufficient resources to meet the cost of complying with subsection (3)(b)”

after a triggering event. I would support that as a principle.

On clause 10, concerns have been expressed about the additional costs that master trusts could face, such as those offered by insurers due to duplicated regulation enforced by the Pensions Regulator. The ABI has said that that would be to the detriment of existing scheme members, as these schemes already operate under stringent FCA and PRA regulation.

The key issue raised by the ABI is the definition of a “scheme funder” in clause 10. Concerns centre on the fact that the Government state that the clause is intended better to enable the Pensions Regulator to assess the financial sustainability of the scheme by increasing transparency on the assets, liabilities, costs and income of the master trust. The ABI is concerned that the clause does not meet the policy intent of providing transparency because, as a separate legal entity, master trusts can still transfer risk to other entities.

That issue was raised in the Lords, and the ABI continues to ask that, in order to protect the benefits to scheme members and minimise costs, the requirements

under clause 10 should not apply where the scheme funder is an FCA and PRA-authorized insurer. There is also a need for greater transparency on fee charging, which needs to encompass transaction costs as well as any ongoing administration fees.

It is welcome that the Government are placing a 1% cap on exit fees for current members and no exit fee for new members. We know that large fees have been charged on exit in the past, and it is clear that we need to protect savers, although if new members are to be excluded from exit fees why should it be permissible for exit fees to remain in place for existing plan holders?

Under clause 12, at least one third of trustees of single-employer workplace pension schemes have to be member-nominated. There is no such obligation on master trusts. The Bill presents an opportunity to explore member involvement, and I hope we can pick up that topic in Committee.

Clause 32 creates a new power enabling the Pensions Regulator to make a pause order requiring certain activities to be paused once a master trust has experienced a triggering event. That includes accepting new members, making payments, accepting contributions and discharging benefits. There is concern about the impact of a pause order on a member’s savings, as there are no mechanisms in place to allow ongoing contributions to be collected and held on behalf of a saver. It is unacceptable that a member should be penalised and, in effect, lose wages in the form of employer contributions due to events out of their control. The Government should clarify whether they intend to take action to protect savers in that area.

We look forward to clarification from the Government on those issues, and we will work in the next stages, where necessary, to improve the Bill. This is therefore a pressing matter and, on behalf of the Scottish National party, I signal our intent to work with the Government to deliver a Bill of which we can all be proud.

The Bill, however, is a missed opportunity to undertake much-needed major reform of the pensions system, rather than patchwork attempts to plug holes in the system. We need a fundamental overhaul of the pensions system, and the UK Government need to introduce more ambitious plans on pension reform. We are disappointed not to have a Bill that looks at the issues with the state pension, particularly the need to address state pension age inequality for the WASPI women.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I take your comments about the WASPI women but, given that the SNP was traduced by the Chair of the Select Committee on Work and Pensions, I make the point that the SNP has raised the issue of the WASPI women at least 44 times in this House and has commissioned independent research. It is completely disingenuous for anyone to suggest that the SNP has refused to support the campaign. A reasoned amendment to kill the Bill was suggested. However, that would help no one and would only remove the Bill’s helpful regulation provisions relating to master trusts.

Frank Field: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. The plan was not to kill the Bill but just to hold it up for a bit so that we could hopefully highlight the position of WASPI pensioners, for soon they will all be retired and the horror will have been completed. We have no other weapon against the Government, because they have made it plain that they are going to sit out this issue. The Scottish nationalists were not prepared to

form an alliance with those of us who want to block the Bill in order to actually raise this issue and perhaps implement the recommendation of a previous Select Committee report.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. I appreciate that the right hon. Gentleman is Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee—

Frank Field: I am not going to be speaking tonight.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I also appreciate that he is not going to be speaking in tonight's debate, but I just want to say that it is a very narrow Bill about something very specific and this is not the forum for discussing all that. People might be very disappointed that we are not debating transport policy, but we are not; we are debating master trusts, so I ask the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) to keep just to that. I know he is trying to skim over things, but if he could skim away from other issues and get back to the main point, we would all be very grateful to him.

Ian Blackford: I will endeavour to skim away, Madam Deputy Speaker. You made the point that this is a narrow Bill, which is exactly why it would have been impossible to amend it to take account of the WASPI case. The right hon. Gentleman should know that an attempt to kill the Bill would have done exactly that, and we do not solve the problem faced by WASPI women by defeating this Bill, which is so necessary to protect pension savers. Frankly, he should be thoroughly ashamed of himself; he does no justice for the WASPI women with his campaign and the remarks he is making.

Let me conclude the remarks I was making. The sheer fact that the Cridland review is currently looking at the state pension age, without looking at the existing problems, limits the ability to learn and develop a more progressive outlook, which could safeguard dignity in retirement for pensioners. Generally, the threat of pensions scams and transfers from pensions to high-risk schemes needs to be urgently addressed. *[Interruption.]* I have got to the bits I am not allowed to say any more. *[Laughter.]*

We reiterate our call for the establishment of an independent pension and savings commission to look holistically at pension reform, focusing on existing inequalities and paving the way for a fair, universal pensions system. The entire pensions landscape is in need of fundamental reform, particularly with a pressing need now to review and enhance auto-enrolment. The Government are set to review auto-enrolment this year, but reports seem to suggest there may not be substantial changes from the review, and with many missing out on auto-enrolment we need to ensure that this policy is moved forward. Although 7 million workers have been auto-enrolled, a further 6 million workers have missed out. The Pensions Policy Institute revealed that 3.3 million of the people excluded from auto-enrolment had been excluded because they earned less than £10,000 a year. It also found that three quarters of the employees earning less than the auto-enrolment trigger were women.

We believe that lowering or removing the auto-enrolment trigger would significantly increase the number of people saving through auto-enrolment and in master trusts. It would also go some way to alleviating some of the historical inequalities women face, whereby their occupational pension savings are already well below those of men. There are

clear disadvantages here, particularly for part-time and the low-paid workers. For example, somebody earning £10,000 per annum will not benefit from the 8% contribution; they will benefit by only 3.4% because over half the earnings are excluded. Although self-employed workers are growing vastly in number, they have fewer incentives to save. If the Government were to review auto-enrolment sufficiently, they could consider moving to a flat rate of pension tax relief and allowing self-employed people to deduct pension contributions from profits to end the disparity.

Looking at the age at which auto-enrolment is triggered could also be more progressive. Just on 26 January, Zurich Insurance called on the Government to take

“a steady approach to increasing minimum auto-enrolment contributions above 8%”.

While there is an acceptance that the levels need to rise, it must be done in a way whereby workers do not opt out.

In conclusion, I welcome this Bill. It contains much we can support and we will work constructively with the Government to enhance it further. I hope that when the Minister winds up he will join with us in that spirit of consensus.

9.53 pm

Royston Smith (Southampton, Itchen) (Con): I hope that Members will forgive me for not going into as much detail as the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford). My comments will be considerably shorter, which will give people some comfort tonight.

If we are able to have the financial resources in the future to spend on things our constituents rightly take for granted, such as our NHS and our children's education, one challenge for the Government is to rebalance the economy away from an over-reliance on the state. Where it is possible and appropriate to do so, the individual and their employers should take more responsibility for their future financial security. The national living wage, which was introduced by this Government—and at a far higher rate than that proposed by the Labour party—has helped to shift the burden back on to employers and away from the state, which had found itself topping up wages through in-work benefits. Many in-work benefits did nothing more than subsidise hugely wealthy businesses at the expense of the British taxpayer. With the introduction of the national living wage, employers will now be required to take more responsibility for paying their employees properly.

I see automatic enrolment in a pension scheme in the same way as I see the national living wage. It is a way of helping working people to save for their future and a dignified, funded retirement. Auto-enrolment requires employers to pay into a pension scheme along with their employees, and the Government do their bit by giving tax relief on employee contributions. I expected employers to be less than enthusiastic about auto-enrolment and the additional costs it would mean for their business, but if anything I have found that businesses in my Southampton, Itchen constituency are very supportive. In fact, one business even suggested making auto-enrolment compulsory to ensure that its staff are saving for their future and not choosing to opt out, as up to 50% of them currently do.

[Royston Smith]

As with all legislation, it is sensible to review how auto-enrolment operates in practice and to improve it where possible. The Bill does that. It contains particular provisions on the role of master trusts and those who operate them. Master trusts are the favoured financial product for investing employees' pension contributions for the majority of small businesses in the UK. Many of them, including the National Employment Savings Trust, operate within the Pensions Regulator's guidelines and have the quality assurance mark. However, there is widespread agreement that regulation for trust-based pension schemes in general is inadequate. The Bill aims to address that and, in so doing, give comfort to savers and protect their retirement savings.

There seems little in the Bill that anyone can disagree with, although some Members have said that it does not go far enough. We insist that our taxi drivers pass a fit and proper person test so that they can carry passengers, but until now there has been no such requirement on all those who operate master trusts and are potentially responsible for a worker's entire retirement savings. The Bill will ensure that those responsible for running master trusts have to demonstrate their suitability to do so—not before time, in my humble opinion.

The Bill also requires schemes to prove their financial sustainability—something that most investors would assume was already a requirement—and will give the regulator new powers to supervise master trusts and intervene if a scheme is at risk of falling below the required standards. With more than 10 million workers estimated to be saving in auto-enrolment schemes by 2018 and more than £17 billion of extra workplace pension saving per year by 2020, it is imperative that master trusts, which will be responsible for much of that investment, are more tightly regulated than is currently the case.

Once the Bill is passed, a consultation process will begin. When he responds to the debate, will the Minister inform the House of any specific regulations that will be presented in the consultation document? How frequently will those regulations be reviewed by the Secretary of State?

9.58 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): I can beat the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Royston Smith) on length of speech, because, not wishing to draw the wrath of Madam Deputy Speaker, I have crossed out 95% of my speech.

As the newly elected chair of the all-party group on state pension inequality for women, I feel obliged to say to the Government that they have missed the opportunity to make provision for that women group of women we have come to know fondly as WASPI, although many other pressure groups with different names are also lobbying for the same cause. I have promised those women that I intend to work with every group to fight this injustice and give them a voice. I will come to the Chamber at every given opportunity to speak up for them until they get justice. All they ask for is a simple transitional payment to support them financially until they reach state pension age. I say to the Government that the problem is not going away. The Bill does not do what it should have done, which was look after the WASPI women, and I fear the Government will regret that.

9.59 pm

Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): The House will be rather pleased that I will focus purely on the Bill, which I very much welcome and have no hesitation in supporting.

It may be helpful briefly to explain the framework and history of master trusts. Such pension plans were historically designed primarily for single employers, or a group of related sponsoring employers with an in-built paternalistic and altruistic nature of management. However, the world of workplace pensions has changed rapidly and for the good, with the introduction of workplace pensions under auto-enrolment following the Pensions Act 2008. As we have heard from the Secretary of State, the latest figures suggest that more than 7 million employees are now enrolled across 370,000 employers. As we reach the final phase of the staging dates roll-out across smaller employers over the coming year, the number will expand massively, approaching 10 million people across possibly 1 million employers. The figure for current assets under management is at more than £10 billion a year and will grow rapidly. It could easily be the case that, over the next 30 years, master trusts contain assets exceeding £1 trillion.

The larger employer may already have had an employer scheme in place, but those are likely to have been contract based, whereby a pension provider—often an insurance company—is appointed to run an individual scheme. It is the smaller employer, under auto-enrolment obligations, that will be using the other possible course of action, which is the trust-based defined contribution scheme, whereby a number of employers—perhaps tens of thousands of smaller individual employers—will take part in an individual scheme. The new legislation will apply to those new trust-based schemes, ensuring that they are well run, financially sound and subject to appropriate oversight by the Pensions Regulator. It is essential that employees have confidence that schemes will protect their assets. After all, it is perfectly likely that an employee's pension fund, after their house, will be the primary life asset upon which so much will depend.

The Select Committee on Work and Pensions, in its report of 15 May last year, devoted some time to highlighting the risks under the current limited regulatory arrangements for master trusts, amounting to little more than Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs registration that practically anybody could overcome—loose arrangements that suited the original purpose of trust-based schemes, but which are wholly insufficient in the new auto-enrolment world. I pay tribute to the work of former Pensions Minister, Baroness Altmann, who similarly highlighted the lack of regulation of master trusts.

Following investigations, including one by the BBC, there were reports of unregulated applicants to the master trust market—notably, a promotion by MWP Pension Ltd, a company owned by former sports fashionwear traders that formerly traded as Wide-Boys R Us. With that type of background, new legislation is urgently needed, otherwise this area could easily become the financial scandal of the future.

Far from being overdue, it is a tribute to the ability of our legislative framework that risks have been recognised and the Government have acted quickly. The market itself has recognised the risks of the current lightweight regime.

The Pensions Regulator, working with the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales—as my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills), a chartered accountant like myself, mentioned—created the master trust assurance framework, with a list available to all on the Pensions Regulator’s website. The list now includes 13 institutions that are complying with good practice. Before the Bill becomes law, I urge smaller employers considering their options as their staging dates approach to use any of those recognised schemes; do not use any other.

I welcome other aspects of the Bill, as it proposes triggering events, pause orders and an appropriately draconian penalty fine of up to £10,000 a day for non-compliance. I welcome the proposals and, with others, will examine their extent in Committee. Finally, and to the delight of all, the Bill gives authority to the Secretary of State to restrict charges, mirroring in part the provisions applying to the charges structure introduced within personal plans under the Bank of England and Financial Services Act 2016, and extending the Pensions Act 2014. As all Members will know, it is purely due to the effect of compounding that, over 40 years, a fund can grow by 50% or more with a simple fee-charging difference of just 0.75%. I certainly hope that the Secretary of State will use these powers to reduce charges as appropriate.

This Bill comes at the right time before contributions under auto-enrolment escalate over the years come, and I will support it.

10.5 pm

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I have recently taken an interest in the issue of pensions in this House, but I had already had a fair amount of interest in it for a fair amount of time. Despite being a fair distance off the state pension age, or general pension age, I would quite like to have a pension, and so would most people of my age. It is really important that younger people do take an interest in this and think about it going forward. That is one of the reasons this provision is really important. We need to ensure that young people—millennials like me—will have access to decent pensions. The Government did a study that produced results in 2013 suggesting that only just over half of people who are currently of working age will have a pension that will be able to keep up their living standards. That is not an acceptable situation. I appreciate that the Government have undertaken reforms such as auto-enrolment to ensure that those numbers can be increased. We do not want everybody to be hitting state pension age and realising that in fact they cannot afford to do all the things that they intended to do. It is therefore really important to make changes to this.

In order for people to continue not to opt out of auto-enrolment and for it to continue to be as successful as it has been so far, we need to ensure that there is trust in the scheme. People must know that their money will grow at a reasonable rate and that they will get the right amount of money that they expect to get when they hit pension age. In order for that to happen, the Government need to have appropriate regulation in place, because, in the main, people are not by themselves going to read all the clauses and schedules of the regulations that come with the scheme that they are enrolled into. They need to trust that the Government have appropriately regulated

these schemes so that if they fail, for example, there is security for them. Otherwise, auto-enrolment will not continue to work at the rate that it has done. It is really important that we have things like the new regulation that is coming through, and that we have recognised the rise of master trusts and how important they are for people who are involved in auto-enrolment.

I am pretty supportive of a lot of this, but I want to raise a couple of things. At the tail end of last year, I held a couple of public meetings in Aberdeen to ask people about pensions, and I was really surprised at the strength of feeling about pension regulation. I was expecting them to talk mainly about some of the well-known issues such as WASPI, the frozen pension, and the lifetime ISA, which is not a scheme that I am particularly supportive of because it has far too many shortcomings. I think we are going to see a lot of negative ramifications in future with the change to pension schemes that encourages people to draw down. There is also the fact that people who enrolled in pension schemes before 1997 are not entitled to an inflationary uplift in those schemes. That was brought up a couple of weeks ago in a debate in Westminster Hall. I was also expecting the ever-increasing rise in the state pension age to come up, because I know that people are worried about that. I will not be getting my state pension until I am at least 68, under the current projection.

I was expecting all those things to come up, but in fact the biggest issue raised was the lack of appropriate regulation around some of the private pension schemes that exist. I was really surprised about that, but this is a real issue for people of all ages. People are really worried as a result of high-profile issues relating to schemes not paying out the expected amount. It is important that the Government are increasing trust in pension schemes, so that people of my age know that they will pay out.

For all of auto-enrolment’s many benefits, it has a number of shortcomings. My hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) mentioned how it disadvantages women, purely because they tend to be on part-time contracts. There is also an impact on people with multiple jobs, who tend to be on lower incomes; they earn a small amount in each job, so they do not get auto-enrolled. Self-employed people cannot be involved in auto-enrolment, and only 14% of self-employed people pay into a pension scheme. That is not enough. If we expect those people to be able to support themselves when they hit retirement age, more of them need to be paying into a pension scheme and the Government need to make changes to ensure that they are more likely to do so.

