

**Thursday
27 April 2017**

**Volume 624
No. 142**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 27 April 2017

House of Commons

Thursday 27 April 2017

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

The Secretary of State was asked—

Tourism

1. **James Duddridge** (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): What recent discussions his Department has had with representatives of the tourism sector on the implications for that sector of the UK leaving the EU. [909869]

3. **Chloe Smith** (Norwich North) (Con): What recent discussions his Department has had with representatives of the tourism sector on the implications for that sector of the UK leaving the EU. [909871]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker): I welcome the fact that tourism is at its highest levels ever, with foreign visitors contributing £22.4 billion to our economy and the industry as a whole supporting some 1.6 million jobs. The start of this year was the strongest on record, and VisitBritain research shows that since the referendum more Europeans say they are more likely, rather than less likely, to visit the UK.

James Duddridge: Southend, of course, is a wonderful tourist destination, with the longest pleasure pier in the world. London Southend airport flies to 26 international destinations. The airport does not do Brussels, however, but it does do Europe. Will the Minister, on his re-election, agree to come to Southend to discuss how a new, emboldened Britain can do the European Union and the country a good job globally with trade with all nation states?

Mr Walker: My hon. Friend raises an important point both about regional aviation and the beautiful part of the world he represents. That part of the world is known for its common sense, which I am sure will be reflected on 8 June. We have been very clear that we are working to ensure the best possible liberal access to European aviation markets and are seeking to replicate third-country arrangements with the likes of the US and Canada. We are committed to working with the sector to get the best deal for the UK, and I will be delighted to meet him to discuss how we can boost tourism in Southend.

Chloe Smith: Tourism employs 12,000 people in Norwich, where the value of the sector has grown 87% over the last 10 years—my fine city is a top 10 destination. Tourism is a quarter of the city's employment. Will my hon. Friend reassure me and Norwich employers, first, that the position of valued members of staff who may be citizens of other European countries will be a personal priority and, secondly, that in seeking a strong future, especially for our young people, the Government will address the skills that British workers could develop to offer Norwich's growing tourism industry?

Mr Walker: My hon. Friend is right to champion tourism in Norwich. As the Prime Minister has said, it is right that we ensure that tourism and hospitality businesses can access the skills they need from the EU and that we ensure that young people in the UK have the right skills to work in this sector. I know she will continue to support tourism through her Norwich jobs initiative and as vice-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on youth employment, on which I enjoyed working with her.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): Tourism requires airports to be open to people, and the Association of British Travel Agents tells us that getting an early deal is of the utmost priority. The chief executive of Stansted airport recently told MPs from our region that no deal means no flights. What assessment has been made of the cost to the British tourism industry of no deal?

Mr Walker: The hon. Gentleman should be more optimistic. We have the largest aviation network in Europe and the third largest in the world, handling more than 250 million passengers and 2.3 million tonnes of cargo last year. We are working closely with the industry and are confident that securing a deal on aviation will be in the interests of both the UK and the EU.

Mike Weir (Angus) (SNP): Many businesses in rural areas such as Angus have diversified in recent years into short-term holiday lets, many of which are taken by citizens of the European Union who come across at short notice. There are serious concerns that, when we leave the EU, there could be a downturn. Will the Minister give us an assurance that, in any deal with the EU, there will remain the freedom for people to come for short-term holidays and that there will be no visa requirements requiring them to get documents before coming to the UK?

Mr Walker: I recognise the importance of that issue. I discussed some of those issues directly with the Scottish hospitality sector during my last visit to Scotland. Of course we want to ensure that visitors from Europe can continue to come to the UK and spend their money here, and we want to ensure that we have the best access for tourists in both directions. That will be a subject for the negotiations to come.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): Southampton airport in my Eastleigh constituency provides regular flights to Amsterdam and therefore more than 55 African nations, driving, among other things, bilateral trade. Will the

Minister outline what his Department is doing to promote similar initiatives to bring benefits to the UK economy ready for leaving the EU?

Mr Walker: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to champion the aviation routes from her constituency, and of course the UK, as a global nation, will continue to want to trade with both Europe and the wider world. Having strong aviation links and liberal access for aviation will be an important part of that.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Tourism in Northern Ireland currently generates £764 million of revenue and attracts 4.5 million visitors. The aim is to double that by 2020 using major events such as the world police and fire games, the UK city of culture and the Giro d'Italia. To achieve that goal, will the Minister outline his strategy for incorporating the UK-wide tourism industry? What support is being offered in the interim?

Mr Walker: We have been working closely with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and our colleagues in the territorial Departments to ensure that we have the best approach to selling the UK brand around the world. I recognise that Northern Ireland has a fantastic tourism offer, and I was delighted to meet representatives of the Northern Irish hospitality industry during my visit last autumn.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): As you know, Mr Speaker, some of the finest parts of the Peak District national park are in Staffordshire, alongside Shugborough, Doxey marshes, Cannock Chase and many other beautiful places. One of the skills that our young people need so that we can benefit from the tourism industry lies in the teaching of languages. What is my hon. Friend doing, together with the Department for Education, to ensure that that is a priority?