Age is another big issue that has not been raised today. People are not auto-enrolled until they are 22 years old, but a number of people are leaving school, starting work and hitting full-time employment earlier than that. If they are enrolled in a pension scheme when they hit 22, they will get a shock and think, “Hang on a second.” If we enrolled them earlier, I think they would be more likely to continue with the scheme. The Government need to look at that big issue.

I appreciate that the Government are continuing to make moves. This year’s Green Paper on defined-benefit schemes will be really important and the review of auto-enrolment will be fundamental. We need to look at how the scheme has worked, because it has been

[Kirsty Blackman]

more successful than intended when the Government conceived it. It needs to be looked at with fresh eyes in the light of that.

At present, 24% of people have no pension scheme when they hit retirement age, but as a result of the changes that figure will be only 12% by 2050. That is much better and it shows that there have been positive developments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber and the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams), have referred to clause 9, which provides a fall-back position in the event of a master trust failing. The issue relates to master trusts that may not be attractive enough to be taken on by other master trusts. The Government could have avoided the situation that that creates. It would have been easier for us to support the clause if, rather than saying that they will introduce the provision through secondary legislation, the Government had outlined their position and given themselves the flexibility to amend it with secondary legislation. As it stands, schemes have to have between six and 24 months' worth of cash in the bank in order to cover themselves, but there is no clarity on how that would work and it is left to the Government to introduce secondary legislation. If the Government had provided more clarity, this would have been a better Bill and they could have amended it as circumstances changed.

I appreciate being given the opportunity to speak and I thank the Minister for taking the time to meet us last week to give us a briefing, which helped my understanding of the Bill.

10.14 pm

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): I am conscious that some Members may be worried that they will be collecting their pension before we have finished debating the Pension Schemes Bill, but I promise that I will not detain the House long. That is a light-hearted start to a speech on a serious issue. It is a great pleasure and honour to speak in this debate, and to follow the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman), who made the important point that for many years there has been a lack of saving and pension provision in society at large. Members of the public turn to pension saving later than perhaps they ought to have done, and—dare I suggest it?—some Members of Parliament may have done the same. That is what the Bill is designed to address.

This is an important and often neglected policy area, and the Government's strides towards automatic enrolment have gone a great way towards putting wrong that right. There is a need for further work, however, which the Bill is designed to address. We have heard about the types of master trust available, and I will not take the House through them all again. They are important, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises. I am made aware of that every time I go around my constituency and meet those in charge of small businesses, of which we have a great many in Witney. Their main concerns are regulation and the steps that they have to go through. Master trusts give them a way to deal with those matters very quickly, because administration costs are pooled and one group of trustees manages a scheme. Not all

employers will wish to set up their own scheme, so master trusts help them greatly. As has been said in the other place, master trusts are a neat solution for smaller employers, for whom setting up an individual scheme would be a burden.

We need the Bill, because the previous reforms have led to the master trusts being a great success. So far, more than 7 million people have been enrolled in a workplace pension by more than 370,000 employers, and total assets of £10 billion are being managed. As the programme rolls out to smaller employers during 2018, we expect that to increase so that an estimated 10 million workers will be newly saving, or saving more, in those workplace pensions. That will have generated £17 million per annum in additional pension savings by 2019-2020.

Action must be taken now, because the increased saving is taking place against a legislative and regulatory framework that was designed for 2010, when some 200,000 members were taking part in master trust schemes; now the figure is some 7 million. The regulatory framework was designed with single-employer schemes in mind, but master trusts operate on a different scale and with very different dynamics. The first part of the Bill, which I support, will help to deal with that.

The second part of the Bill deals with early exit charges. In 2014, the Government brought in major changes to pensions, which have allowed 232,000 people to access flexible payments and exercise their right to use their money in the way they see fit. More than 1.5 million payments have been made, with £9.2 billion withdrawn in the first 21 months. Some schemes impose costs on people when they withdraw their money to use as they see fit, and the Bill is designed to address that.

In conclusion, I support the Bill. It will, I submit, increase confidence in saving and confidence in pensions. It will protect savers, and it will enable them to take full advantage of the new pension freedoms that they have been granted by the Government. It is a reforming Bill that amends the existing framework, and it will be of benefit to all. I urge the House to support it.

10.18 pm

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): It is a great pleasure to join in the debate. May I say how nice it was to have two such constructive contributions from the SNP? My friend the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) and the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) spoke from the perspectives of considerable industry knowledge and the view of a younger generation, which were extremely valuable in tonight's debate.

I rise to congratulate the Government on introducing a Bill with the simple and absolutely correct objectives of providing essential protections for people saving in master trusts and giving those people the same security as members of single-employer schemes. That is the key thing. Many people listening to this debate will wonder what on earth a master trust is. The simple way to explain it is that it is a multi-employer occupational pension scheme. The question that many people will be asking is: why do these things exist in the first place? The answer is of course that they have advantages of scale. That means that small employers do not have to create their own trust; they can join an existing master

trust, which can reduce their costs, administration and overall hassle, and that is incredibly important for a small employer.

The downside, unfortunately, is that master trusts do not, as a mandatory requirement, have to pursue the best interests of the scheme members. They can take a purely commercial approach to generating profit. Their trustees do not have to pass the fit and proper persons test, the master trust does not have to be authorised, and there is a question mark over what would happen to the assets in the case of the master trust failing.

For all those reasons, the Select Committee, under the chairmanship of my distinguished colleague the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field), looked at this issue in some detail last year. In effect, it made three key recommendations: first, that a pensions Bill should establish minimum finance and governance standards; secondly, that there would be ongoing requirements for master trust schemes and for compliance; and thirdly, that there should be measures to protect member assets in the event of a master trust winding up.

The report, which was written last May, was accompanied by a letter from the Chairman of the Select Committee to the Chancellor at the time, asking him to make sure that there would be a pensions Bill in the Queen's Speech. To be fair, the Government have delivered precisely that. In fact, the previous Pensions Minister said she wanted a pensions Bill to provide stronger regulation of master trusts, and the current Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Pensions is now taking that forward and delivering the promised Bill.

I felt that the hon. Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) was a little curmudgeonly to say that the Bill was long overdue. In fact, it is being delivered surprisingly fast. As other Members have pointed out, although there have been a couple of cases of small master trusts failing, they have been taken over very swiftly and easily, and as far as we are aware, nobody has lost any money so far. The Bill is therefore slightly ahead of the curve in dealing, we hope, with the problem ahead and providing the necessary framework and structures.

The industry has responded constructively to the changes. If we look at the three main bodies that have responded—the Association of British Insurers, the Pensions and Lifetime Savings Association and NOW: Pensions, which is the snappily named pensions provider of Danish origin—we can see that all three have made constructive comments. Some of the comments will need to be taken up in the Public Bill Committee, but they have broadly supported the ideas that the Bill is putting forward.

In essence, the Government have focused on three separate items. First, there are the master trusts, which will have to be authorised. Secondly, there are the people—the trustees—who will have to pass the fit and proper persons test. Thirdly, there are the assets, which will have to be ring-fenced and protected. Those are all good things, although they raise one major question to which I hope my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will respond in his winding-up speech. They require the Pensions Regulator to do a lot of important work, and there is a question mark over whether that body has the right resources. He will no doubt be able to tell us more about his discussions with the regulator and what they

have agreed on resources. Without the right resources, these important changes will clearly not be implemented effectively.

There we have it: it is a simple and important Bill that everyone should support. The tone of this debate has been constructive. There will, however, be details to go through at the next stage of the Bill's progress. For example, the PLSA has raised questions about whether the requirement for the scheme funder to be an independent entity is too onerous. NOW: Pensions has noted that only four master trusts have actually passed the master trust assurance framework full audit, which is disappointing. The ABI has questioned whether master trusts attracting members not connected to an employer—in other words, those in what is known as the decumulation phase—should be regulated by the FCA. Those three issues can be considered at the Bill's next stage.

In closing, I just want to say that the Bill is important, and I am grateful to the Government for bringing it forward. Some good issues have been raised, and I will support the Bill.

10.25 pm

Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): I am delighted to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham)—what a speech! The speech of the night, I would say. Pensions are an issue of vital importance to my constituents in Brecon and Radnorshire, and to all, young and old, throughout the country. As we live longer and grow older as a nation, it is imperative that everyone in the UK can support themselves in retirement. That is something on which we have all agreed, and that is why I am pleased that the Bill is before the House.

There are three key parts to the Bill, which emphasise the need for it: the protection of consumers, the incentives for responsibility, and the ending of anti-competitive practices. There are several points in the Bill with which I take issue, but slight tweaks will make it totally perfect. I was going to go through those points, but time is against us, and I have the wonderful pleasure of having been invited on to the Bill Committee, so I look forward to bringing those matters to the Minister's attention over the next few weeks.

Overall, the Bill seems much needed. We must ensure that our constituents have confidence in our pension system, and the Bill seeks to do that. As we have heard too often, and throughout the debate, we need to ensure that responsible master trusts that work in the interests of their members are supported, and again the Bill seeks to ensure that. We need to ensure that our constituents have security for their retirement nest eggs, and the principles in the Bill seek to do just that. I therefore support its Second Reading and encourage all right hon. and hon. Members to do the same.

10.26 pm

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): We have had a good, almost conciliatory debate, but we have also rightly focused on the opportunity that the Government have missed to bring forward an appropriate Bill that addresses the issues surrounding pensions. The Chamber again heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) on the plight of the thousands of WASPI women left stranded by this Tory

[Alex Cunningham]

Government, who selfishly and needlessly accelerated the state pension age, leaving many women no time to make alternative provision for themselves in their 60s. If one line was added to the Bill to extend pension credit to the WASPI women—that is our policy—it would have gone a long way to pacifying us this evening.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): The hon. Gentleman has got his mention in; let's stick to the Bill.

Alex Cunningham: So I suppose, Mr Deputy Speaker, that you do not want me to mention the fact that we do not have clarity on the state pension age, either. The Government have already said that they do not have a long-term commitment to the triple lock; we would like to know what their plans are, both on that and, more importantly, for many of our people who work in the most demanding physical jobs, and suffer ill health much earlier in life than those who spend their life behind a desk.

I will not test your patience any further, Mr Deputy Speaker, but we have drifted away from the principles of an effective pension scheme to a muddled view of saving for retirement. Indeed, such is the political hostility towards pensions that they do not get a mention in the latest leaflet produced by the Treasury, “Ways to save in 2017”. There are lots of mentions of different types of individual savings account—cash, junior, help to buy, lifetime and stocks and shares—but not one mention of the word “pension”, or of auto-enrolment.

Although this narrow Bill needs improvement, it is much needed, and we will work with the Government in Committee to help make it fully fit for purpose. Labour is proud of its achievements with auto-enrolment, but we are a long way from finishing the job. The sluggish response of this Government and the last to the development of a regulatory framework for auto-enrolment has left people's savings at risk for too long. Given what the shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams), said, our priorities for improving the Bill should be fairly obvious. There should be transparency: members must know what choices they are making, and how much those choices cost—and I mean all the costs in the investment chain. There seem to be conciliatory thoughts on that on both sides of the Chamber.

We also need improved governance and a pension system in which members are more engaged. I am glad to read in the media and published reports that in many cases the regulators and the Government agree with the Opposition. As I said on 9 January, I welcome the one-word commitment from the Under-Secretary of State for Pensions to implement the FCA recommendations to improve transparency in the pensions industry. We will hold them to account for that.

I repeat that members must know how much things cost—they must know how much each investment costs and how much transactions cost. It is not good enough simply to say that a default fund is capped at 0.75% and that people should be content. The industry tells us that it is moving towards greater transparency across all its platforms. We will be pleased to see what it comes up with. I have no doubt that we need to help the industry with appropriate legislation.

In the past, pension fund providers and others involved in fund management have often tried to dodge the issues when asked direct questions about costs, including by saying, “You should be happy to reward performance,” when we know that lower costs give a better net performance. Other hon. Members have spoken about that in the debate. They also say, “We are incentivised to manage costs, so when your funds do well, we get a bigger pay-off,” but we know that 80% of asset manager fees are based on just holding members' money rather than making it perform well. When people realise that the average compensation of an asset manager, from the most junior to the most senior employee, is £225,000, people have the right to know how they are using the scheme's money.

The Opposition favour a change in reporting to ensure that pension schemes must report to members on the three headings: administration, investment costs and transaction costs.

I know that the Minister values the cost-collection template, which has been negotiated with the Investment Association by the Local Government Pension Scheme Advisory Board. We must encourage its use by all pension providers. I hope the Minister will confirm his support for such an approach for master trusts.

On member governance, all the investment risk lies with the member and not with the sponsor or the provider. There is an argument to be made that, since the pot belongs to the member and the scheme-sponsoring employer bears no investment risk, governance by scheme members should prevail in number over employers. Some companies choose to operate a trust-based defined-contribution scheme, but most newer auto-enrolled members will not find themselves saving into one. Instead, the vast majority of people will find themselves saving into a master trust or a group personal pension arrangement. In such schemes, member representation on governance boards is far more rare.

We are in a new landscape—we have lost member-nominated trustees, which we had believed to be a clear fiduciary principle. A member perspective adds diversity, which prevents the risk of group-think within boards. Ian Pittaway, chair of the Association of Professional Pension Trustees, has said:

“They're brilliant in so many areas, they ask difficult questions that other people might be frightened to ask, they're great on member issues, whether it's changing benefits of a death-in-service case or something like that.”

In the defined-benefit world, as long as the scheme was well governed and well administered, the member would end up with a reasonable replacement ratio, but in the defined-contribution world, a member's outcome depends on a host of factors that are currently beyond their control.

There may be resistance to member representation from master trusts, with tens of thousands of schemes and hundreds of thousands or even millions of members, but the industry has proved that it is possible. We will address that more in Committee. Whatever the route to better representation, most in the sector agree that it can only be beneficial for the defined-contribution landscape. There is a clear argument and there are clear demands that the Bill is the best place to start. We look forward to working with the Minister to make it happen.

Yes, we could have debated equally if not more important measures in the Bill, but sadly we are not. It could be many years before we get a chance to pass legislation in those areas. The Bill can both protect and empower the people whose money is being invested on their behalf. The Opposition are therefore happy to see the Bill progress to Committee, where we hope the Minister will be open to the improvements I am sure we can make to the Bill.

10.34 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Pensions (Richard Harrington): I should point out to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, that your predecessor in the Chair, the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire (Natascha Engel), was very robust in her attempts to reduce the content of Members' speeches to that which is relevant to the Bill. I will do my best to continue with that tradition.

I was expecting some excellent contributions to this debate and I have not been disappointed. I thank hon. Members on both sides of the House for the general spirit of consensus on the basics of the Bill. A number of hon. Members raised issues that go beyond the authorisation of master trust pension schemes and administration charges, the two issues covered in the Bill, and I am itching to rebut them. However, I realise, Mr Deputy Speaker, that I would be deemed to be out of order as they are out of the scope of the Bill, so I shall not do that. The Government were criticised by Opposition Members on the grounds that the Bill's scope was not wide enough. I will address two points in particular.

On the scope of auto-enrolment, we will announce shortly a statutory review in 2017. It is my intention to make that review wider than the limited definition within the Bill. That will report by the end of the year. It is not in the Bill, which regulates master trusts, but it has not been ignored by the Government and it will not be.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): I think I do need to help you, Mr Harrington. We all said Members would get one hit and then they would have to get to the Bill. Both Front Benchers have had one hit. Now we can really get into the meat of the Bill.

Richard Harrington: I congratulate you, Mr Deputy Speaker, on continuing so well the leadership and robustness started by your predecessor in the Chair. I apologise for any offence caused to the Chair. I actually thought I was speaking within the scope of the Bill, but I will of course be led by the Chair and move on to the substance of the Bill.

As I said, the points raised in the debate by Members on both sides of the House have been broadly complimentary. The whole purpose of the Bill is for the Government to be able to respond very quickly to the phenomenal and exponential growth in master trusts over the past two years. That growth was not predicted by the Opposition, who take credit for auto-enrolment—in fact, there was cross-party consensus—and it was not predicted by either the coalition Government or this Government. It happened very quickly and I believe the Government are doing the right thing by responding quickly. I do not accept that the Government have acted too slowly.

I was very glad to receive the support of the shadow Secretary of State, and she made a very relevant point when she explained her view about the expansion of master trusts. We are not allowed to mention the “w” word, as the hon. Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd) calls it from a sedentary position, because that would be outside the scope of the Bill. The regulation has been very considered. Both Labour Front-Bench spokesmen and the SNP spokesman commented on the large amount of secondary legislation. The reason is very clear: we want to consult very quickly with industry and responsible parties on the detail, but this process will not take a long time. We have to get the detail absolutely right, because this is a one-off chance to regulate. There will be a chance for scrutiny by both Houses, because in the first instance the regulations will be subject to affirmative procedure.

Many Government Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat), spoke about transparency. We take this very seriously and we are consulting on it. It is not in the Bill, but it is in the spirit of the Bill, because the regulator will be provided with many powers that will help to enforce transparency and members' rights, which have been discussed.

Alex Cunningham: On the specific point of transparency, why is it necessary to start consulting people when we should simply be saying, “We want to know what all the costs are in the entire investment chain”?

Richard Harrington: I must explain to the shadow spokesman that we believe in democracy, and part of that is consulting to get it right. We believe this is very important; it has gone on long enough; it needs to be done right. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman did not mean that the Government should just decide what to do without consulting on this hugely complex area within the industry. When it comes to the regulations, let me repeat that we will consult on all of them. I apologise to the hon. Gentleman if consulting is not correct, but we have to get this absolutely right.

Alex Cunningham: I certainly agree with consulting, but will the consultation extend to the members of the master trusts and not just the people who manage the members' money?

Richard Harrington: I believe in full transparency and disclosure, but this is a very complex issue. Brevity of disclosure is sometimes clearer to people, helping them to understand all the costs and charges within their pension, rather than giving them 10, 12 or 14 pages. I would like to move on.

One point was made eloquently by both the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) and my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) on the question of whether the Pensions Regulator will be properly resourced to carry out the new duty. I can confirm that we have already had extensive talks with the Pensions Regulator, and that it is the Government's fundamental view that we cannot enact a Bill such as this which deals with improving and expanding on the response without giving the regulator the proper resources that it needs.

[Richard Harrington]

I am pleased to say that many Members of all parties have explained that master trusts are an important part of the pensions industry. The Government are filling a gap between personal pensions and insurance-based pensions that are regulated on the one side, and on the other side the evolution of the trust system, for which there is ample pensions law and regulations. There is a significant gap in the market. We are pleased that master trusts have expanded in the way they have, but they need some regulation and attention because companies have been moving into this area simply because there is that gap in regulation. That does not mean that such trusts are a bad thing, and I am delighted to report that we are carrying out this Bill from a position of little failure. This is not a Government responding to catastrophe or calamity when people have lost money; what has happened has been successful, but we need to provide the correct regulatory framework for it.

I can do no better than conclude my speech by citing my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester, who said that the Bill was simple and important and that everybody should support it. For that reason, I commend the Bill to the House and support its Second Reading.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

PENSION SCHEMES BILL [LORDS] (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),

That the following provisions shall apply to the Pension Schemes Bill [Lords]:

Committal

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Public Bill Committee.

Proceedings in Public Bill Committee

(2) Proceedings in the Public Bill Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Tuesday 21 February 2017.

(3) The Public Bill Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading

(4) Proceedings on Consideration and any proceedings in legislative grand committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which proceedings on Consideration are commenced.

(5) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.

(6) Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings on Consideration or to other proceedings up to and including Third Reading.

Other proceedings

(7) Any other proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of any message from the Lords) may be programmed.—(Mark Spencer.)

Question agreed to.

PENSION SCHEMES BILL [LORDS] (MONEY)

Queen's recommendation signified.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Pension Schemes Bill [Lords], it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of:

(1) any expenditure incurred under or by virtue of the Act by the Secretary of State; and

(2) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under any other Act out of money so provided.—(Mark Spencer.)

Question agreed to.

PENSION SCHEMES BILL [LORDS] (WAYS AND MEANS)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Pension Schemes Bill [Lords], it is expedient to authorise:

(1) the levying of charges under the Pension Schemes Act 1993 for the purpose of meeting expenditure arising under any Act resulting from the Pension Schemes Bill [Lords] or any other Act; and

(2) the payment of sums into the Consolidated Fund.—(Mark Spencer.)

Question agreed to.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EQUALITY

That the draft Equality Act 2010 (Gender Pay Gap Information) Regulations 2017, which were laid before this House on 6 December, be approved.—(Mark Spencer.)

Question agreed to.

BACKBENCH BUSINESS COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Dr Dan Poulter be discharged from the Backbench Business Committee and Robert Courts be added.—(Bill Wiggin, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.)

Doncaster and Bassetlaw NHS Trust STP

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Mark Spencer.)

10.44 pm

John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab): At this late hour, I rise to talk about the South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw sustainability and transformation plan. Sustainability and transformation plans are a huge part of the direction of travel in the NHS, but I find that the general public know nothing about them and that consultation is not reaching people—unlike their implications, including the cuts that they are disguising, which are reaching more and more people.

When I heard about the plans and met people to discuss them, it struck me that this was a chance for people in our area to have a vision of an NHS fit for today. I thought that it would enable us to move beyond the clapped-out buildings and outdated technologies into a new era, perhaps without all the funding in place, but with a vision of what would be there in 10 or 20 years' time if that money became available. I find myself dismally disappointed.

I expected a vision across South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw of what a new surgical hospital of the future would look like. I recalled that, 25 years ago, my own company was working at Addenbrooke's hospital. During a "live time" operation, we connected with consultants from Japan so that they could give their precise view on what should be done to a patient many thousands of miles away. I expected that—the best expertise and the most modern technologies—to be part of the vision. I expected tomorrow's technology, but what I see is yesterday's technology.

I expected to see, beyond smartphones, smart health. I expected that if someone of our age, Mr Deputy Speaker, should require paramedics, today's smart technology would enable his medical records to be accessible to them immediately on their arrival. I expected screening, testing and all the real "before and afters" of any operation, and any highly specialised input, to become increasingly localised. I expected both our brilliant universities in Sheffield to be in the middle of the new future of the NHS. I expected an area that had been blighted by the impact of the coal and steel industries on the health of people and families to be able to look to the future, with a clear vision of how health services would be configured and how they would be linked to the super new health provision. That is what I expected from the plan.

I expected to be able to challenge my local communities to become engaged in prevention—in education, sport, recreation and healthy living—and to use the NHS less because they were fully involved in a modern plan for a modern health service. I expected to see mental health services that were a support, not a stigma, in the community. I expected to see the integration of social care and the NHS. Let me say to the Minister—I have said it before, but I will say it again now—that I am happy for Bassetlaw to be the first area to hand over the entire social care budget to the clinical commissioning group to put the two together. Working together but delivering from a single budget, they can be much more effective. I hope that the Minister will oblige by making our area the pathfinder for change of that kind.

This dismal plan is a smokescreen for cuts. But there is an opportunity, because of those cuts, to engage the population. The population does not know about the STP, but it certainly knows about the breast care unit that, behind the smokescreen of these changes, is being cut at Bassetlaw hospital, possibly never to be returned. It is a state-of-the-art system as good as that anywhere in the country, brilliantly put together by Mr Kolar and his team, but it is being dismantled at this moment. Women who, previously, from first appointment to consultant were seen, diagnosed and in treatment in 24 hours are now waiting weeks. It is a system that even in the olden days of the last two decades has been prompt and to the point, but it has now shifted back 30 years in its thinking. I hope the Minister will look at precisely how this dangerous cut is being done, because the people of Bassetlaw are not happy about it.

The management of the hospital—the chief executive went on Friday and is still to be replaced, and a new chair was appointed at the turn of the year—has decided to pick on the children's ward of Bassetlaw hospital, which is perhaps not the smartest of moves. The STP gets nobody other than me and one or two officials to participate in its consultation, but then there is the parents' Facebook campaign against the overnight closure and the video blog—fancy words—that I did to expose it. Some 9,000 people watched my video blog within the first 24 hours, and 7,000 have joined the Facebook group in the first 24 hours. So there is some consultation feedback for the NHS. The people of Bassetlaw, particularly the mothers and grandmothers, are saying, "We do not want this children's ward shifting or closing, as it has been; we want that reversed."

What is their vision, and my vision, of an NHS? Let me give the Minister the views of some of the real people—not the theory, not the stats, but the views of humans. Let me tell the Minister about the twins Leon and William, with autism spectrum disorder, milk allergies and other food intolerances, and learning difficulties, poor eyesight and sensory processing disorders. William has had eight chest infections since birth, with each one becoming more serious. What does his mother Kelli say? Her twins

"thrive on continuity of care and are routine driven and to take an unwell child who has no communication (non verbal) and understanding could be devastating."

These twins are

"not critically ill but suffer from an acute neurological condition so severe that they attend St Giles"

special school in Retford.

Kelli says:

"My boys know Bassetlaw Hospital and it is all they have ever known, if they have to go elsewhere this will have a detrimental effect on their mood and stress levels. This also may mask a real problem and when a child is non verbal you rely on the subtle hints they give. Even I"—

the mother—

"struggle to understand what their main cause of upset is when they are panicked."

They need "continuity of care", but what does this modern, new NHS offer us—this year, brought in two weeks ago? It does not offer continuity of care. If those twins go in in the daytime, they will go into Bassetlaw children's ward, but if they go in overnight they are automatically transferred to another hospital, and asked to go back to Bassetlaw the next morning. I have

[John Mann]

already got mothers who are told to go to Sheffield or to Doncaster and arrive there and, after an hour or two—having spent the night getting there, waiting at Bassetlaw for an ambulance, going in an ambulance, getting transferred—are then told, “You need to get back to Bassetlaw.” What a farcical, 1960s health system we are now having imposed on my local hospital.

That is not good enough for the twins Leon and William, and it is not good enough for the six-year-old asthmatic who is admitted to the children’s ward two or three times a year when he is struggling to breathe and requires nebulisers, oxygen and steroids. His parents say:

“The service has...been efficient and relatively quick, which as you can imagine is paramount when you have a child who is fighting for breath...My son gets the treatment he needs without us having to bother the ambulance service. However if we have to travel to Doncaster, which is over 30 miles away and have the nightmare of parking there too it fills me with complete dread. It stops us being able to access home as easily when he has to stay in sometimes for 3 days but also takes the security and familiarity out of the stay for my son, who is already quite poorly”.

Distance is a crucial factor, and it is total nonsense that the distance their son has to travel should be determined by whether he is ill at night or in the daytime.

A four-year-old from Beckingham was treated three times in the children’s ward at Bassetlaw last year. Her mother says:

“The care was absolutely fantastic. I was really scared that she was so poorly, but all the staff were so kind and couldn’t do enough to help. Other mums I spoke to said exactly the same. The thought of having to drive to Doncaster with a sick small child, particularly my own, fills me with dread...I couldn’t have driven her to hospital on my own with her as she was at that age and I asked if we could have an ambulance but it was going to be well over an hour before one could be sent.”

We struggle to get ambulances at any time, never mind in the middle of the night. Ambulances cost money, yet in my area parents will be expected to get into ambulances and travel vast distances—in some cases 40 miles there and 40 miles back. That is not sensible planning in the modern national health service.

Another parent told me:

“My daughter was born 3 months premature in 2012. Due to this she has several health issues, in particular problems with her lungs which has caused her to be admitted on to the children’s ward at Bassetlaw hospital on many occasions.”

Her parents described an occasion when they were told that

“her organs were shutting down as her lungs were not getting enough oxygen. The children’s ward staff were amazing and gave her high dependency care on the ward as she was too unstable to move her to Doncaster hospital. If it had not been for them our daughter would have died.”

She was too unstable to be moved, yet now she would automatically be moved after 8 o’clock at night. That is an abomination, and there are many more.

Another example is 16-month-old Isla, who went to A&E twice in November. Her parents said that

“with her already being distressed with feeling so poorly we felt that the added ordeal of waiting for an overnight transfer by ambulance was added distress and unfair on our daughter. We had been warned we could wait up to three hours for an ambulance to be available and this was on top of the time we had already spent there. For such a young child to be subjected to a seven hour

wait and an ambulance transfer in the middle of the night is grossly unfair and doesn’t fit with the ethics and duty of care we believe the NHS should stand for.”

This is not theoretical; it is actually happening.

Mylor, aged 10, was also born prematurely at Bassetlaw hospital. He suffered a brain injury, periventricular leukomalacia. He has quadriplegic cerebral palsy and is unable to sit or stand independently. He has had major hip surgery and has complex health needs. Rarely a week goes by without his needing an associated appointment related to his health needs. His parents say:

“It is of great comfort and reassurance to have a children’s hospital 8 miles from our home with staff who know Mylor and his medical background, a hospital he is familiar with. The decision to cut back admissions on the ward will greatly impact on disabled children and their families—families who already face enough challenges and worry caring for their loved ones.”

The impact on those young disabled children is enormous. They know the children’s ward. They know the staff.

Courtney has autism and learning difficulties. The family said

“we have always been allowed an open door policy if Courtney has ever been very ill. It has been of great comfort to our family to have the reassurance of the excellent medical staff at Bassetlaw. The staff have got to know Courtney and her condition, and her illness has quickly been addressed and this—“

the open-door policy—

“has often prevented her condition from getting worse.”

Dr Leonard Williams, a paediatrician at Bassetlaw for 30 years, pioneered this open-door policy. Most parents do not even go through A&E; they go straight into the children’s ward, technically through the back door, with their children and their conditions known. All of that has been thrown out of the window in the last two weeks. Charlotte has many issues and

“contracted pneumococcal meningitis at 4 weeks of age which left her severely disabled, profoundly deaf and epileptic to name some of her conditions. She has spent many days/weeks on the Children’s Ward at Bassetlaw and the care has always been fantastic. We have always been allowed an open door policy if Charlotte has ever been very ill. It has been of great comfort to our family to have the reassurance of the excellent medical staff at Bassetlaw.”

There is a lot of repetition, but each of these is a different case.

Ollie is six. He has Hirschsprung’s disease and has had a colostomy. He has multiple problems and has had multiple surgeries. His family said

“you never know when you may need the hospital and it’s absolutely vital we have a local one accessible 24/7. It also is very distressing for families and children to be far away from loved ones when members of the family are poorly. Having a local hospital is very important”

to them. I can go on and on with example after example.

Chloe is a 13 year old with a huge number of issues. She has been to Sheffield children’s hospital because she has so many conditions, but she also regularly attends Bassetlaw, where she has grown to trust the staff. Being in hospital for her is not a one-off. Chloe has been treated in the children’s ward for more than a decade, and her mother says it is

“how we live our lives.”

Emily has an extremely rare condition. She has seizures and

“often stops breathing while having them.”

She frequently stays at the children's ward for one or two nights. Her mother said:

"We moved into this area to be close to the hospital for this reason and Emily's illness has always been quickly addressed at Bassetlaw and this has often prevented her condition from getting worse."

There is a three-year-old with chronic asthma who is severely disabled, profoundly deaf and epileptic. There is a 10-month-old, born prematurely, whose father's employment means that he will not be able to be there if she does not go to Bassetlaw. Zac was the one for whom we launched the campaign. He is three years old. He is blind. He is permanently in a wheelchair and cannot speak. Zac's father is an industrial worker who works nights. How is he meant to get in with his son if he does not even know which hospital he is going to on his regular admissions to the children's ward? Those are just some of the children. There are many, many more.

The staff say that seven hours for a non-blue light ambulance is the norm. We have seen cases already of kids waiting six or seven hours at night for a transfer after already waiting all day. There was case in which a blue-light ambulance arrived at Bassetlaw at 8 pm, just missing the deadline, which means a blue-light transfer and the child still going through A&E in Doncaster at midnight—four hours later. In Bassetlaw that would have been minutes, not hours.

We know about the financial black hole across South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw. We are aware of the massive black holes in some of the health trusts and that not enough money is being put in. We are also aware of the additional cuts, with the latest one being the cutting of health visitors in Bassetlaw. Mothers have been told in the last week that they have to weigh their own baby. There have been eye tests in schools since the inception of the NHS—stopped in the last week. Height tests in school—stopped in the last week. Those are major and significant cuts, and they are going to have to be reversed. "Weigh your own baby in the current national health service because we haven't got any health visitors, and when they're ill you can't go into the children's ward." "There is no ambulance waiting for you. Drive your own kid to another hospital." That is what families in my area are being told.

The STP states:

"Improving our population's health and wellbeing...means re-imagining, re-designing and re-forming our public services and public budgets to improve the health and wellbeing of our population."

Those changes and this plan are not forward-looking, they are old-fashioned, unimaginative and consultant-focused. It is a 1960s solution to the health service, not critical interventions in the right place, not key operations by specialist surgeons and not decentralised local services. For the young, the old and the seriously ill, it is already traumatic.

The support of my neighbour, the hon. Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick), for the children's ward and breast care unit is on the record, in the traditions of his predecessor, and I thank him for his cross-party work in Bassetlaw and in this place to save our NHS, but there are a few local politicians who seem to think that they are cleverer than the rest of the world. Well, their ignorance is no excuse, and my message to each and every one of them is: "Will you hold your head up high and proud by joining us in fighting these appalling changes and this appalling plan?"

This month and this year, these children have been given a third-class ticket. My constituents and I demand that the children are given a first-class ticket and an equal chance to all other children in this country. They are being denied that chance. Every child in Bassetlaw will benefit from keeping the children's ward fully functional and fully operational 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The kids in Bassetlaw are united, and if the kids are united, they will not be defeated.