Mr Walker: My hon. Friend, who is a great champion for his local area, is right to raise this issue, and we have discussed with the tourism and hospitality industry the importance of attracting people with language skills. One aspect we are looking at is how, through negotiations, we might be able to continue engagement with the Erasmus programme in the future, but there are many other ways in which we need to boost our skills domestically, and boosting languages will be very important to a global Britain.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): Tourism is the main catalyst for economic development in South Down, which will have a land border with the EU. How will that burgeoning cross-border tourism trade be nurtured and financially protected in the face of the challenges from Brexit and given that the Republic of Ireland's VAT rate on tourism is 9% whereas in my constituency it is 20%?

Mr Walker: One of our highest priorities in these negotiations and in our whole strategy for the UK's exit from the EU is to secure the soft border that exists, to make sure that there is no return to the hard borders of the past and that the economic progress we see as a result of north-south tourism within the island of Ireland continues, and to ensure that those bodies can be in place. I assure the hon. Lady that this is an issue on

which we will continue to engage, and we will continue to promote the excellent tourism offer in Northern Ireland.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): The Minister is obviously aware that a record 37.6 million overseas visitors came to the UK in the past year. Is he aware that 70% of those came from the EU? Does he agree that those figures show that although the UK may be leaving the EU, we are very much welcoming and open to visitors from the EU and the rest of the world?

Mr Walker: I wholly agree with what my hon. Friend and neighbour says. He is a great champion for the tourism industry, and may I thank him once again for the work he has done to make sure that our Department gets to hear directly from the tourism and hospitality industry across the UK?

Northern Ireland

4. **Tom Elliott** (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): Whether he has had discussions with representatives of Sinn Féin on that party's priorities for Northern Ireland in the negotiations on the UK leaving the EU; and if he will make a statement. [909872]

11. **Danny Kinahan** (South Antrim) (UUP): Whether he has had discussions with representatives of Sinn Féin on that party's priorities for Northern Ireland in the negotiations on the UK leaving the EU; and if he will make a statement. [909881]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker): The Northern Ireland Executive, including Sinn Féin Ministers, have participated in the Joint Ministerial Committee processes, but to discuss our preparations for exit and ensure that we can deliver an approach that works for the whole and each part of the UK we want to see the political situation in Northern Ireland resolved and Assembly government continuing. That is what the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is working hard to achieve.

Tom Elliott: I thank the Minister for that answer and for his interest in Northern Ireland; he has come over to visit us—including my constituency, which has a long and significant land border with the Republic of Ireland—on a number of occasions. How can he and the Department ensure that there is further good co-operation as Brexit negotiations continue, particularly in the absence of a Northern Ireland Executive?

Mr Walker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Prime Minister are fully committed to ensuring that as we establish our negotiating position, the unique interests of Northern Ireland are protected and advanced. I touched earlier on the issue of the common travel area. They have a clear understanding of the range of views from across Northern Ireland, and we will continue to champion the interests of Northern Ireland in the coming months. We remain committed to continuing to work with all parties and a new Executive in the months ahead, as part of our effort to ensure that we deliver a good deal for the whole of the UK, including Northern Ireland.

Danny Kinahan: May I, too, thank the Minister for all his hard work on behalf of Northern Ireland and Scotland? In recent weeks many discussions have taken place in Northern Ireland about electoral pacts and the bid to block Brexit, as if the decision were reversible. Does he agree that the efforts of all parties would be much better if they were put together in seeking to achieve the best possible outcome for Brexit and for Northern Ireland?

Mr Walker: Absolutely. One great strength of our electoral system is that it allows constituencies and their voters to choose the best candidate to represent them, and not stitch-ups between politicians and parties. Like the hon. Gentleman, I campaigned on the remain side during the referendum but am now working as hard as I can to make the decision of the UK a success for the whole of the United Kingdom. I think voters should reflect on whether their representatives are working constructively to get the best outcome for their constituencies and for the United Kingdom, rather than on deals behind closed doors.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): Will my hon. Friend assure the House that he will do his utmost to ensure that the UK withdrawing from the EU does not disrupt peace on the island of Ireland?

Mr Walker: Absolutely. My hon. Friend is right to raise that point. We must work continuously to ensure that we protect the peace, the agreements that underpin it and the close and unique relationship between the UK and the Republic of Ireland, which is in a better state than it has been in decades.

Financial Services Industry

5. **Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con):** What steps the Government plan to take to help the financial services industry prepare for the UK leaving the EU. [909873]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker): We want to ensure that UK companies have the maximum freedom to trade with and operate in European markets, and to let European businesses do the same in the UK. Financial services is one area for which a bold and ambitious trade agreement will be sought, and we will continue to talk to the industry as we prepare for negotiations. The Government have made it clear that we believe implementation periods will be important to minimise disruption, and the industry has welcomed that. The great repeal Bill will prepare the ground for the UK's exit so that on the day we leave there is as little disruption and as much certainty and continuity as possible. A strong, stable Conservative Government will be best placed to deliver that.

Stephen Hammond: I am grateful for the confirmation that the Government intend to include financial services in the free trade agreement. Will the Minister confirm that we will negotiate to ensure maximum access for licensed firms on the basis of mutual recognition and an equivalence regime?