11.8 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr Philip Dunne): I start by paying tribute to the passion with which the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) laid his case before us this evening, and I share his welcome to my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick), who joins him here.

The hon. Gentleman's remarks are clearly timely, and he started his contribution by laying out his vision for innovative technology to be brought to bear for the people of South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw through the emerging sustainability and transformation plan. He drew on his experience from across the world in his previous life to try to bring innovation to bear, and I will touch on the STP towards the end of my remarks.

The hon. Gentleman spent most of his contribution talking about the more immediate issue of the challenge of maintaining a 24-hour children's ward in Bassetlaw hospital. He has given us many examples of the impact of the current closure—or the fear of the impact of the closure—on families in his constituency and their children who have had experience in the ward. He did so with considerable empathy and conviction, and I am sure his constituents will be grateful for that.

I wish to start my remarks by setting out the facts as they have been presented to me in preparing for this debate. It is the case that Bassetlaw hospital stopped providing an overnight children's service today. Children who would have been treated at Bassetlaw overnight will now be treated at the Doncaster royal infirmary or Sheffield children's hospital. The closure is being undertaken by the trust on safety grounds, as there are workforce shortages for both paediatric medical and nursing staff, despite attempts to fill the gaps with locum staff. This is a patient safety issue; the current situation does not offer a safe and sustainable service, which the hon. Gentleman would expect for his constituents. That is the fundamental premise on which this decision has been taken. The replacement service will be monitored to ensure it is safe and effective prior to any decision in October about the long-term future of the service.

In December 2016, the trust identified an emerging issue with safely staffing children's nursing, as there were gaps of six whole-time-equivalent registered children's nurses. The trust has attempted to source children's nurses through locum agencies but has been unsuccessful. Additionally, there is currently a three-person gap on the junior doctor rotation at the trust. I am advised that the trust has undertaken an overseas recruitment drive for medical staffing through an agency, but this has also, unfortunately, not been successful.

The situation with the workforce and the unpredictability of the locum doctor cover has resulted in the ward being temporarily closed at night to new admissions on many occasions in recent months, but children admitted

[*Mr Philip Dunne*]

earlier in the day who are stable have remained on the ward overnight. To put this into context, between 1 November and last Friday the trust had transferred 23 children out of the ward, averaging two per week. The total number of children remaining in the ward overnight from 1 September was 452, an average of three per night. I want to assure the hon. Gentleman that the trust appreciates that some children are admitted to the ward regularly—he gave us such examples from constituents’ emails—but due to the nature of their illness it is impossible to predict when this will be. The trust is contacting regular users of the children’s ward individually to discuss their particular care needs and how these can be best delivered under the new system. The trust will continue to provide a seven-day “hot clinic” service for ill children who need to be seen quickly for clinical diagnosis but are unlikely to need an admission for assessment. I understand that this clinic will also invite children discharged from the assessment unit on the previous day for a consultant review, if clinically necessary. This will offer parents confidence about their child’s progress if they have been in the assessment unit the day before.

The service that has become operational as of today is a consultant-led paediatric assessment unit, providing services seven days a week. The intention is that this will run from 8 am to 10 pm, with a cut-off time for the last admitted child for assessment of 8 pm each day. At the moment, the cut-off time for assessment is 7 pm, and that will move to 8 pm following a review after the new model has been operational for two months. As ever, the paramount consideration is the safety of the children.

Children admitted during the day who have been assessed by a consultant as “acutely unwell” will be rapidly transferred to a centre such as the Doncaster royal infirmary or Sheffield’s children’s hospital. I understand that the new model of care for the trust is consistent with Royal College of Paediatric and Child Health guidance, and represents the latest and safest national guidance.

The hon. Gentleman referred to long waits for non-urgent patient transport, and I can provide some reassurance on that. The trust and the CCG have, from today, jointly commissioned a dedicated urgent transport facility to be available from 4 o’clock in the afternoon to 2 o’clock in the morning, seven days a week, specifically to cater for any necessary children’s transfers. The trust is committed to providing the highest-quality care for children, as recently demonstrated when it invested around £250,000 to build the assessment unit and new children’s out-patient area.

We should remember that the decisions on how to provide safe care for children, which come into force today, are a matter for the local NHS. It is right for these issues to be addressed at a local level, where the local healthcare needs and demands are thoroughly understood and considered. The local NHS makes decisions to ensure the safety and welfare of patients. Although the decision may cause upset and disruption for patients and families, it is for the local NHS to ensure that the services provided are of the highest quality possible and are safe and sustainable. Above all, parents with sick children need to have confidence that their child will be

treated at the safest level and by the most appropriately qualified staff. I am sure the hon. Gentleman will agree that that is paramount.

Nottinghamshire County Council’s scrutiny committee has been informed of the service changes, and I understand that no decision was made to refer the changes to the Secretary of State.

John Mann: Part of the weakness of the structure is that not a single person from Bassetlaw sits on Nottinghamshire County Council’s scrutiny panel. Not a single person from Bassetlaw has been consulted, including none of the staff who work at the trust. Is it not time that the people of Bassetlaw, including the staff, were listened to? At my public meetings on Saturday, there will be an opportunity for the trust to come along and hear precisely what parents, staff and others have to say.

Mr Dunne: I understand that the hon. Gentleman has already held a meeting for the public to discuss this matter. I am also aware that, as would be expected, he has been in touch with the trust and the CCG to make his representations directly. I am sure that if he has not yet had the opportunity to discuss this matter with the scrutiny committee at the local authority, he will have every opportunity to do so.

The South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw sustainability and transformation plan covers an area that has funding in the current year of £2.7 billion. Under the current plans, funding will rise over the remainder of this Parliament by £400 million to 2021—a cash increase of just under 14%. The plan is one of 44 STPs that are being developed by local NHS leaders and local authorities, with providers, commissioners and other health and care services coming together to propose how, at local level, they can improve the way that health and care is planned and delivered in a more person-centred and co-ordinated way. That is the ambition, and one that I think the hon. Gentleman shared in his hope that the STP will generate an NHS fit for the future.

For all STPs, there will be no changes to the services that people currently receive without local engagement. If plans propose service changes, formal consultation will follow in due course, in line with legislative requirements and procedures. The Government are clear that all service changes should be based on clear evidence that they will deliver better outcomes for patients. Any changes proposed should meet four tests: they should have support from GP commissioners; they should be based on clinical evidence; they should demonstrate public and patient engagement; and they should consider patient choice. I am also aware of a consultation that is currently under way on children’s surgery and anaesthesia services in South Yorkshire, Mid Yorkshire, Bassetlaw and North Derbyshire.

I reassure the hon. Gentleman that the changes happening in the children’s ward at Bassetlaw hospital are unrelated to the STP or to the current consultation on changes to children’s surgery and anaesthetic services, which are not currently conducted at Bassetlaw. The decision was taken as a result of insufficient staffing to maintain patient safety.

In conclusion, I fully appreciate the concerns that the hon. Gentleman expresses on behalf of his constituents, particularly the families of the young children who have

been used to the service being provided 24 hours a day in Bassetlaw. I encourage him and his constituents—he has told us he is doing this—to maintain a proper, open dialogue over the coming weeks and months with Doncaster and Bassetlaw Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, and the Bassetlaw clinical commissioning group to ensure that there continues to be a safe and sustainable service for the children of Bassetlaw. That service should be provided in the hospital during the day and, for those

who are stable, overnight. However, children who have an urgent problem that needs attention overnight must go somewhere safe for that service.

Question put and agreed to.

11.21 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Monday 30 January 2017

[MR NIGEL EVANS *in the Chair*]

Agenda for Change: NHS Pay Restraint

4.30 pm

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 168127 relating to pay restraint for Agenda for Change NHS staff.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. At a time when the number of deeply concerning and time-consuming issues on the international political agenda is increasing, it is important that we and, most importantly, the Government do not lose focus on our domestic priorities and the challenges affecting our constituents' day-to-day lives. The national health service is at the very top of that list, so I am pleased to introduce this debate. The way we treat our NHS staff is surely one of the most decisive factors in whether we have the functioning health service that we all need.

The petition is titled:

“Demand an end to the pay restraint imposed on agenda for change NHS staff.”

It has been signed by more than 104,000 people across the country, including 4,500 from my region, the north-east. It reads:

“Agenda for change staff including nursing, midwifery, healthcare assistants and associated healthcare professionals have suffered a pay restraint since 2010. Losing approximately 14% in real terms of their pay, staff are struggling nationwide and many have been pushed into poverty.

The impact of the pay restraint is harsh. Many are sadly leaving the professions they love. There is an NHS staff crisis. In London we lack 10,000 nurses. Yet two fifths of nurses living in the capital plan to leave as they are unable to pay their rent. Staff reporting using food banks and hardship funds is increasing. The pay restraint must end.”

The petition's creator, Danielle Tiplady, a nurse and supporter of the Royal College of Nursing's “Nursing Counts” campaign, said:

“Nursing staff deserve a pay award that reflects our knowledge, skill and dedication.”

She added that the interest in her petition

“is a huge achievement, but colleagues are struggling to pay bills and even turning away from the profession, and it's time Parliament debated why.”

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): Danielle Tiplady is one of my constituents, and I am proud that she started the petition. The Royal College of Nursing's most recent employment survey of its members found that 30% had struggled to pay gas and electricity bills, 14% had missed meals because of financial difficulties, and more than half had been compelled to work extra hours to increase their earnings. Given the demands of the type of work that nurses do, does my hon. Friend agree that our nursing profession is in a terrible place and that the Government surely must act?

Catherine McKinnell: I absolutely agree. It is hard to emphasise enough my support for people working across the NHS in increasingly challenging circumstances, without whom our health service would, quite frankly, cease to exist.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): The way to show respect for our nurses and other NHS staff is to act now to remove the cap, as has been described, and listen to the independent pay review body.

Catherine McKinnell: My hon. Friend makes an important point. It is not enough for us to state our support for our NHS workers; we must show it through real action.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): I agree with the points that the hon. Lady has made. Does she agree that, given the shortage of about 24,000 nurses, the fact that about one in three are due to retire in the next 10 years, and the challenge of Brexit, which might make recruitment more difficult, one potential consequence of pay restraint, along with the sense of injustice for nurses, is that we will face a real recruitment crisis? People will just vote with their feet and not work in the NHS. That presents us with a real challenge.

Catherine McKinnell: I very much share the right hon. Gentleman's concerns. He anticipates some of the points that I would really like to get across.

My view of the importance of those who work in our NHS is shared not only by Opposition Members. The Department of Health stated in its response to the e-petition:

“Agenda for Change staff are vital. They work incredibly hard for patients and deserve to be fairly rewarded. We are committed to ensuring trusts can afford to employ the staff the NHS needs.

NHS staff are our greatest asset. Despite the pressures on the NHS driven by an increasingly aged and frail population, nurses, and all our hard working NHS staff continue to put patients first, keeping them safe whilst providing the high quality care patients and their families expect.”

How have we found ourselves in a situation in which hard-working, dedicated, exhausted nurses, midwives and other healthcare professionals are genuinely struggling to make ends meet?

Mr John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): Are we not in danger of getting into a downward spiral? Staff feel stretched, undervalued and underpaid, and many are looking to move abroad, or possibly even into other professions—I have had emails to that effect. Many are also going to agencies, and we know how much money agencies make. That costs extra, especially at a time when the retail prices index is moving inexorably up as a result of currency effects.

Catherine McKinnell: My right hon. Friend puts his point very succinctly and absolutely correctly.

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): I hesitate to interrupt my hon. Friend, because she is making such a good case, but does she agree, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (Mr Spellar) said, that agency working, which is very expensive, is really a false economy?

[Mr George Howarth]

If nurses leave full-time employment in the NHS to work for agencies, they cost the NHS two or perhaps three times more, so there are no savings whatsoever.

Catherine McKinnell: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is also a false economy to lose professionals, given all the money that has been invested to make them a well-trained, well-performing workforce.

As hon. Members will be aware, Agenda for Change was introduced in 2004 as a system of pay, terms and conditions, and it applies to more than 1 million directly employed clinical and non-clinical NHS staff, with the exception of doctors, dentists and some very senior managers. It was designed with the intention of delivering fair, transparent pay that is better linked to career progression, skills and competencies. Agenda for Change is based on the principle of equal pay for work of equal value. According to NHS Employers, the system allows NHS organisations to

“design jobs around the needs of patients rather than around grading definitions”

and individual NHS employers are better able to define the skills and knowledge that they want the staff in those jobs to develop.

Importantly, in relation to this debate, Agenda for Change was also designed to enable employers to address more local recruitment and retention difficulties. However, as with hundreds of thousands of people who work in the public sector, all Agenda for Change staff have been affected by the previous and current Governments’ imposition of pay restraint.

Mr Andrew Smith (Oxford East) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Is it not perverse that the Conservative party seems to favour the introduction of all sorts of markets in the NHS apart from a labour market? The devolution of responsibility to trusts that it often heralds is completely inconsistent with a centralised, state-imposed pay freeze.

Catherine McKinnell: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. There was a two-year pay freeze from 2011-12 and a 1% increase in 2013-14 and 2014-15, followed by confirmation in the Budget of summer 2015 that the Government would fund an average public sector pay award of only 1% for the four years from 2016-17. As has been pointed out, the Government decided to reject the independent NHS Pay Review Body’s recommendation of a further 1% uplift to all pay scales from 2014-15, stating that there would be an annual increase of at least 1% for Agenda for Change staff in England through either contractual incremental pay or a non-consolidated payment.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on her excellent speech, which I am following closely. Is there not very thin moral justification for the Government rejecting the review of an independent pay body when each of us as MPs has our pay independently assessed and awarded? I can see no justification for saying to hard-working nurses in Kettering, “You can’t have the pay rise that an independent pay body said you should have” when I, as an MP, automatically get a pay rise awarded by our independent body.

Catherine McKinnell: The hon. Gentleman makes an incredibly powerful point, which I hope the Minister has heard.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): I congratulate the hon. Lady on leading this debate, despite the other debates going on elsewhere. I rarely find myself in agreement with the hon. Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone), but I fully agree with him. Hundreds of nurses across Northern Ireland feel desperately demoralised by the pay freeze, which has gone on for such a long time. When we got a new Prime Minister, on 13 July last year, who talked about a fresh beginning and new opportunity, they were encouraged, as many of us were, and thought that this would be an ideal opportunity for her Government to show that they mean what they say and that they care about removing pay restraint.

Catherine McKinnell: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention—I think that many of us are surprised that we agree so entirely with the hon. Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone). She raises an important point about the concern that many people up and down the country feel about some of the Prime Minister’s early actions in her time in office.

There are real concerns that the continuation of pay restraint in the NHS threatens to undermine the very benefits that Agenda for Change was supposed to bring to employers and staff. A centrally imposed cap on pay rises limits employers’ ability to respond to recruitment and retention problems while compromising the extent to which skills and competencies acquired by staff throughout their careers can be properly recognised and rewarded.

The extended nature of the pay restraint imposed first by the coalition Government and now by the Conservative Government also throws up this question: what is the point of having an independent NHS Pay Review Body, given that the Minister is clearly content to impose a figure on NHS Employers and staff each year? Indeed, the Royal College of Midwives has warned that the policy

“undermines the integrity of the system; and will cause lasting damage to the morale and motivation of staff, worsening the staffing crisis in the NHS.”

Despite the widely promised but yet to materialise extra £350 million a week for the NHS, we all know that our health service faces real and significant challenges in financial terms, both now and in the years ahead.

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): I add my congratulations to the hon. Lady on securing this important debate. She has somewhat moved on to the topic of Brexit. In Bedford hospital, to fill vacancies in our nursing staff we have relied on bringing in staff from the European Union. Does she not agree that the Government have a choice: they can continue with pay restraint if they wish, but if so we must retain that ability to attract people from within the European Union and secure the rights of those already here?

Catherine McKinnell: The hon. Gentleman raises some important points. I would never admit to having strayed into the subject of Brexit in this important debate on the NHS, but his comments are on the record and

should be noted by the Minister. As NHS Employers stated in its 2017-18 submissions to the NHS Pay Review Body:

“The NHS continues to face unprecedented financial and service challenges. The majority of trusts fell into deficit during 2015-16 and the overall shortfall has now reached over £2.5 billion... The financial settlement for the NHS up to 2020 is extremely challenging, with employers set ambitious targets to deliver efficiency savings. At the same time, demand for services continues to rise. Performance indicators show the service is under great pressure as demands for care increase and other public services reduce provision.”

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Does the hon. Lady agree that the physical demands of nursing, as a family member who worked as a healthcare assistant over the summer reflected to me, mean that sometimes conscientious nurses might be tempted to lift patients on their own, such are the demands of the job, and seriously strain their backs? That is something we should have regard to.

Catherine McKinnell: I very much agree. That is a factor right across the NHS and the social care sector, and it is an issue we see arising increasingly as staff come under increasing pressure, with the increased pressure to make efficiency savings, which ultimately compromises the health and safety of staff who find themselves in such situations.

Just last week the National Audit Office published its report into NHS ambulance services, which concluded, among other things, that:

“Increased funding for urgent and emergency activity has not matched rising demand, and future settlements are likely to be tougher”.

Crucially, in the context of this debate, it also concluded that:

“Ambulance trusts face resourcing challenges that are limiting their ability to meet rising demand. Most trusts are struggling to recruit the staff they need and then retain them. The reasons people cite for leaving are varied and include pay and reward, and the stressful nature of the job.”

That very much ties in with the concerns the hon. Gentleman raised.

Dr Daniel Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on her speech; I agree with a number of the points she has made. On ambulance trusts and the point about very senior managers, we need good managers and senior managers in the NHS. However, ambulance trusts are a particular example—my trust, East of England, is an example—of where managers have sometimes received huge pay rises at the expense of frontline staff, who have received pay rises of nought or 1%. That is unacceptable. Does she agree that that further lowers the morale of frontline staff in a difficult period of pay restraint?

Catherine McKinnell: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, which is why it is important that staff under Agenda for Change have the opportunity to have their voices heard today. When the Government look at how the NHS's limited resources are distributed among the workforce, they need to approach the matter very much in the round.

I have no doubt that the Minister, when he responds to the debate, will be tempted to repeat the Prime Minister's mantra that the Government are putting an

additional £10 billion into the NHS by the end of this Parliament. However, as we all know, that figure has been comprehensively debunked by the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) and her fellow members of the Health Committee, and more recently by the chief executive of NHS England, Simon Stevens, when he appeared before that Committee. Indeed, Ministers confirmed only last week that NHS England will face a 0.6% real-terms fall in per capita funding in 2018.

How would an end to pay restraint for Agenda for Change staff help address the enormous difficulties the NHS faces? As the Royal College of Nursing has highlighted, chronic staff shortages have led to an “over-reliance” on “expensive agency staffing” to the extent that spending on agency nurses equates to about one tenth of the NHS's total nursing pay bill. Indeed, the Royal College goes on to state that

“the over-reliance on agency staffing is a reflection of a nursing shortage and a direct consequence”

of the limit on pay for nurses working in the NHS.

We therefore have the nonsensical situation whereby nurses are leaving the NHS because of increasing workloads, stress and feeling undervalued following years of pay restraint, so the NHS has to turn to expensive agency nurses to fill the gaps left behind. Those concerns are mirrored by the Royal College of Midwives, which, following a freedom of information request, uncovered that NHS trusts in England spent almost £72.7 million on agency, overtime and bank midwives in 2015—enough to pay for 2,063 full-time experienced midwives or 3,318 full-time, newly qualified midwives.

The Minister might also refer to an increase in the number of nursing and other NHS staff since 2010. Again, that addresses neither the fact that there is currently a shortage of about 24,000 nurses in England and Wales, nor the shortage of nearly 3,500 midwives across the UK. Nor indeed does it address Health Education England's worrying confirmation that last year some 8.8% of nurses left the NHS—the highest number since 2011. All that surely shows that the NHS is facing a perfect storm, not least in the light of the Minister's ludicrous decision to axe bursaries for new nursing, midwifery and allied health students—I should perhaps say “Ministers' decision”, rather than directing that comment at the Minister of State—the Government's continued disgraceful failure to confirm the long-term future of 33,000 nurses from other EU countries working in the NHS, and the fact that one third of nurses are due to retire in the next 10 years. I look forward to hearing him explain how continued pay restraint for Agenda for Change staff will help resolve the staffing crisis.

Dr Poulter: The hon. Lady makes a good point about bursaries. Most nurses enter the profession in their late 20s—at about 28 or 29. We are talking about a recruitment challenge in nursing and the fact that the number of applicants for nursing courses dropped by 25% this year. Surely that demographic group needs the bursary as an enticement into nursing.

Catherine McKinnell: The hon. Gentleman makes another valid point. I hope that the Minister is listening, because although we are focusing specifically today on pay restraint for Agenda for Change staff, there is a much wider issue for the Government to take on board.

[Catherine McKinnell]

A variety of factors is affecting recruitment and retention of NHS staff. The axing of bursaries is just one significant factor that the Government should seriously examine, and reverse.

What has the pay restraint for Agenda for Change staff meant to individual nurses, midwives, paramedics, cleaners and other healthcare professionals since 2011? Depending on the measure of inflation used, it has resulted in a drop in real-terms earnings of up to 14%. To put that in context, the trade union Unison has calculated that it is equivalent to annual pay cuts of £2,288 for a cleaner, £4,846 for a nurse, £6,134 for a midwife and £8,364 for a clinical psychologist. Indeed, ahead of the 2017-18 NHS pay review process, Unison surveyed its members working in the NHS and received the following responses, which are a matter of deep concern: nearly two thirds felt worse off than they did 12 months ago; 49% had asked for financial support from family or a friend; 13% had used a debt advice service; 11% had pawned possessions; 11% had used a payday loan company; 15% had moved to a less expensive home or remortgaged their house; and just under one fifth took on paid work in addition to their main NHS job, 64% of whom did so because their NHS salary was not enough to meet their basic living costs. More than 80% said they had considered leaving the NHS in the past year.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. Does she share the concerns of the London nurses at the lunchtime lobby today, who said that punitive London housing costs are making the situation even more acute? They feel that they are being forced out of the capital, which needs nurses, and that what is happening is almost social cleansing by the back door, pricing nurses out of our city.

Catherine McKinnell: Yes, I share those concerns, particularly about the significant shortage of nurses in London. The issue affects places throughout the country, but I fully appreciate the acuteness of the situation in London.

The findings that I have set out are mirrored in the most recent Royal College of Nursing employment survey of its members. It found that 30% had struggled to pay gas and electricity Bills, 14% had missed meals because of financial difficulties, 53% had been compelled to work extra hours to increase earnings, and 32% were working extra night and weekend shifts to help pay bills and meet everyday living expenses. The RCN stated:

“This corresponds with our year on year increase of 30%, over the past five years, on the number of our members seeking specialist money advice from our RCN Welfare Service. This contact from our members focuses predominantly on dealing with unmanageable consumer debt.”

It is shocking and depressing stuff. It is bad enough that the Government continually expect NHS staff, many of whom are at breaking point, to do more with less and treat more patients with fewer resources in what are usually physically and psychologically demanding roles, but to expect them to do so while they face such anxiety and stress over their own financial situation is completely unacceptable.

We do not need to take Unison or the RCN's word for what is happening. I have received emails containing powerful testimony from NHS staff in my constituency. One explained:

“I have been qualified as a children's staff nurse for 12 years and I reached the top of my pay scale four years ago. I have not had a pay rise since. 4-5 years ago I was in a comfortable position, I could afford the basics and if I wanted extras like holidays or treats I would just do overtime or extra shifts to afford these luxuries. However, due to the fact my pay against my cost of living has reduced by 14%, I now struggle to afford the basics and am having to do extra shifts just to be able to provide food and pay my bills... I am missing out on valuable time with my family as I have to work nearly every weekend in order to be able to get a wage that can cover our costs. It is now becoming such a stretch each month that I may have to leave nursing and find a job that pays me better... Working as a children's nurse in a busy A&E unit is amazing and worthwhile, but it is very stressful. On a daily basis we deal with and see things that are devastating and can be difficult to switch off from. Our pay should reflect this.”

Another constituent challenged the claim made in the Government's response to the e-petition:

“Average earnings for qualified nurses were £31,214 in the 12 months to June 2016”.

She described herself as an average nurse in her 40s with a partner and a child:

“I have been qualified and working in the NHS for 11 years. I don't earn £31,214. The top of my band (band 5) is £28,464. So, I am paid about £14.50 an hour to clean up faeces, vomit, blood and other bodily fluids. To hold the hands of patients who are dying. To comfort the relatives of patients who are dying. To maintain complicated machinery/equipment that is keeping a person alive whilst watching the newly-qualified staff nurse who doesn't feel confident and make sure they don't do anything dangerous.”

Another constituent painted a very concerning picture about her financial situation. She recently qualified as a nurse—a year and four months ago. She is a single parent of three children, and commented:

“After studying hard for 3 years mixing university, placements and guided learning, I gained my degree only to find myself in more dire financial circumstances than I was as a student.

I live to a tight budget, I drive a car that is 16 years old, I don't smoke or drink, and I rarely socialise with my friends unless it's a special occasion. This month I was paid £1,450 after tax—from that £300 is childcare; £400 is rent; leaving £750 for the month covering gas, water, phone, food, insurance etc. I also receive £35 tax credits a week which covers my daughter's bus fare to college and her lunch money.

I am a qualified professional and yet I would class myself as being on the breadline. I know there are others in greater need than I am; however I feel like I work hard and sacrifice my family time for nothing.”

Finally, a senior sister with 30 years' experience in an acute trauma unit explained:

“After six years of pay restraint, I now see nurses struggling day to day to make ends meet. Those who have stayed are now planning to leave the NHS early and newly qualified nurses are unable to stay without reasonable remuneration.

I feel like I grieve every day for my profession now. We have an NHS workforce currently willing to work as hard as the service asks them, but this goodwill is now eroding faster than I have ever seen in all my years' service.

I am retiring within a couple of years. This request comes not for me, but for those who come after me and who will be caring for me and my family in the future.”

It is clear that our NHS is facing a crisis, yet the people the Government entirely rely on to make the NHS work are being badly let down. Nobody would suggest for a minute that those working in the health

service do it for the money. However, we have reached a situation in which nurses, midwives and other invaluable NHS staff are struggling to pay their bills or put food on the table, or are pawning their possessions or taking out high-interest loans just to get from one month to the next.

How can we expect people to continue to provide high-quality care to us and our loved ones in what are already increasingly challenging circumstances when they are also facing this level of stress and anxiety at home? I strongly urge the Government to look at this situation again and to take on board the concerns being raised not only by organisations such as Unison, the RCN and the RCM, but by NHS frontline staff who are saying loud and clear that this pay restraint simply cannot continue.

5 pm

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. It is a particular pleasure to follow the excellent contribution from the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell). She set out the compelling case for why the pay regime for nurses, midwives and associated health service professionals across our health services is becoming increasingly exploitative.

The hon. Lady spoke of the particular experience in England; I obviously speak from the experience of Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, the Administration in Northern Ireland have chosen to void the clear recommendations from an independent pay review body, as in England, and have not taken the more constructive approach followed in Scotland to pay recommendations and to meeting the proper pay needs and aspirations of hardworking professional staff. As other hon. Members have said, those staff provide such a valuable service day in, day out. They work long hours with huge responsibilities, but with less and less of a sense of reward and with ever more inadequate remuneration.

We now have the situation in which many things have been brought forward. People were promised that Agenda for Change would ensure greater equity and transparency on pay, that they would see salary paths improving naturally—with more than just token increments—and that it would reward people's sense of vocation. Of course, it does nothing of the sort, because people have found themselves locked into highly contested bands. Certainly in Northern Ireland, people doing the exact same work in different trusts are paid differently, which is causing huge frustration and a grave sense of grievance and injustice for many people.

The health and social care system in Northern Ireland is supposed to be operating increasingly as a single employer, with the commissioning role of Health and Social Care Board moving to the Department and the Minister. However, we have the bizarre situation in which people who are doing the same job and delivering on the same targets set by Ministers and the Executive are supposedly employed by different trusts and are paid differently—not because their working terms are different, but because the terminology on their contracts might be different here or there. The slightest difference in terminology in job descriptions is being used to keep people in lower pay bands than their counterparts in a neighbouring trust who are doing the exact same job. Of course, not being able to address those issues absolutely suffocates people with frustration.

This has happened in the context of those staff being locked into the 1% pay rise cap that has endured for a number of years. It is one thing to ask people to take a pay freeze in the name of austerity and managing public financial pressures for a year or two, but it is another to be locked into such a pay freeze while seeing other people, including on the public sector payroll, being able to escape those constraints. Again, it adds to the sense of injustice.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): On the pay freeze, over the past five or six years it has worked out to roughly the equivalent of between a 6% and 8% wage cut. That is the reality that those people face. The Government say they value people in the health service, but the only way to demonstrate that is through their wage packets at the end of the day. The other issue, which will certainly affect mature students who want to be either a nurse or a midwife, is that the education maintenance grant has also been cut. So much for valuing people who work in the national health service.

Mark Durkan: I agree with all of the hon. Gentleman's points; they touch on points made in interventions by other hon. Members. Let us be clear: the long-standing freeze is, in essence, a long-term pay cut in real terms. People are left feeling frustrated and aggrieved by that. People are leaving the profession; they feel they are being driven out—we heard references to the number of people who are switching to agency roles, but many people do not want to do that, and their sense of vocation is being exploited in a way that now probably more than borders on the cynical. A better response is needed.

I have made points particularly on Northern Ireland. On Agenda for Change, we know, as other hon. Members have mentioned, that pay in the lower bands actually falls below living wage standards. One appalling vista—which will bite this year in Northern Ireland, where these adjustments are being made—is that the money for that 1% pay rise will be used to bring people in the lower wage bands up to the living wage. In other words, if the 1% envelope is to be used to cover that, other people will lose out; there will be a trade-off between nurses and health service professionals in different grades, with that 1% being prioritised towards bringing people up to the living wage. Nobody should be asked to endure inadequacy as the price of affording a micro-concession to equality for those who are locked into the lower bands that pay below the living wage. That is going to bite in Northern Ireland this year.

It should not, because as part of the Stormont House agreement and other things, Northern Ireland has a voluntary exit scheme that was meant to reduce the cost of the public service payroll. If that overall voluntary exit scheme saves money on the public service payroll, my party made the point that, rather than those savings being used to pay for a cut in corporation tax in future years, they should be used for restorative pay measures—starting first in the national health service for those staff who have suffered as a result of freezes and who are stuck on inadequate and unfair pay bands under Agenda for Change. Their case could be met because public sector payroll savings are on the way.

Health service staff in Northern Ireland will be asked to manage yet more change. People already work long hours in heavy-demand services, but more structural

[*Mark Durkan*]

changes will be made to health services following the Bengoa review and others. If people are being asked to manage all of those changes and keep those services going during those transitions, the one thing they are entitled to is some long overdue consideration of the inadequate pay they have been asked to endure.

Mr Nigel Evans (in the Chair): I call Dr Philippa Whitford.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): I thought I would be called to speak at the end.

Mr Nigel Evans (in the Chair): No Members indicated that they wished to speak by standing in their place, but I can be flexible, with your permission.

Dr Whitford: Yes; I would expect to speak at the end, if other Members wish to speak.

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Nigel Evans (in the Chair): I call Andy Burnham.

5.9 pm

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Evans. I also thank the SNP spokesperson. I had not intended to speak but will grab this opportunity because it is an incredibly important debate.

First, I pay tribute to the Royal College of Nursing and the *Nursing Times*, which have captured the voices of nurses all over the country. We heard some of those voices in the excellent speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell), and I think they speak for the vast majority of those in the nursing profession.

We meet at a time when the NHS is under unprecedented strain—certainly in recent times. Workforce morale is at the heart of the quality and sustainability of NHS services. What is often forgotten and missed when we debate this subject is that the vast majority of nurses in the NHS—nearly all, actually—work beyond their contracted hours.

I will never forget being at a meeting in Bristol with a nurse from the Bristol Royal infirmary. It was when the Government were looking at introducing regional pay, which the RCN led a campaign against. At the time, the nurse was being presented with a contract and asked whether she was prepared to vary her Agenda for Change conditions by moving from a 37-hour working week to a 39-hour one—it may have been 39 to 41 hours, but it was an increase. I asked her, “What did you do?”, and she said, “Well, I signed it straight away.” I asked why, and she said, “Because I’m currently doing a 45-hour working week, but they don’t know that.” In many ways, that illustrates the point: management do not know the value of what they get from the nursing profession.

That anecdote tells the story about the job. It is more than a job to people. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North said, people give all of themselves to this job, but they have limits. When they feel as though those above them do not understand the

commitment and the huge contribution they make to the NHS, and when they feel taken for granted, the good will and morale start to dry up. That is when the Government are in danger of achieving a false economy. The price of holding down nurses’ pay in the way that has been done over the past six years is, in the end, nurses not feeling able to go above and beyond as they normally willingly do.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): I agree with the points that my right hon. Friend is making. The RCN has told us that the pay of a significant group of nurses has fallen in real terms by 14% over the period he refers to. Does he agree that that is a pretty startling statistic?

Andy Burnham: My hon. Friend the Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) said that this is a pay cut. We should not call it a pay freeze because it is, in fact, a pay cut. The Government have manipulated the figures in this area. Let us call it what it is: a pay cut that has now been sustained over a number of years.

People are at their limits. They cannot carry on having their pay cut every single year while they face other pressures and rising costs, such as accommodation costs, without there being a consequence. The consequences will be for their own sense of wellbeing, their own mental health or, indeed, their children’s quality of life. Nurses are now saying, in large numbers, that enough is enough.