Mr Walker: My hon. Friend absolutely right. As a priority, we are pursuing a bold and ambitious trade agreement with the European Union. That agreement should be of greater scope and ambition than any seen before it, so that it covers sectors that are crucial to our linked economies, such as financial services. We know that our European neighbours have a stake in this, too, because they do not want European firms to lose access to the City of London's financial services. Financial stability is important, not only for the UK but for the whole of Europe, which is one reason why we want to reach a deal with the EU on financial services. We will seek to establish strong co-operative oversight arrangements with the EU and will continue to support and implement international standards to safely serve the UK, European and global economy.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister stop reading his brief and speak from the heart? I have two sets of workers in Huddersfield. Many people work in financial services for Lloyds, and their jobs are in peril. I also have a large number of people who work in the national health service, and the Government are doing nothing to stop the cruel closure of the Huddersfield infirmary. Will the Minister do something about my financial sector workers and my health workers, with the EU catastrophe arriving soon?

Mr Speaker: My counsel would be to stick to the financial services industry.

Mr Walker: I will follow your guidance, Mr Speaker.

I am delighted that the Government are standing up for every sector of our economy, including the financial services sector. The hon. Gentleman neatly points out that the financial services sector matters not only in the City of London but throughout the country, in constituencies such as his. We will fight for those jobs; unfortunately, every Labour Government in history has destroyed jobs.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): Was my hon. Friend as impressed as I was by the new spirit of resolve and optimism witnessed yesterday among senior City figures at the Prosperity UK conference, at which the Secretary of State spoke so inspirationally?

Mr Walker: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's question. Of course we welcome the engagement of so many businesses from across different sectors, including the financial sector, in making this process the greatest success it can be.

20. [909891] **Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP):** I hope you will indulge me for a moment, Mr Speaker. When I took my oath, you told me that my voice would be heard in this Chamber, and you have kept your word. You have been a champion for Back Benchers and I thank you for that.

At the start of the week, the EU 27 firmed up their Brexit negotiating guidelines and inserted a new paragraph that states:

"Any future framework should safeguard financial stability in the Union and respect its regulatory and supervisory regime and standards and their application."

Following this major blow to the Prime Minister's unworkable plans for a hard Tory Brexit, can we expect to see a change in the Conservative manifesto?

Mr Walker: I welcome the hon. Lady's question and her focus on financial stability, because, as I said in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond), we absolutely recognise the importance of financial stability for the whole of Europe, including the UK, and of reaching a deal with our European counterparts. When I met the financial services industry in Scotland to talk about these matters, it was clear on the importance of financial stability, and it was very clear on the vast importance of the United Kingdom market for Scottish financial services.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): What assessment has my hon. Friend made of the French Government's warnings that the City should continue to be overseen by EU regulators?

Mr Walker: We recognise the importance of regulatory oversight and mutual regulatory understanding as we move towards a comprehensive trade agreement with the European Union. One thing I have learned while doing this job is the huge respect in which UK regulators are held around the whole of Europe. I think we have some of the best financial regulators in the world.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): What assessment has the Minister been able to make of the loss of the European Banking Authority and the impact that it might have on the financial services sector?

Mr Walker: The future of European agencies is of course a subject for the negotiations to come, but I have no doubt that the UK will continue to be a global centre both for financial services and for leading the conversation about the regulation of financial services in the years to come.

Sir Julian Brazier (Canterbury) (Con): Financial services are important to the economy in my constituency, and I welcome all my hon. Friend's comments. Does he agree that it is in Europe's interests that it should have a good deal here, as it will need access to the City of London? It is not the UK that has a banking crisis at the moment.

Mr Walker: My hon. Friend is absolutely right for drawing attention both to the importance of financial services across the whole of the UK and to the fact that this is about the mutual interests of the UK and the EU. We want a deal that works for both, and access to the global leading financial markets in London will be as important for the other side in these negotiations as it is for us.

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): Last month, the Secretary of State confirmed to the Brexit Select Committee that exiting the European Union on World Trade Organisation terms would mean an end to passporting rights. Does the Minister agree that that would be catastrophic for our financial services sector and all those who work in it? If so, does he agree that no deal is not a viable option for the financial services sector?

Mr Walker: As a priority, we are pursuing the most ambitious trade agreement that has ever been achieved with the European Union. Its scope and ambition should be greater than that of any agreement before it. The financial services market access—access for European firms to the UK and access for UK firms to Europe—is hugely important. That is what we are focused on achieving. Let me say to the hon. Gentleman that the position of his party that any deal is better than no deal is an absurdity when it comes to defending the national interests of this country. We need to get the right deal and to be able to say to the other side that if they do not offer us the right deal the UK will manage and take the right steps to protect itself. Of course our focus should be on getting the best deal.

Matthew Pennycook: The latest draft EU negotiating guidelines discussed on Monday suggest that financial services will be separated from any agreement on our future trade deal. If the Government cannot secure the safety and certainty of the financial services sector as part of any future agreement, what is their back-up plan?

Mr Walker: I say gently to the hon. Gentleman that we do not write the guidelines, but we recognise that financial services will be part of a comprehensive deal. We have talked about a comprehensive free trade agreement, and it certainly has not been ruled out. What the EU has said is that it does not want to do separate sectoral deals—well, actually, nor do we. We want the most comprehensive trade agreement available and we think that that should include services, including financial services.

Employment and Workers' Rights

6. **Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): What steps the Government are taking in preparing the great repeal Bill to protect (a) employment and (b) workers' rights. [909874]

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Davis): I shall start by saying that I am going to disappoint the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) as I will stick to my brief.