Mary Glendon (North Tyneside) (Lab): Further to what my right hon. Friend just said, does he agree that there is a culture under this Government and the previous coalition Government of devaluing the whole of the public sector? This is one stark example of what is happening across the public sector.

Andy Burnham: That is how it begins to appear. The Government are pushing people beyond their limits. There was the attempt to introduce regional pay, and there was the attempt to cut what is called the unsocial hours payment—there has been a whole series of initiatives that try to strip away support for the profession. It begins to feel like an attack on the profession. That is certainly how junior doctors felt, and I think GPs feel the same. The nursing profession is making clear today that it feels the same too.

As I said, this is a false economy. As well as damaging the good will and the extra hours that people were willing to offer before, it has also, as my hon. Friend the Member for Foyle indicated, pushed people into the arms of private staffing agencies. That, in the end, is another false economy for the national health service. Over recent years, we have seen the bill for private staffing agencies in the NHS increase year on year, to the point where it is now in the region of several billion pounds every year. Many trusts are in the grip of the private staffing agencies. That, of course, is also a factor in the cuts to nurse training that we have seen in recent years.

Dr Poulter: The right hon. Gentleman is making some very fair points. I hope he recognises that one of the first things I did in ministerial office was to reverse what was happening on regional pay and stick to the national pay contracts. He makes an important point

about temporary staffing. If we look at the approach with the junior doctors' contract, many junior doctors will now see a huge reduction in in-house locum pay for the work they are doing; it is sometimes a reduction of £10 an hour. That will feed locum agencies and drive up the temporary staffing bill. We need to see nurses and other Agenda for Change staff paid properly, to stop them needing to do agency work. That is one of the main drivers of the agency business.

Andy Burnham: I am glad to hear the intervention of the former Minister, whom I worked well with in the previous Parliament. I want to take this opportunity to say that he did listen on regional pay. We made an argument about that issue, backed up by the RCN and others, and, to be fair, it did not go any further than the experiment in the south-west. I give credit to him for that. I also give credit to him for consistently showing a real regard for the pressures faced on the frontline.

The hon. Gentleman makes an important point that the Minister would do well to reflect on. There is a huge false economy here. It makes sense to have fairness in terms of headline pay for staff, to maintain good will, but on top of that, it makes sense to provide them with incentives to give any additional shifts or time to the in-house bank, rather than private staffing agencies. The Government have lost sight of that in recent times.

Mr Jim Cunningham: My right hon. Friend makes an interesting point. It can be a false economy to rely on agencies to staff hospitals, whether it be nurses or doctors. At the end of the day, training suffers. That makes it difficult for the NHS to recruit, so it is a false economy in a number of ways.

Andy Burnham: It is not only a false economy; it directly damages the quality of patient care. When people arrive on the ward who do not know the team or the environment and have to be told everything, it builds in confusion and delays because staff have to take them through things. It does not make sense to use private staffing agencies to the extent that they are being used in the NHS. The cost is exorbitant—that is No. 1—but it also damages morale, because it leads to staff in the permanent employ of the trust working on the ward alongside people who are being paid significantly more than them for the same shift, despite having just arrived on that ward. That does not build a sense of team on the ward; it builds a sense of resentment.

Dr Huq: My right hon. Friend makes a powerful point about the lack of continuity with agency staff coming in. He talks about recruitment and retention. The NHS traditionally has had a large overseas workforce. Does he agree that the £35,000 salary required to settle in the UK has not helped matters? Nurses normally start at £23,000. Our NHS would crumble without overseas workers. We have also heard that in the post-Brexit climate, people from overseas feel less welcomed by this nation. Does he have any comment on that?

Andy Burnham: My hon. Friend makes two important points. The first was on the effect that Home Office immigration rules could have had on the nursing profession. I think the former Home Secretary, now the Prime Minister, made some changes in that regard.

My hon. Friend is right that there is a much bigger context here: the post-referendum climate. The Government have been absolutely wrong not to guarantee the status of EU nationals currently working in our national health service. I have an example from my constituency of a Polish community nurse, who every day gets up early to go on her local round delivering insulin to vulnerable patients who are diabetic and housebound. One morning she heard a cry of, "Go home!", out of one of the bedroom windows opposite. What does that make that nurse feel like, and is she likely to stay when we are in this prolonged period of uncertainty in which this growing hostility is felt to be around? There is a real risk here. We cannot simultaneously refuse to give clarity to those tens of thousands of nurses from other parts of Europe who are currently working in our NHS and run down the good will of nurses who are UK nationals. In the end, something will give, and it will be patient care, if we operate policies of that kind.

Alongside that, there is the attack on nurse training. We have seen cuts to nurse training places over a number of years, so there is a shortage of nurses coming through. Many places are being and have been forced to recruit from overseas. In those circumstances, with everything else that I have described, including the downward pressure on headline pay, how can it possibly make sense to scrap the nursing bursary? Will that not just be another factor that adds to the growing sense of crisis in the profession? Every single piece of support that is there to develop the nursing profession is systematically being stripped away.

We have seen years of that approach and are beginning to see the consequences in the national health service. Labour, of course, did not get everything perfect—I am not saying that—but I can say with some pride that when I was a Minister in the Department of Health, we brought through a major programme of investment in the nursing workforce, through Agenda for Change. It was the subject of hard discussions, but in the end it was agreed between the trade unions and the Government of the day. We did have in the Department of Health a social partnership forum, which brought together NHS Employers, trade unions and the Government to iron out problems relating to the nursing workforce. We did massively increase the numbers in the nursing profession. We did ensure that they were properly rewarded and had proper access to training. My worry is that we are seeing some of that break down.

In the immediate aftermath of the financial crash, it was acceptable, it seems to me, to ask the nursing profession to make a contribution to deficit reduction, but here we are, six years on, expecting people who are out there today, working flat out to keep an NHS in crisis going, to take pay cuts for the privilege of doing so. At some point, that strategy begins just to fall apart, and the NHS falls apart with it. I say to the Minister that we are not far from that point now.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Is there not a wider economic point that if we keep pay freezes in place for so long—six years—that ends up harming the private sector economy, because if 70p in every pound of public sector money ends up in the private sector economy, some of that is wages, including nurses' pay?

Andy Burnham: Of course, and the point is very well made, but I will also say again that it does not help deficit reduction if nurses are being pushed into the grip

[Andy Burnham]

of private staffing agencies as a consequence of pay policies. That is another way in which the Government's short-sighted approach has not in the end produced benefits for the economy, as the hon. Gentleman says, nor helped us meet the target of deficit reduction, because so much money is being wasted every year.

I will conclude on that point. The voices that have been mobilised in support of the lobby of Parliament today are real voices, as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North. These people are the backbone of the national health service, the backbone of our communities and the backbone of our country. They have limits, though. Their limits are higher, but they do have limits, like everyone else. They feel taken for granted. Right now, the NHS cannot afford to lose the good will of the nursing profession. The Minister needs to listen carefully to what is being said today and he needs to make urgent representations, through the Secretary of State, to the Chancellor of the Exchequer in advance of the spring statement. A signal needs to be given to the nursing profession that the Government are listening and will take action, within the bounds of what is possible, to treat the nursing profession properly. I hope that, if nothing else, the Minister takes that message away from today.

Mr Nigel Evans (in the Chair): There being no one else standing in their place, we will move to the winding-up speeches.

5.24 pm

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): It is an honour to serve under you, Mr Evans.

We seem to have been in this place before. We had a lot of debate about the nursing bursary, and these things are connected, because it comes down to how we are treating people and valuing them, as has been said. In Scotland, we also have a pay cap of 1%, but one difference is that that is being paid each year, whereas for three of the last six years, nurses in England have faced a freeze—an award of 0%. What they are told is, “Well, your increment gives you a rise.” The increment is how people move through the Agenda for Change structure, so if they are not getting any cost of living rise, the increment structure of Agenda for Change is being undermined.

The Scottish Government are a real living-wage employer and are recognised and registered as such, so people earning less than £22,000 get £400 to keep them above the real living wage. Starting in the next financial year, 2018-19, those in the lower bands in England will fall below the national minimum wage; they do not come anywhere close to a proper living wage. We know the Government's living wage as “the pretendy living wage”, because people cannot actually live on it. That term should not be used because it is confusing. The result is that at band 1 or 2, a nurse or healthcare assistant in Scotland will earn £881 more than their equivalent in England. The common band for a nurse graduate is band 5, and at the top of that band, the nurse in Scotland will earn £284 more than the nurse in England.

Scotland has had no compulsory redundancies since the crash. In England, there have been 20,000. That seems bizarre when we are short of nurses. The vacancy

rate in England is 9.5%; in Scotland it is 3.5%. We get what we pay for. If we treat people badly, eventually they go away, or, if they are approaching retiral, they do not go on working; they finish, because frankly they are burnt out. Nursing is a hard, heavy and stressful job. Nurses in Scotland feel stressed because of the gap caused by vacancies, the increased demand, the ageing population and the complexity of the cases they look after, so we can only imagine what it must be like in hospitals in England, with almost 10% of places not being filled and having to be covered by agency staff, which, as we have heard, is just a circular, self-defeating argument.

Lady Hermon: On the hon. Lady's point about how difficult and wearisome the work of a nurse is—it is hard work—those nurses born in the 1950s who are affected negatively by the Government's pension policy cannot now retire until they are 65, 66 or, indeed, 67. Has there not been a double whammy for those nurses who want, for the love of the job, for the love of the patients and for the love of service of the community, to stay in post? The Government have an opportunity to recognise that contribution. If they will not do something on pensions—I hope that they will change their mind on that—they could at least remove the pay freeze.

Dr Whitford: The whole message that is sent by nurses, particularly those who are in their late 50s and approaching 60, is that they are burnt out; they do not feel valued. When they have to work hours and hours beyond their shifts, doing what is frankly heavy labour—coming from that background, I can vouch for its being heavy physical work—they will of course leave as soon as they can manage to do so. The problem is that that exacerbates the pressure on all their colleagues, and that is what we are seeing with the huge shortage of thousands of nursing posts across England.

We have to recognise that we will face more increased demand and more complexity as our population ages. When patients in their early 70s were coming to me with breast cancer, they had multiple morbidities. By that stage, they had had a heart attack, were type 2 diabetic, had a bit of kidney failure and were severely immobile from arthritis, obesity or one of the many other conditions that people are getting. The nurses were trying to deal with all those things. Going forward, we will face more cases of dementia and Alzheimer's, which is a particularly challenging morbidity for patients and the staff looking after them. Working in that environment, where everyone around them is having a bad day at the same time that they are having a bad day, means that people do not enjoy going to work. If there is any chance to get out, they are going to take it.

We need to attract more nurses to deal with demand. As was mentioned earlier, approximately a third of nurses are due to retire within the next 10 years, and we need to prepare for that. Some of that relates to the expansion that we had under Labour; when there is a big expansion in a profession, a whole lot will tend to retire at the same time. Unless succession planning is ongoing and established, we will reach an absolute crisis.

That brings us to the other difference: the nursing bursary. In Scotland, we still pay a nursing bursary of more than £6,500. We also have free tuition, which is

equivalent to £27,000. We have additional funding for nurse trainees with additional support needs. They tend to be older—they are around their late 20s and early 30s—so they get more than £2,000 for childcare, a dependency allowance if they have either an adult or children dependent on them and a single-parent allowance.

The Scottish Government know that we have a challenge to recruit and retain nurses to grow the nursing profession, and they are putting that money in. They are not putting it in by giving high pay awards each year, but they are the only Government that actually accepted the independent review body's recommendation of 1% on top of any steps within Agenda for Change. What is the point in doing all the work around a review body, if the Government do not bother listening to it?

I suggest that the Government need to show nurses that they are valued. They need to look at the decision to get rid of the nursing bursary, because we already know from NHS England that there has been a decrease of 20% to 25% in applications, so it is having exactly the opposite effect than the Government talked about. We know from the Nursing & Midwifery Council that registrations from the EU have dropped by 90% since last July. That means that whole source is drying up, regardless of rules, because people do not want to take the risk of moving here. We cannot shut down every possible source for having enough nurses. A lot of this is about calling on the Government to change their attitude and realise that this is a difficult job. We need to attract people into it and we need to retain people for as long as we can. Nurses are worth every penny they are not being paid.

5.33 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) on the eloquent and knowledgeable way that she introduced this debate on behalf of not only the Petitions Committee but the more than 100,000 people around the country who signed this petition.

When she introduced the debate, my hon. Friend said that it is not enough for us simply to state our support for NHS staff—it has to be shown. The excellent attendance that we have had today, despite the important international business taking place in the main Chamber, has shown the huge support for our NHS staff and it is high time that the Government matched that support with action. In an intervention, the hon. Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) put the proposition that it is incredibly hard for the Government to justify ignoring the recommendations of an independent pay review body when we as Members of Parliament have our own pay agreed and implemented by an independent body. Can the Minister not see how repeatedly ignoring independent pay reviews strikes at the very heart of the bond of trust that exists in an employment relationship? Can he not see how it makes us look like we are uncaring and wrong? It is self-defeating and the approach needs to change.

My hon. Friend rightly highlighted the particular problems in ambulance trusts and the issues with the recruitment and retention of paramedics. She described the expenditure on agency staff as “nonsensical”. Certainly,

no business would consider this a sustainable model. The personal testimonies that she gave from her constituents were compelling. None of us could fail to appreciate how difficult the situation is for some of our nurses. One said that she grieves for her profession, and that highlights just how dire the current situation is.

We also heard from the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) about his perspective in Northern Ireland. He told us how the use of terminology appears to lead to people in different jobs being paid lower rates of pay for effectively the same job. That is certainly not how Agenda for Change should work in practice, and the pay freeze only exacerbates the sense of injustice that individuals feel. He summed up the situation perfectly when he said that the long-term pay freeze is in fact a pay cut. He said their sense of vocation “is being exploited”. He was right about that, but is it not incredibly sad that a Member of this place can say that without fear of contradiction? Just how low have we sunk?

We also heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), who has great experience in the health service. He rightly said that nursing is “more than a job” and it is clear that he appreciates that, but he is right that when nurses feel that those above them do not appreciate what they are doing, it becomes a false economy and drives people into the arms of staffing agencies.

Andy Burnham: My hon. Friend has just mentioned people feeling a sense of fairness, particularly in the pay of those above them. Does he share my concern that in this current climate, while nurses' pay is being cut, we are seeing large pay increases self-awarded to members of clinical commissioning groups and senior management? Does that not completely demoralise the whole local profession?

Justin Madders: I agree entirely. We all know—it is well documented—the financial pressures that the health service is under. It defies belief or explanation that those in senior positions can still fly in the face of that. I can only sympathise profusely with how nurses must feel when they see those headlines.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): Important as nurses are as the backbone of our health service, many other NHS staff are affected by the Agenda for Change pay freeze. Does my hon. Friend share my particular concern for the many staff who work in support services? Given the financial pressure that trusts are under, they have been forced to privatise parts of the service, and support services staff have moved off Agenda for Change terms and conditions altogether, which is what has happened at my local trust. The private sector tries to recruit new members of staff for less than Agenda for Change, because it is implementing the funding cuts that it faces.

Justin Madders: My hon. Friend has encapsulated the challenge we always face when a service is privatised. Most often the only way in which the savings promised by the private company can be delivered is by changes to staff terms and conditions. I also agree that the pay freeze affects not only nurses, but the whole of the Agenda for Change workforce. Today we are focusing in particular on some of the effects on nurses, because there are clear reasons why that position is unsustainable.

[Justin Madders]

To return to some of the contributions we have heard today, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh described clearly the impact on a ward of having agency staff, and how that creates uncertainty and is not the most efficient way of working. There is also the manifest unfairness of having someone on the same ward, who is only there for that particular shift, earning significantly more than permanent members of staff. How demoralising must that be for those involved? He was right to say in conclusion that we cannot afford to lose the good will of the nursing profession further.

In common with many hon. Members who have spoken today, I pay tribute to everyone who works in the NHS and the health and social care sector, not only to doctors and nurses, but to other allied health professionals such as porters, healthcare assistants, cleaners, receptionists, care workers, paramedics and countless others. It is important to remember that behind every story about the crisis that our NHS has faced this winter are patients waiting too long for treatment, and hard-working public servants doing everything that they can to prevent a very difficult situation from getting worse.

The NHS is the biggest employer in the country—and one of the biggest in the world—and it depends on the tireless efforts of its staff to keep going and meet the challenges of rising demand and insufficient funding. Let us be clear: we cannot indefinitely keep asking them to do more for less. I would argue, as other hon. Members have, that only the good will of NHS workers has stopped the current crisis from turning into a catastrophe. I recently heard the staff who work in our NHS described as “shock absorbers”. That seemed to be a pretty good description of how they are taking and absorbing the relentless pressure and stress of being on the frontline of an underfunded health service. They can take that for only so long before something snaps, which is why it is so important that we fully explore these issues today.