The White Paper published on 30 March sets out that the employment and workers' rights that are enjoyed under EU law will continue to be available in UK law after we have left the European Union as the great repeal Bill will convert EU law into domestic law. This will give certainty and continuity to employees and employers alike, creating stability in which the United Kingdom can grow and thrive.

Michael Tomlinson: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for that answer. Since the Health and Morals of Apprentices Act, it is the Conservatives who first protected workers' rights and put those protections on to the statute book. Will he confirm that, post-Brexit, we will continue to do so not only to protect them, but to enhance them, thereby proving that we are the real workers' party?

Mr Davis: I had not expected references to 1802—it was 1802, was it not?

Michael Tomlinson *indicated assent.*

Mr Davis: I thought so. It was the very first piece of employment legislation in this House, brought in by a Conservative Government long before the Labour party existed. I suspect that we will still be bringing in such legislation long after the Labour party has ceased to exist. My hon. Friend is absolutely right: we will continue to protect workers' rights. Indeed, the Prime Minister has made it plain not just that we will protect rights, which was the line I started promulgating last summer when I took this job, but that we will expand them. She has appointed the Taylor commission, under Matthew Taylor, with the explicit aim of ensuring that these rights are appropriate to the modern age and will protect people in the modern age.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): All the evidence shows that public holidays improve the productivity and wellbeing of workers, including those in the NHS still awaiting their £350 million a week as promised by the leave campaign. Does the Secretary of State agree with having an additional four days, as the Labour party proposes? Although that would still be short of the number in Finland and Spain, which have 14 and 15 days respectively, it would bring us in line with the European average of 12. At the moment we only have eight. That is an example of how, when we leave—

Mr Speaker: Well done—very good. I think we have the gist. The thrust of the question has been communicated and we are eternally grateful to the hon. Lady.

Mr Davis: The short answer is no. The more elaborate answer is that employment rights in this country are better than the European Union minimum across the board. That is true of the average number of mandatory annual holidays and maternity rights, to give just two examples. I am afraid that we do not have an awful lot to learn from the European Union in that respect.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): After these questions, we go into a general election that, as the EU has already said, will make very little difference to its negotiations. It has a lot more to do with exploiting a civil war on the Labour Benches and preventing yet another civil war on the Tory Benches. In terms of workers' rights, what about those who are currently in work? This week, Diageo announced that there could be 100 job losses in Scotland, with 70 in Leven. The union has described the company as "hedging their bets over Brexit" and the Government have been asleep at the wheel. Now, regarding the workers—

Mr Speaker: Order. We just need one brief sentence. Spit it out, man.

Stephen Gethins: Well, I think the issue of job losses is very important. Will job losses be a priority?

Mr Davis: I suppose if there is one thing I should take lectures from the Scottish National party on, it is promoting civil conflict. If the hon. Gentleman's question is whether our priority is the promotion of the economy, the answer is yes.

Stephen Gethins: The reason that the SNP is outpolling the Tories so highly is that we are united in getting behind workers' rights and getting a decent deal in

Europe. The Secretary of State has put aside these negotiations for narrow political benefit, which he will not have in Scotland. What is he going to do about these threats to jobs?

Mr Davis: We will seek the best possible deal to maintain our relationship with the European Union. Over and above that, we will seek the best possible deal with the rest of the world, which already gets 60% of our exports.

Great Repeal Bill: Future Trade Terms

7. **Sir Henry Bellingham** (North West Norfolk) (Con): What discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for International Trade on the potential effect of the great repeal Bill on negotiating future trade terms with the EU. [909875]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker): My Department is responsible for overseeing negotiations to leave the EU, and establishing the future relationship between a global Britain and the EU. We are, of course, working hand in hand with the Department for International Trade as we seek a deep and special partnership with the EU, and a bold and comprehensive trade agreement. The great repeal Bill will ensure a smooth and orderly exit from the EU. The laws and rules that we have now will, wherever practicable, continue to apply. The negotiations with the EU on the future relationship with Britain will be unlike any before, since both sides will start from the point of exact equivalence.

Sir Henry Bellingham: I thank the Minister for that comprehensive reply. When it comes to these key negotiations, is it his intention to recruit and embed outside talent and expertise from different sectors such as law, insurance and financial services to reinforce and bolster the Government's own civil service teams? Has this outreach programme started?

Mr Walker: I can assure my hon. Friend that we have been doing that outreach. Both my Department and the Department for International Trade have been bringing in expertise from across the civil service and from key areas of the private sector. The Under-Secretary of State for International Trade, my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier), tells me that his Department has already recruited more than 200 trade advisers.

Heidi Alexander (Lewisham East) (Lab): I have asked Ministers six times in the last three months how the Government plan to extract us from the European economic area. Not once have I got a straight answer. Throwing away our membership of the single market with no plan for a vote in Parliament is the single largest act of economic self-harm and democratic nihilism that I can imagine. In which year does the Minister believe we should come out of the European economic area, and will the so-called "great" repeal Bill include the repeal of the European Economic Area Act 1993?

Mr Walker: The Government's position has been very clear: we are a member of the European economic area as a consequence of our European Union membership,

and we respect the position of European leaders that the four freedoms underpinning the European Union are inseparable. We are leaving the European Union, but we will seek to form a deep and comprehensive free trade agreement between the UK and the EU.

Mr Speaker: I call Sir Edward Leigh.