The incredible determination, professionalism and compassion that we see from staff comes against the backdrop of six years of pay restraint. Salary increases for NHS staff have either been frozen or capped at a level far below the rate of inflation. According to Unison, between 2010 and 2016 that represented a cut of more than £4.3 billion from NHS staff salaries, or a loss of between 12% and 19% in actual value since 2010. The Royal College of Nursing believes that since 2011 there has been a real-terms drop in earnings of 14% for its members. With Treasury forecasts indicating that the cost of living will go up by more than 3% every year between 2018 and 2020, it is not difficult to see how the current policy on pay restraint is unsustainable.

The policy is already beginning to have a huge personal impact on some of those affected. Registration fees have gone up by more than a third in two years, and we know well that wages have not kept pace with the cost of living. As we have heard, particularly from my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North, staff surveys from the RCN and Unison found that nearly two thirds of staff feel worse off financially than they did a year ago. Forty-nine per cent. had asked for financial support from a family or friend, 13% had used a debt advice service and 11% had used a payday loan company. About a third of nurses are struggling to pay

their gas and electricity bills, 53% are working extra hours just to pay their everyday bills and 11% had pawned possessions. The Cavell Nurses' Trust also found that 20% of nurses had skipped a meal in the last year due to money worries. Those are not abstract figures; they represent real people.

There was a lobby of Parliament today, and I am sure that some hon. Members in the Chamber went to hear at first hand from nurses how they are struggling. I met a nurse from the west midlands who works three days a week because of her caring responsibilities. She told me that she is living below the poverty line. Are we not ashamed that someone caring for our most vulnerable has to live like that? Are we really comfortable with a situation in which the people we are asking to care for our loved ones are having to pawn their possessions in order to make ends meet? In one of the richest countries in the world, can any of us accept the sight of nurses going to food banks?

Nowhere is the problem more acute than in our capital city. The *Nursing Times* reported that 40% of nurses who currently live in London say that the cost of housing means they will be forced to leave the capital in the next five years. Of course that challenge is not unique to the health service, but vacancy rates in the London area are among the highest in the country, with at least 10,000 nursing vacancies. How long will it be before we reach a tipping point from which there will be no recovery?

The impact is not just on nurses in their daily lives outside work, but on their working environment. NHS staff surveys paint a picture that cannot be ignored. The 2015 survey for England found that 48% of those surveyed stated that a lack of staff was impinging on their ability to do their job, and only 43% felt able to manage all the conflicting demands on their time. The warning signs are there for us all to see.

Analysis of NHS England data by the *Health Service Journal* found that 96% of NHS hospital trusts in England had fewer nurses covering day shifts in October than they had planned, and 85% did not have the desired numbers working at night. In 2013, the regulator Monitor, now part of NHS Improvement, warned about the potential impact of continuing pay restraint, stating in a report:

“Capping wages for longer to keep costs down would be self-defeating for the sector in the long term as it would make recruiting and retaining good quality professionals increasingly difficult.”

We had that very clear warning four years ago, but we have not heeded it.

The evidence that we have heard today and on previous occasions has proved that that prophecy was correct. The Public Accounts Committee reported that the number of nurses leaving their jobs increased from 6.8% in 2010-11 to 9.2% in 2014-15. Simon Stevens gave evidence to that Committee in 2014, stating that pay restraint would not be an “indefinitely repeatable strategy”, yet that is exactly what the Government propose to do.

Pay restraint, along with a cut to the number of nurse training places in 2010, led to a situation in which the amount of money that the NHS spent on agency staff soared by £800 million in a single year to £3.3 billion in 2014-15. Although considerable steps have been taken to bear down on the figure since then, the situation only

developed because of poor and short-term decisions made by the Government, and it remains the case that we still spend far too much public money on agency staff because the NHS has been unable to recruit and retain enough of its own. If we had maintained the levels set by the last Labour Government, we would have had 8,000 more nurses trained during the last Parliament.

Recent figures have revealed that the agency staff cap has been breached almost 2.7 million times in its first nine months of operation. That is a clear example of the impact of the recruitment and retention crisis on all areas of the NHS and how the current workforce balance is completely out of kilter. The use of agency staff is meant to be a temporary measure in times of particular demand and stress for the workforce, not a permanent feature. The fact that these incidences have run into the millions in less than a year should be a huge concern to the Government and a clear warning that the stability and continuity that we all want to see in our workforce is a long way from being achieved. The Government urgently need to address the situation in which hospitals seem unable to provide safe levels of care without relying permanently on agency staff.

The dependency on agency staff has made the case for a pay increase as strong as it has ever been. That is the view not only of the Royal College of Nursing, but of those that look at the impact of skills shortages on the wider economy. In March 2016 the Migration Advisory Committee found that many nurses are moving to agency work or leaving the profession altogether. The fact that the Government have had to put nurses on the skills shortages list should have been the point at which they realised that their pay restraint policy had reached the end of the road. Instead, they have ploughed on regardless, treating the symptoms rather than the cause.

In that regard, the disastrous policy of having tuition fees for student nurses will almost certainly make the position worse, not better. The Royal College of Nursing warned at the time that the policy could act as a disincentive for students from some backgrounds—particularly mature students and those on lower incomes—and early indications are that applications to study are down by at least 20%. If that turns out to be an accurate reflection of the position, the pressure on existing staff can only increase.

Dr Huq: At the weekend, on the doorstep, I met my constituent Dr Linda Burke, who is pro vice-chancellor for health and education at Greenwich University. She is really worried, because her university's figures look like they are down by between 20% and 30%—UCAS will have final figures for late applications. She says that that is serious because it will directly reduce the number of nurses for the NHS. We should be thinking about our future workforce. Does my hon. Friend have anything to say about that?

Justin Madders: I am glad to hear that my hon. Friend is out on the doorstep on a Saturday morning, but sorry that the news she was given is so concerning. It is not, however, a surprise. This is something that just about everyone interested in the matter warned the Government of and, as she says, we will find out in the next month or so what the final figures are. If they are of the order that we are hearing about, the Government

will have the opportunity seriously to reconsider the policy. Today, when I attended the lobby, I heard some student nurses saying that they are finding it difficult to get staff mentors, because senior staff are exhausted. They do not blame those staff for that; they understand the intolerable pressure, because they too see it for themselves.

The change to student fees will add an extra penalty on those training from this year onwards, due to the Government's decision to freeze the student loan repayment threshold at £21,000. That means that all future nurses will face a real-terms pay cut. According to Unison, based on current salaries, the average nurse, midwife or allied health professional will lose more than £900 per year to meeting their debt repayments. In practical terms, for a nurse on band 5, that means a salary cut approaching 5%. It is abundantly clear that that will make staff retention harder, not easier; there is a clear link between pay and retention levels.

Nobody is suggesting for a minute that anyone who goes into nursing is motivated by money, but when someone who has just finished yet another draining shift, going above and beyond the call of duty time and again, finds that they do not have enough cash in the bank to feed themselves and their family, and when each year their wages buy them less and less, they could be forgiven for thinking, "Is it all worth it?" It is morally wrong for the Government to put our nurses in that position, and it makes no sense economically either.

Lilian Greenwood: That is precisely the point that one of my constituents, a nurse, made when she wrote to me. She said that she graduated last year and is earning only £21,900, one of the lowest starting salaries among her graduate friends. She says that only months into her dream profession, she feels

"worn down by the strains put on the NHS. I face continued pressures every day. Most 12-hour shifts I don't get my unpaid break, and I leave late."

That is on top of knowing that she is not being properly rewarded for the work that she does. Is that not precisely why our nurses are feeling so demoralised?

Justin Madders: Yes. It is sad to hear that someone who has only just started out in the profession is being ground down so much already and is feeling so unappreciated. It is a story and a message that we hear repeatedly from our constituents who work in the health service. The Government need to listen carefully to it.

The RCN's submission to the pay review body not long ago said:

"Having faced a long period of pay restraint, it is inevitable that a large number of staff are now undertaking agency work as a way of restoring the real value of their earnings. Further restraint will only lead to even more damaging impact to the recruitment, retention and motivation of the most valuable asset the NHS has."

Those comments were echoed by the House of Commons Health Committee in July 2016, which said that

"a long term pay squeeze has unintended consequences for recruitment and retention, which may drive higher costs."

The independent Nuffield Trust made a similar statement after the 2015 summer Budget. It said that

"curbing public sector pay may make it even harder for the Government to realise some of its totemic pledges, such as seven-day working and reducing reliance on temporary staff."

[Justin Madders]

All those comments have come before the implications are clear for recruitment and retention of the thousands of staff who come from the EU. If they left tomorrow, it would make the current staffing gaps seem like a golden age.

I conclude with a couple more quotes. The first states that

“as the economy returns to growth, NHS pay will need to stay broadly in line with private sector wages in order to recruit and retain frontline staff.”

That quote is from a document that I am sure is known to us all, the NHS “Five Year Forward View”. Median weekly earnings for full-time employees in the private sector rose by 3.4% in 2016. I referred earlier to the anticipated increases in the cost of living over the next three years, which are bound to put more upward pressure on private sector wages.

The second quote is from a document entitled “The Conservative Party Manifesto 2015”, which I do not generally quote. Page 38 says:

“We will implement the NHS’s own plan to improve health care even further—the Five Year Forward View.”

As the Conservative party manifesto includes a clear commitment to delivering “Five Year Forward View”, and as it is clear that pay restraint needs to end to improve recruitment and retention rates, I must ask exactly what is preventing that from happening. I would be grateful if the Minister, when he responds, could tell us whether he considers the current policy of pay restraint to be consistent with the successful delivery of “Five Year Forward View”.

Labour agree with what has been said, be it by the cross-party Health Committee, the King’s Fund, the Nuffield Trust or the Health Foundation, about the need to end pay restraint. We agree with their crystal-clear message, and that of many hon. Members who have spoken in this debate, that further pay restraint for NHS staff would be self-defeating and unsustainable. We therefore endorse the wording of the petition.

I conclude with another quote from the Migration Advisory Committee, which said:

“The restraint on nurses’ pay instituted by the government was presented to us, and in the evidence to the pay review bodies, as an immutable fact. It is not. It is a choice”.

That is the nub of it: this is a political choice that does not need to continue. The Government have persisted with a damaging policy in pursuit of an objective that they have now abandoned, yet despite all the evidence that that policy is self-defeating and will cost more in the long run, the pay cap remains in place. It is a choice that they have made. It is the wrong choice, and it is time that they accept that they have got it wrong and change course before it is too late.

5.55 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr Philip Dunne): Mr Evans, I am grateful to you for calling me to wind up the debate. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I congratulate the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) on taking up the petition and giving a well-constructed speech, with which many people listening to the debate—not just Members from her party, but those outside—will feel considerable sympathy. I express similar sentiments towards

the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders). Although I do not agree with his prescription, I thought that he conducted himself in a thoroughly considered way, as usual. It is a pleasure to be shadowed by him, as well as by the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), who as usual made a constructive contribution.

[SIR ROGER GALE *in the Chair*]

First, I should say that we are all rightly proud of our national health service and the staff who work incredibly hard day and night for the benefit of patients. They undoubtedly deserve a cost of living increase, but we must recognise that the financial and quality challenge facing the NHS is unprecedented. These are not normal times. I deny the allegation that Agenda for Change staff are undervalued, as the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) indicated in his speech, which was knowledgeable, given his previous role as Health Secretary. Staff at all levels in the NHS do a fantastic job, and it is vital that we in Government and the leaders of the NHS recognise that staff morale is important to maintaining staff commitment to services.

In my experience of making visits across the NHS, hard-working staff put patients first every single day of the week. They do so because caring for sick and vulnerable people is as much a vocation for them as it is a job. I know that pay restraint is challenging, but when I speak to staff, they tell me that they want to know that the right number of staff will be working alongside them in the hospital or community setting. The Government have listened. Contrary to some of the contributions made by hon. Members, staff numbers have increased significantly across most grades since May 2010. We have recruited almost 11,800 more doctors. More than 13,300 more nurses are working on our wards today than in May 2010—the overall number of nurses working for the NHS is at an all-time high. There are over 2,100 more midwives, and more than 6,300 currently in training, as well as over 1,500 more health visitors and over 2,400 more paramedics.

The allegation that people are leaving the NHS in droves is simply not borne out by the facts. The most recent workforce statistics were published last week, covering the period ending October 2016, and they showed that a record number of full-time equivalents were working in our NHS.

Dr Huq: The Minister is giving figures for the current workforce, but does he have any for the future workforce? I mentioned my constituent, Dr Linda Burke, of nursing and education studies at the University of Greenwich. She is worried that due to the cut in nursing bursaries, the number of applications is falling, possibly by as much as 30%. The RCN itself has said:

“We have consistently raised concerns to the Government... Despite 100 years of nursing knowledge and expertise, our advice fell on deaf ears.”

The RCN is effectively saying, “We told you so.” Will he remark on that?

Mr Dunne: I can say to the hon. Lady that there are 51,000 nurses in training today—I cannot tell her whether that is a record number, but it is a very significant number. There are 1,600 paramedics in training, which

I believe is a record number. She and one or two other hon. Members have given anecdotes today about applications for new courses starting in the autumn, but I cannot tell her what the figures will be, because I have not yet seen any numbers published by UCAS. I think that they are due in the coming days, so we will have to see.

Dr Whitford: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Dunne: I will, although I am not actually right honourable.

Dr Whitford: Honourable but not right—I accept that. The figures from NHS England itself suggest a drop in nursing applications of at least 20% to 25%.

Mr Dunne: The hon. Lady must have access to figures that my Department and I do not have. My information is that we have yet to receive any formal numbers from UCAS; there may be some early indications, but they do not represent the actual numbers. We will just have to wait for them. There is no point in speculating any further.

A number of hon. Members mentioned the potential impact of Brexit on EU staff, who currently represent a significant number of the professionals working in the NHS. Some 43,000 non-UK-born nationals work in the NHS—about 15% of the workforce—and about half of them come from the EU. It is very important that none of those staff are unnecessarily concerned about their future. The Prime Minister has sought to make it clear on several occasions that she wants to protect the status of EU nationals who are already living here and that the only circumstances in which that would not be possible would be those in which the rights of British citizens living in EU member states were not protected in return. We wish to provide as much reassurance as we can, both to NHS workers and to their employers, that they have a constructive future here in the UK.

However, it is important that we move towards a self-sustaining workforce. Frankly, that is at the heart of the reason behind the change in funding for nursing places, which is to bring nurses in line with doctors and those doing other degrees in England, so that from this autumn onwards they receive funding through student loans rather than bursaries.

Dr Poulter: The Minister is right to highlight the increases in many staff numbers across the NHS. He will also be aware that because of the increased focus on quality of care, many trusts have had to acknowledge that they did not have enough staff in the first place. If there are enough staff working in the NHS at the moment, why is the locum bill about £3 billion a year?

Mr Dunne: I will come on to agencies shortly. I am not denying that there are vacancies within the NHS, but my point is that there has been and continues to be a significant investment in increasing the number of people working in the NHS, which was not the impression that other hon. Members gave.

Lady Hermon: I have listened very carefully to the Minister, but I have to tell him that nursing staff, midwives and others in the nursing profession—certainly

those in Northern Ireland who have contacted me—feel very demoralised by the attitude that the Government have held for several years. People in the nursing profession do a wonderful job and perform a great service for us all and for our families and friends when we have accidents or are ill, and the Government really must recognise their sense of demoralisation. If the Government will not change their policy on pay restraint—the Minister has already hinted that they will not—what steps will they take to address the serious problem of low morale in the nursing profession?

Mr Dunne: Obviously I cannot speak about circumstances in Northern Ireland, because we do not have responsibility for that. As I develop my remarks, I will go on to explain some of the things that we are doing to ensure that people who work in the NHS feel valued, as the hon. Lady asked, and get the kind of motivation that encourages them to get out of bed every morning and come into work day in, day out.

Lady Hermon *rose*—

Mr Dunne: I will make some progress.

We recognise that the NHS faces a number of very challenging pressures: not just the ageing population, but the expectations of the public, who rightly demand quality personalised care at home or in hospital every day, not just from Monday to Friday. Those pressures will not be resolved just through pay, but by engaging with staff as they adapt and respond to new ways of working, including by introducing change that comes with scientific development and by supporting them through appropriate training and development.

We know that inflation is increasing. We continue to rely on the independent pay review bodies, which for decades have applied their expertise and objectivity in making recommendations to Government, and we have huge respect for their important work. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North and the hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) referred to the NHS Pay Review Body's 2014-15 recommendations. Last year the Government accepted its recommendations for 2016-17. We have provided our evidence to the current round—as have others, including trade unions—and we expect its recommendations in the coming weeks.

Justin Madders: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Dunne: I will first answer, if I may, some of the comments made about the NHS Pay Review Body's recommendations and how they sit alongside other elements of the NHS.

The allegation was made that there have been significant pay rises across NHS boardrooms, which are demoralising for those who have suffered pay restraint. However, I say to the hon. Members who raised that point that in 2016 the median rise across all board positions in NHS trusts was 0%. There are individual examples, when very senior managers are introduced to trusts that are going through a management change or are in difficulty, where higher pay rates may have to be introduced than for the previous incumbent, but generally speaking the opposite is happening: in many cases, those coming into new positions are coming in on slightly lower salaries.

Justin Madders: The Minister talks about respecting the independent NHS Pay Review Body's recommendations. Without having seen them, can he say whether the Government are likely to respect those recommendations?

Mr Dunne: The hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to hear that I cannot give him any reassurances on that. We will have to see what the recommendations are and then take a view. However, we are not very far away from that point now.

The hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) referred to the national living wage. I got the impression from him that some NHS staff members in Northern Ireland are earning only the national living wage; I can reassure him that no NHS staff in England are earning only at that level.

Dr Whitford: Looking at the graph going forward, however, those on bands 1 and 2 of Agenda for Change will fall not only below the real living wage, which they are already below, but below the national living wage, which is the minimum wage, in the coming years—2018-19 and 2019-20.

Mr Dunne: Once again, the hon. Lady is speculating about what might happen in future, and I am afraid that not only can I not comment on that, but I am not sure whether she is correct or not. There are some assumptions in what she said about what will happen to the national living wage. The Government are making some assumptions, but what the Government choose to do about the matter we will have to see. At present, the policy is certainly that nobody will be paid less than the national living wage. I can reassure her about that.

Mark Durkan: Just to clarify, like the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), I was referring to the living wage and not to the national living wage, which is a figment of Government policy.

Dr Whitford *rose*—

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): Order. You cannot take one intervention following another intervention. I call the Minister to speak.

Mr Dunne: I am very happy to give way to the hon. Lady.

Dr Whitford: I was basing my assumptions and suppositions on what the Government themselves announced when they said that the pay freeze would continue in the next four years. That was announced in the comprehensive spending review, so I am not just making it up, and if pay goes on the trajectory that was announced last year, it will fall below the national living wage, which is obviously due to rise towards 2020.

Mr Dunne: I have made the Government's current position clear and we will have to see what emerges from the NHS Pay Review Body's recommendations, and then how those are implemented over the coming years. I think it is fruitless to speculate on what might happen in future years, based on the suppositions that the hon. Lady made—

Dr Whitford: Why?

Mr Dunne: Because I have been very clear that at the moment nobody will be paid less than the national living wage, and that is all I am going to say on that.

Dr Poulter: On the current position, can my hon. Friend clarify what the average annual increase in pay in real terms is for NHS staff who have been at the top of the Agenda for Change pay scale since 2010?

Mr Dunne: I will come to that point. If my hon. Friend will bear with me for a few minutes, I think I will be able to satisfy him on that.

Lady Hermon: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Dunne: No, I am afraid I am going to make some progress.

Hon. Members need to recognise that there is clearly a balance between pay and jobs in the NHS and across many public services. I note that the Opposition spokesman was full of recommendations about what not to do but had none, as far as I could calculate, about what should be done in relation to the delicate balance between pay and jobs. If pay were increased beyond the proposal from the NHS Pay Review Body, or beyond what the Government intend to pay, clearly there could be an impact on the number of jobs that can be afforded in the NHS within the financial envelope that we have.

Justin Madders: We are very clear that we believe that the recommendations of the independent NHS Pay Review Body should be accepted. Much of what I said was about how we should recognise that, given the pressures on nurses' pay, that will not necessarily cost the Exchequer anything in the long run.

Mr Dunne: I am not sure that that provides much clarification, but I thank the hon. Gentleman for having a go.

Employers in the NHS know that they need to deliver greater efficiencies and improved productivity to help protect frontline jobs. Making the workforce more expensive, through higher pay rises, will not help.

It is therefore disappointing that trade unions have alleged that staff have suffered a pay cut of about 14% in real terms—an allegation that has been repeated by a number of hon. Members in the debate. The truth is that the Government have ensured that no NHS employee—indeed, no employee—should be paid below the national living wage. As I have said, no NHS employee employed under the Agenda for Change pay system is paid below that.

The truth is that average earnings of NHS staff as a whole remained well above the national average salary for 2015, which was £27,500, and have increased by more than annual pay awards. For most NHS staff groups, half of employees employed in 2010 and still in employment in 2015 benefited from double-figure increases in earnings, equating to between 2.2% and 2.9% annually, depending on staff group. The average annual consumer prices index figure over the same period was 2.4%.

Dr Poulter: I specifically asked about those who are at the top of the Agenda for Change pay scale, which many Agenda for Change staff are. Can the Minister

confirm what the figures are for that group, because I think that the figures he has given include those in receipt of incremental rises?

Mr Dunne: They do, and it is important for hon. Members to understand the impact of incremental pay rises. The truth is that some half a million Agenda for Change staff are eligible for incremental pay rises each year of more than 3% on average, on top of annual pay awards. I am not saying that NHS staff should have no concerns about the level of pay award they receive; what I am saying is that since the 2008 recession, NHS earnings and public sector earnings have generally compared well with those in the wider economy.

A number of hon. Members talked about regional pay and in particular the challenges of working in London. Of course, we are very sympathetic to individuals who face the pressures of working in London—in both inner and outer London—and that is why we have the increments available to recognise the extra costs of living there.

Catherine McKinnell *rose*—

Dr Poulter *rose*—

Mr Dunne: I will make a little progress, if I may.

NHS organisations spend about two thirds of their entire expenditure on pay. Ensuring that the NHS has the staff it needs relies, crucially, on controlling pay and on making every penny count for the benefit of patients.

I give way to my hon. Friend.

Dr Poulter: My hon. Friend the Minister may not have the answer to my specific question here today, but will he write to me after the debate to confirm the answer to my question about those members of staff who are at the top of the Agenda for Change pay scale? What, in real terms, has been their pay increase since 2010?

Mr Dunne: I will be happy to look at that; if my hon. Friend would write to me with his precise question, of course we will give him an answer.

Catherine McKinnell: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Dunne: I was about to come on to agencies, but I will give way to the hon. Lady.

Catherine McKinnell: I thank the Minister for giving way. I am slightly concerned by his response, in that he does not seem to be taking on board the very significant concerns that have been raised right across the board, not only by unions but, significantly, by the National Audit Office. Last week, in its report on ambulance services, the NAO said:

“Ambulance trusts face resourcing challenges that are limiting their ability to meet rising demand.”

One of the “challenges” that is specifically cited is “pay and reward”, which is hampering recruitment. It is not just the unions and NHS staff who are saying these things; it is the NAO and other bodies as well.

Mr Dunne: The hon. Lady refers to ambulance staff. In recent weeks—just before Christmas, in fact—the Department agreed a deal with trade unions whereby

paramedics working in ambulances would have their banding increased from band 5 to band 6, phased in over two years so that they can demonstrate they have the increased skill competence required. That represent a significant increase in reward for paramedics; some 12,000 paramedics will receive a higher pay award, precisely to address recruitment challenges for that specific profession. So we are listening and we are doing something about this issue. I will try to give the hon. Lady other examples of where we are responding to specific pressures.

Lady Hermon: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Dunne: No. The hon. Lady has had a fair crack. I will make a bit more progress.

I was challenged in this debate to refer to what the Government are investing in the NHS and I obviously take some relish in responding to that challenge. We are investing an additional £21.9 billion in nominal terms, which is equivalent to £10 billion in real terms, to fund the NHS’s own plan for the future. By doing so, we believe that we are playing our part, through the measures announced over the last 12 months or so, to help the NHS achieve its five year forward view. It needs to do that not only by realising benefits from the Carter review to improve productivity, but by clamping down on rip-off staffing agencies and encouraging employers to use their own staff banks for temporary staffing needs, so that they can invest in their permanent workforce. That has been referred to by a number of right hon. and hon. Members.

Agency and bank working provide an opportunity for NHS staff to engage in more flexible working to suit their own circumstances, so I would not want to characterise all agency working as bad. What is challenging is when NHS organisations need, in some cases, to go out to external agencies beyond their immediate bank and pay significantly higher rates. That is why the Department introduced, a year ago, a number of measures to start to limit the ability of agencies to charge the NHS such high fees, and we have had some success in that. In the period for which I have figures—roughly the middle of last year—the agency costs to the NHS had been reduced by 19% over the equivalent period the year before, so we are doing something about those fees. We are apprised of the problem and are bringing down the cost to the NHS of employing agency staff.

This issue is not just about pay. NHS staff, like many people, work hard to improve our public services. They have families and commitments, and they deserve to be rewarded fairly for what they do. However, as has been said, pay alone will not necessarily persuade the skilled and compassionate people that we need to choose a career in the NHS. It would be wrong to see the NHS employment package as just about headline pay. NHS terms and conditions have been developed over many years, in partnership with trade unions, and they recognise that it is a combination of pay and non-pay benefits, which need to keep pace with a modern, changing NHS, that help to recruit, retain and motivate the workforce.

Dr Whitford: Certainly the nurses I met during the lobby here, who had come from all over England, but particularly from London, described literally struggling and facing great financial hardship. That is very difficult for them. They work so hard for the benefit of all of us,

[*Dr Philippa Whitford*]

yet feel that they cannot go on in their profession because they simply cannot keep their families here in London.

Mr Dunne: I have already explained to the hon. Lady that we have a London weighting, which reflects the increased costs of living in London. I have also explained to her that average pay for nurses is significantly above the national average pay. She herself referred to average nursing pay of some £31,000—

Dr Whitford *indicated dissent.*

Mr Dunne: If not her, then another hon. Member referred to it, and that is from the latest available workforce statistics.

Picking up on the hon. Lady's point, it is important that NHS staff are confident that their employment package is competitive. We want employers to make better use of the full package in their recruitment and retention strategies. NHS Agenda for Change staff have access to an excellent pension scheme, far in excess of arrangements in the wider economy, which includes life assurance worth twice the annual salary, and spouse, partner and child benefits. They have annual leave of up to 33 days—six and a half weeks—plus the eight bank holidays, which is far better than that which is available in the private sector, and in many other elements of the public sector. They have sickness and maternity arrangements that go well beyond the statutory minimum and, as I have touched on, there are flexible working, training and development opportunities for staff at all grades. For too long, the NHS employment package has been a well-kept secret and we want leaders to make the very best use of the overall NHS employment offer to help recruit and retain the staff they need.

Tom Elliott (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): The Minister has outlined the pay and conditions package—or part of it. Does he believe that staff within the nursing profession are confident at the moment about their pay and conditions package, or does he feel, as I hear, that they are undervalued within the system?

Mr Dunne: I have tried to indicate in my remarks that we do not undervalue anyone who works in the NHS. The role of our nurses in particular provides the backbone of the entire health service. Understandably, people are concerned about their level of pay. With several years of pay restraint, that is no surprise—it is the case right across the economy—and that is why we will look carefully at the recommendations of the NHS Pay Review Body. I have already said that we recognise that there should be some increase in the award to take into account the cost of living.

You will be pleased to hear, Sir Roger, that I am going to conclude my remarks, by reconfirming that as a nation we are extremely proud of our NHS. The patient surveys we undertake every year tell us that our patients are proud of our NHS. Our staff tell us, in the surveys we undertake of them, that they are proud of working in our NHS. This is not just me saying this, reading it from a sheet; it is what staff tell me whenever I visit an NHS facility. They are proud of their job. They are proud of looking after their patients, and they want to continue to do so.

The Government have to take tough decisions, and in this area we have done so to protect jobs through pay restraint. Average NHS earnings for most staff groups have continued to grow. We are committed to ensuring that they have the right number of colleagues working alongside them in hospitals and in the community.

I strongly believe that the issue of recruitment and retention is not just about pay. It is about creating a culture in which learning, development and innovation are encouraged. It is about creating an environment where staff want to work, take pride in what they do, and are well motivated and feel safe; an environment where employers promote the importance of the values of the NHS and work incredibly hard to keep staff safe, and where bullying and harassment are not tolerated.

6.26 pm

Catherine McKinnell: I do not think that anyone could argue with what the Minister has just said about NHS staff being proud of what they do and wanting to continue. But even while this debate has been going on, I have seen several tweets. For example, one asks:

“please tell me what the RCN”

—it says the Royal College of Nursing, but I say the Government—

“is going to do. I am seriously starting to struggle now”.

Others say that they

“know so many young people who would be great nurses but lack of bursary & low pay put them off”.

Those tweets reflect NHS staff's real live experiences of the current pay situation under Agenda for Change and the continued pay freeze.

I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have contributed knowledgeably and passionately to this very important debate, whether in speeches or interventions. I feel very strongly that we have won the argument today. There is a high degree of cross-party consensus on many of the issues we have outlined, and the Government are either burying their head in the sand or deliberately not facing up to significant challenges regarding pay, recruitment and retention for NHS staff. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) pointed out, by failing to address the issue we are taking advantage of those who work in the NHS and are pushing their good will to the limit. What disturbs me even more is that not only their good will is being tested; their very ability to survive in the job is being tested, too. I have received a number of testimonies and seen the evidence—the Government seem to deny the figures, even though they are there in black and white and I set them out clearly in my opening speech—about the real-terms pay cuts that NHS staff are facing. They simply cannot manage, and that is a shameful situation.

I said in my speech that it is the very people the Government rely on to deliver a high-quality NHS service in extremely challenging circumstances who are being badly let down by the Government's current policy. How have we reached a situation where nurses, midwives and other invaluable NHS staff are struggling to pay their bills and put food on the table? They are pawning their possessions and turning to payday loans. On the softer side, they are turning to agency work to top up their pay—not to afford the luxuries in life, but the basics. It is a completely unsustainable situation, and the Government must take urgent action to lift this

burden off our NHS staff so that they can do their job, which is caring for us and our loved ones without the fear of financial insecurity hanging over their every working day.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petition 168127 relating to pay restraint for Agenda for Change NHS staff.

6.30 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Petition

Monday 30 January 2017

OBSERVATIONS

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Climate Change

The petition of residents of Macclesfield,

Declares that climate changes impacts upon both people and places; further that the rapid progress towards ratification of the Paris Agreement is to be applauded; further that the UK requires a low carbon investment plan to transform the economy in line with the Climate Change Act 2008; and further that 1,100 individuals have signed a local petition on the same matter.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to publish an ambitious low carbon investment plan.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by David Rutley, *Official Report*, 30 November 2016; Vol. 617, c. 1634.]

[P001986]

Observations from The Minister for Climate Change and Industry (Mr Nick Hurd): The Government remain committed to tackling climate change and to the UK's Climate Change Act. Climate change remains one of the most serious long-term risks to our economic and national security. The Act introduced five yearly carbon targets to put us on a cost effective pathway to meeting our legally binding 2050 target. We need to meet our targets while keeping our energy supply secure and low cost.

The UK has already made great progress towards our goal. The UK is currently ranked third in the world for tackling climate change by the independent Climate Action Network. Provisional statistics indicate that UK emissions in 2015 were 38% lower than in 1990, and 4% below those in 2014. The UK met the first carbon target (2008-12) and is on track to meet the second (2013-17) and third carbon targets (2018-22).

The Government are looking ahead to our emissions reduction plan which will set out how we will reduce emissions through the 2020s. We recognise that the plan will form an important signal to investors, the markets and businesses. The Government are investing the time now to undertake critical preparatory work to ensure we get this right. This includes engaging across businesses, industry and other stakeholders on the shared challenge of moving to a low carbon economy.

ORAL ANSWERS

Monday 30 January 2017

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
DEFENCE	639	DEFENCE—continued	
Defence Suppliers: Innovation	646	Royal Navy: Size and Capability	654
Leaving the EU: UK Defence Policy	648	Sea Cadets	641
NATO Assurance Measures: Estonia and Poland ..	647	Topical Questions	654
NATO: Role of US Administration	650	US-UK Defence Relations	639
NATO Spending Target	642	Yemen	652
Royal Navy: Size and Capability	651		

PETITION

Monday 30 January 2017

	<i>Col. No.</i>
BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL	
STRATEGY	7P
Climate Change	7P

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CONTENTS

Monday 30 January 2017

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 639] [see index inside back page]
Secretary of State for Defence

Jobcentre Plus Offices: Closure [Col. 661]
Answer to urgent question—(Caroline Nokes)

US Immigration Policy [Col. 675]
Statement—(Boris Johnson)

Changes in US Immigration Policy [Col. 704]
Application for emergency debate under Standing Order No. 24
Emergency debate under Standing Order No. 24

Pension Schemes Bill [Lords] [Col. 752]
Motion for Second Reading—(Damian Green)—agreed to
Programme motion—(Mark Spencer)—agreed to

Doncaster and Bassetlaw NHS Trust STP [Col. 783]
Debate on motion for Adjournment

Westminster Hall
Agenda for Change: NHS Pay Restraint [Col. 213WH]
General Debate

Petition [Col. 7P]
Observations

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