Mr Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): My hon. Friend and the Government are right to seek—

Mr Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman is a very fine man, but his name is not Sir Edward Leigh. *[Interruption.]* Be patient—we will hear from the fellow shortly. I am sure the right hon. Gentleman, who is a person of immense distinction, knows his own name—he just did not hear me.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): We are of one mind anyway—it does not really matter very much.

In the interests of good government, will the Minister instruct the permanent secretary to ensure that there are worthwhile discussions with a possible future Government on how we square the circle of staying in the single market but controlling immigration and of being inside the customs union, or outside it—I do not know what they are going to do—and trying to make new trade agreements? I am sure that the permanent secretary is a very clever man and that he can do all this work.

Mr Walker: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his demonstration of the single transferable question and on the point he makes. The speech from the shadow Secretary of State has been widely picked up as setting out a confused position and one that is irresolvable, but I have no doubt that our permanent secretary is brilliant enough to be able to work his way through it.

English Regions

8. **Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): What steps he is taking to involve representatives of the English regions in the Government's preparations for the UK leaving the EU. [909876]

The Minister of State, Department for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Jones): Mr Speaker, it is nice to be here. The Government are committed to securing a deal that works for the entire United Kingdom, including all parts of England. The Department for Exiting the European Union and the Department for Communities and Local Government are working closely with the Local Government Association and regional partners across the country to understand clearly the issues related to exit and to identify any regional differences. As my hon. Friend will be aware, the Secretary of State has already committed to bringing the newly elected combined authority mayors in England together for a summit in the summer.

Kevin Hollinrake: I thank the Minister for that answer. At departmental questions some weeks ago, the Secretary of State agreed to hold a meeting in York for the mayors of the north to make sure the region's interests were properly represented. With Yorkshire's devolution deals

proving challenging to agree, will the Secretary of State agree also to invite the leaders of those areas not represented by a mayor?

Mr Jones: The Government are committed to securing a deal that works for the whole United Kingdom, including every part of England. DExEU Ministers have visited Yorkshire on a number of occasions, and that includes the Secretary of State's visit in November. I am sure he will be willing to consider another visit after the election.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The north-east has benefited hugely from investment and funding from the European Union—a counterbalance to the neglect of this and other Tory Governments. What guarantee will the Minister offer that the repatriation of powers from the European Union will not mean further concentration of powers in Whitehall and that powers will be devolved to the north-east and other regions?

Mr Jones: After the United Kingdom leaves the European Union, we will give full consideration to further devolution to bring powers as close as possible to all parts of the country. We are committed to securing a deal that works for the north-east, and Ministers have visited every part of England, and that includes a recent visit to Sunderland and Peterlee to talk to local people about manufacturing issues.

Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): On his visits around the regions of the UK, will the Minister make it clear that to deliver the Prime Minister's commitment to take back control of our money, our laws and our borders, we must leave the single market, leave the customs union and establish sovereign control of our borders and all the maritime waters within the exclusive economic zone?

Mr Jones: My right hon. Friend has set out the Government's position admirably.

Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): Visiting the north-east is always a good thing to do, and we are very happy to have the Minister, but he does need to listen while he is there. The Engineering Employers Federation has warned that walking away with no deal would condemn north-east manufacturing to “a painful and costly Brexit.”

The EEF wants the Government, instead of posturing, to focus on obtaining full World Trade Organisation membership, a clear position on customs and a sensible transition period. Why are the Government not listening to the needs of manufacturers in the north?

Mr Jones: On the contrary, we deal regularly with manufacturing industry. Indeed, I recently had a meeting with the EEF that was very successful. The fact of the matter is that we are intending to seek the best possible free trade agreement with the continuing European Union. Our position will be, however, unlike that of Labour, that no deal is better than a bad deal. I find it extraordinary that the Opposition seem to think it sensible to go to the negotiating chamber expecting to have no deal.

Devolved Matters

9. **Natalie McGarry** (Glasgow East) (Ind): What discussions he has had with the Attorney General on which provisions in the great repeal Bill may require the Government to legislate on devolved matters before the UK leaves the EU. [909878]

The Minister of State, Department for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Jones): We have regular discussions with ministerial colleagues, including my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney General. We fully respect the Sewel convention and have been working closely with the devolved Administrations, particularly through the Joint Ministerial Committee on EU Negotiations.

Natalie McGarry: Before asking my last question in this House, may I thank you, Mr Speaker, your staff, and the outstanding House staff across all areas, and wish colleagues right across the House every success in the coming months?

Can the Minister confirm whether the great repeal Bill will require legislative consent from the devolved Assemblies—yes or no?

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Lady very much for her warm remarks, which are very much appreciated.

Mr Jones: Similarly, Mr Speaker, may I express my best wishes to the hon. Lady for the future?

The question of whether a legislative consent motion will be required for the great repeal Bill will of course depend on the form and content of the great repeal Bill, which will be published in the next Parliament.

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): Has my right hon. Friend received a report on the Scottish Affairs Committee's visit to Brussels on Monday and Tuesday this week? If so, does he share my delight that it was made absolutely clear throughout those discussions that the European Union is interested only in negotiating with the United Kingdom Government and not with the Scottish Government?

Mr Jones: Yes, I did note that. The position is quite clear—it is member states that negotiate with the European Union. Given that this country voted as a single country to leave the European Union, we should be expecting the support of the Scottish National party and not what it is doing at the moment.

18. [909889] **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): Actually, by the Tories' logic, Scotland voted twice to remain in the European Union because they told us in 2014 that a vote against independence was a vote to remain in the European Union.

Statutory instruments are not usually subject to a legislative consent motion, but if statutory instruments that affect devolved areas are going to be created as a result of the great repeal Bill, will the Government commit to ensuring that there is consent from the devolved Assemblies before they take effect?

Mr Jones: It is very likely that the necessary competencies will be created to allow the devolved Assemblies themselves to make those statutory instruments.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Many have criticised the Government's plans to make minor and technical changes to legislation using so-called Henry VIII powers, but this is in fact no more than plans to use delegated legislation. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the use of delegated legislation is actually an established part of the legislative procedures used in this House?

Mr Jones: Yes, my hon. Friend is entirely right. Any such statutory instruments would be made pursuant to statute, which would of course go through this House and the other place in the normal way.

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Ian Mearns. Not here.

Welsh Sheep Meat Trade

12. **Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): What steps he is taking to ensure protection of the Welsh sheep meat trade in negotiations on the UK leaving the EU. [909882]

The Minister of State, Department for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Jones): The Government are working hard to get the very best deal for the United Kingdom—a free trade deal with the EU that is more ambitious than any other trade deal yet struck. We are considering and analysing the impact of future trading arrangements on all sectors of our economy, including agriculture, developing policies to support our vision for a global Britain that is producing more, selling more and exporting more.

Paul Flynn: That answer was characteristically vacuous and meaningless: could the Minister try to concentrate? Welsh farmers are saying that the door is open to New Zealand competition that could clear Welsh lamb off the shelves because of the price, and the door is not open to new markets in the United States, although that was promised. The Minister will understand the cultural priority of maintaining life on Welsh farms, where one of the most ancient languages in the whole of Europe prospers at its purest and best. Is it not a major priority for the Government to give a guarantee to Welsh farmers?

Mr Jones: May I say that I represent many more Welsh farmers than the hon. Gentleman does, and that I intend to continue to do so after the general election? The Government are intent on securing the best possible free trade agreement for this country, which will benefit all farmers, including Welsh farmers. Furthermore, we intend to ensure that Welsh exports continue after the general election.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: If the hon. Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson) wishes to contribute on the matter of the Welsh sheep meat trade, she is welcome to do so.

Dr Johnson: I do, Mr Speaker; thank you. Welsh sheep are an important part of the farming sector in Wales, but the farming community as a whole, throughout the UK, is looking for reassurance that it will be supported as we leave the European Union. I have a very large agricultural sector in Sleaford and North Hykeham, and I would be grateful for the Secretary of State's reassurance that the farming sector will be protected as we leave the European Union.

Mr David Jones: My hon. Friend is entirely right. The agricultural sector is of particular importance in the forthcoming negotiations. We have already increased the number of exports from the British farming sector. We are currently in the process, for example, of negotiations to open the market for UK lamb to Saudi Arabia. There are a host of other opportunities out there, which will be available to us once we have left the European Union.

Mr Speaker: I call Tom Pursglove on question 15. *[Interruption.]* Aah, excellent! I was rather hoping that the hon. Member for Crawley (Henry Smith) would beetle into the Chamber just in time. In fact, I was prolonging the previous exchange in the confident expectation that he would arrive. He has done so, so we will reinstate question 13.

Aerospace Industry

13. **Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): What recent discussions his Department has had with the aerospace industry on the negotiations for the UK leaving the EU. [909883]

19. **Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): What recent discussions his Department has had with the aerospace industry on the negotiations for the UK leaving the EU. [909890]

The Minister of State, Department for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Jones): Engagement with industry is a central element of our plan to build a national consensus around our negotiating position. The Department has been listening and talking to aerospace manufacturers and industry groups across the UK and internationally, including Rolls-Royce, Airbus, ADS and the aerospace growth partnership.

Henry Smith: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for your forbearance, if nothing else. *[Interruption.]* And for much more. Does my right hon. Friend the Minister welcome Boeing's investment in the new hangar maintenance facility at Gatwick airport as proof of the expanding aviation sector, even post Brexit?

Mr Jones: Yes, indeed. Boeing has announced 100 new jobs at its facility at Gatwick. Aviation and the aerospace industry are vital parts of our economy, and we have no doubt that they will continue to thrive after we have left the European Union.

Robert Courts: I am grateful to the Minister for mentioning Airbus, which has a very large component at RAF Brize Norton in my constituency. Will the Minister please tell me what discussions he has had with such companies to reassure them that in a post-Brexit Britain, not only will their supply chains be secure, but they will be well placed to make the most of a global, outward-facing Britain?

Mr Jones: I have had several discussions with various aerospace companies, including Airbus, which I met in Bristol recently. We do understand that supply chains across Europe are heavily integrated, but there is a clear mutual interest in agreeing trading arrangements. The British aerospace industry is the most important in Europe, and there is a mutual interest in ensuring that the relationships persist beyond Brexit.

Trade and Customs Agreement

14. **Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): What discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for International Trade on securing a comprehensive trade and customs agreement which provides the exact same benefits which the UK receives as a member of the single market and customs union. [909885]

The Minister of State, Department for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Jones): I think it is me again, Sir. This question was due to be linked with Question 10. The ministerial team have frequent discussions with colleagues across Departments, including the Department for International Trade, on our future relationship with the European Union. One of the Government's key objectives in the negotiations is to secure a mutually beneficial customs agreement. We are also committed to pursuing a bold and ambitious free trade agreement of greater scope and ambition than any such agreement before it.

Alex Cunningham: In the circumstances, perhaps I should be glad to get any answer. Does the Minister agree with the International Trade Secretary that it needs to be easier to hire and fire workers in the UK?

Mr Jones: Our commitment to the security of workers' rights has been well stated many times—indeed, we actually held a debate in Government time to ensure that that point was well made—and I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman should raise the issue yet again.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): The Minister of State, as a near constituency neighbour, will know that car manufacturing is a vital part of the Shropshire economy. Will he give an undertaking to my constituents today that he will ensure that any free trade agreement will protect car manufacturing not only in Shropshire, but throughout the west midlands and the United Kingdom?

Mr Jones: A free trade agreement would clearly be of huge benefit not only to Land Rover in Shropshire, but to many other motor manufacturers around the country. As I have said, we are seeking an ambitious free trade agreement that will provide a host of opportunities right across the world for our manufacturers.

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): The Minister will know that paragraph 19 of the European Council's draft guidelines for the negotiations on the future EU-UK relationship makes it clear that there must be "a level playing field in terms of competition", with the same social and environmental standards. Does the Minister agree with that principle, and is he therefore be happy to see it embedded in the agreement?

Mr Jones: First, these are the draft guidelines; the final guidelines will not be issued until 29 April. They are the guidelines under which the European Union wants us to operate the discussions, but it remains to be seen what our response will be.

Mr Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): Although my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) and I are of one mind, we have two questions—and only one knighthood.

The Government are right to seek a continuing free trade agreement with the European Union: it will be in the interests of the European Union as well as in ours, and it will be the first, best outcome. However, Ministers cannot admit what I think is quite likely, which is that politics may trump economics and that there may be no deal. Will they therefore confirm that in those circumstances we will go to a good, second-best outcome, which is trading on most favoured nation terms, as do the European Union's most successful partners—the USA, China, Japan and Russia? It would mean an average tariff of 4%, which is relatively small beer compared with a 15% improvement in competitiveness because of the exchange rate, while saving £10 billion a year, which is equivalent to a 7% tariff on our exports.

Mr Jones: Let me say quite clearly that the Government's ambition and intention are to achieve the best possible free trade agreement with our EU partners. However, our position is also that we expect to negotiate toughly and—unlike Labour's, our position will be made clear to the European Union—that we are prepared to walk away from the negotiating table if it is not possible to achieve a deal that suits us.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): When the Secretary of State gave evidence to the Exiting the European Union Committee, he told me that the Government had not undertaken any economic assessment of the impact of Brexit since he had been in his post. Will the Minister update the House on whether there has been any progress, and when it comes to publishing the Government's final deal, will he ensure that it includes an economic assessment of the impact of that deal and an economic assessment of the impact of no deal, so that my constituents and the country can make up their minds themselves about whether no deal is indeed better than a bad deal?

Mr Jones: The Department has carried out an in-depth assessment right across 50 sectors of the economy. We have made it clear, however, that it is not in the national interest for us to produce a running commentary on the way in which we are developing our negotiating position, and that will remain the case.

Support for Farmers

15. **Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on support for farmers after the UK leaves the EU. [909886]

The Minister of State, Department for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Jones): It is me again, Mr Speaker. We are working closely with colleagues across Government to assess the impacts that withdrawal from the EU will

have across a number of sectors in cross-cutting areas. The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is considering the best possible options for a future agricultural land use policy that specifically benefits British farming, the countryside and the environment.

Tom Pursglove: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for the last-day-of-term test earlier.

I am very grateful to the Minister for his answer. The UK's exit from the European Union clearly provides many new and exciting opportunities for our farmers, but in order to get the policy right, what work is going on alongside the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to engage fully with our farmers and the sector more generally? Of course, Ministers would be very welcome at any time to come and engage with my farmers in Corby and east Northamptonshire.

Mr Jones: We are presented with an unprecedented opportunity to redesign agricultural policies to suit the British agricultural industry. We are, indeed, meeting a number of interested parties and stakeholders from the agricultural sector. I have had meetings with all the British farming unions, the National Pig Association, the Country Land and Business Association and the International Meat Trade Association, to name but a few.

Scottish Food and Drink Sector

16. **Steven Paterson** (Stirling) (SNP): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the effect on the Scottish food and drink sector of the UK leaving the EU. [909887]

The Minister of State, Department for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Jones): We are working closely with colleagues across Government to assess the impacts that withdrawal from the EU will have across a number of sectors in cross-cutting areas. I have had meetings with a number of stakeholders from the Scottish food and drink sector, including NFU Scotland, the Scotch Whisky Association, the Scottish Fishermen's Federation and the Food and Drink Federation.

Steven Paterson: I am grateful for that answer. The Stirling constituency boasts many world-class food and drink companies, such as the Glengoyne and Deansston distilleries and Graham's the Family Dairy. What assurances can the Minister give me, if any, that during the Brexit negotiations, access to the important EU market for those excellent companies will be maintained and protected?

Mr Jones: Certainly, as I have said already, we are seeking a free trade agreement that would continue to secure such access. The Scotch Whisky Association has said that there are enormous opportunities for the sector if the UK can secure favourable bilateral trade deals across other export markets. India, for example, is a growing market for Scotch whisky, but we are being held back by a 150% tariff. The hon. Gentleman should look for the opportunities of Brexit, not be a wet blanket.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): Since the SNP Government came to office in 2007, the value of Scottish food exports has more than doubled, with businesses in my constituency enjoying

excellent levels of growth. What impact assessment has the Department carried out on the impact of Brexit on such excellent growth, or is there simply a fingers-crossed approach? This morning at 9.21, I received a response from the Scotland Office to a question I posed to the Secretary of State for Scotland, and we now know that the Scotland Office has not made any assessment of the impact of Brexit on Scottish trade.

Mr Jones: I am surprised to hear that. As I said a moment ago, the Scotch Whisky Association itself has identified enormous opportunities from Brexit. When the hon. Lady goes back to her constituency to do a bit of campaigning, perhaps she might go to her nearest distillery and ask people there what they think.

UK Universities

17. **Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): What discussions his Department has had with UK universities on the negotiations for the UK leaving the EU. [909888]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker): The Government have provided assurances to EU students in the UK. I particularly welcome the announcement on 21 April, which confirmed that EU students applying to study at English universities in 2018-19 will remain eligible for undergraduate, masters, postgraduate and advanced learner financial support, even if the course concludes after the UK's exit from the EU. The Government want to create an environment in which the UK remains a world leader in research and academia, and continues to be home to the best universities in the world.

Jason McCartney: I echo those sentiments about international students and commend my hon. Friend for all his work on that campaign. I am very proud to have the award-winning Huddersfield University in our town. I visited its institute of railway research a couple of weeks ago. Thanks to the local enterprise partnership business growth fund, it is working on innovative rail and tram projects around the world, including in Australia. Will the Minister and his team make sure that our world-class universities are at the heart of the opportunities that Brexit brings?

Mr Walker: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to champion our world-class universities. Along with my hon. Friend the Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation, I have been meeting regularly with his higher education and innovation council, which represents the views of the university sector to us. It is very clear that UK collaborative research, both with European partners and more widely in the world, is a huge opportunity through this process.

UK Rebate

21. **Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): What the total amount of the UK rebate from the EU has been in real terms since it was introduced. [909892]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker): I thank my hon. Friend for his recent Westminster Hall debate, when this issue was discussed. As he pointed out, a

Conservative Government successfully secured the rebate in 1984, which was then introduced in 1985. Compiling an aggregate figure in real terms is a complex matter. The Government have not published such a figure, but I know that he has and estimated it to be well over £100 billion. Details of the most recent UK rebates are published in the document entitled "European Union Finances". The latest edition was published in February and reported that the UK received a rebate of £3.9 billion from the EU in 2016.

Mr Hollobone: The massive £117 billion total rebate since Margaret Thatcher negotiated it in 1984 is testament to her resolution and determination in getting the best deal for Britain and refusing to take no for an answer. Will my hon. Friend agree to emulate her negotiating style and swing the metaphorical handbag until we get the deal Britain needs?

Mr Walker: I assure my hon. Friend that, as befits the tough reputation of both our Secretary of State and the Prime Minister, we will be robust in defending the UK's national interest throughout this negotiating process. As the Prime Minister set out in her Lancaster House speech on 17 January, the days of Britain making vast contributions to the European Union every year will end. A strong, stable Government led by our right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) will be best placed to secure the best deal for the British taxpayer. Just as our first lady Prime Minister secured the rebate and value for the British taxpayer, I am sure our second will fight Britain's corner throughout the negotiations.

Topical Questions

T1. [909894] **Stephen Hammond** (Wimbledon) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Davis): Before I answer, may I start by thanking you, Mr Speaker, for your forbearance in these Question Times, and for everything else you have done for this House in the past several years?

We have a clear plan for Britain, one that fosters a deep and special new partnership with the European Union, and serves the interests of all parts of the United Kingdom. We want that new partnership to be underpinned by a comprehensive free trade agreement that gives UK companies maximum access to European markets, and European companies the same access to UK markets. Membership of the single market involves maintaining all four freedoms, including free movement of people, which is therefore inconsistent with our desire to take back control of our borders. Britain is leaving the European Union, but we are not leaving Europe. It is in both our interests to see the European Union succeed socially, politically and economically. That will be our policy in the coming years.

Stephen Hammond: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that as part of that plan the Government are committed to the putting the rights of EU citizens into British law via the great repeal Bill, and that nothing will affect those rights unless it has the consent of this House?

Mr Davis: My hon. Friend is right. One thing that I think people have missed and he has picked up on is that any change in those rights would require primary legislation in this House. In addition, our plan is to put through the great repeal Bill and have subsequent consequential primary legislation that will underpin those rights. I have made those points to many of my opposite numbers, the interlocutors for other member states, and said that this will be taken at the same time as protection of British rights abroad. They have all understood and welcomed that. I am very confident that we can get a deal that will protect all of the, I think, 4 million in very short order.

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): Let me pick up on that theme. As the Secretary of State knows, about 3 million EU nationals are very anxious about their status when we leave the EU. Labour would unilaterally guarantee their status from day one. Under this Government, all they can do is apply for consideration for permanent residency, but as the Brexit Select Committee warned in March:

“The current process for consideration of permanent residency applications is not fit for purpose”.

The Secretary of State knows how important this is. Have things improved?

Mr Davis: I respect the hon. and learned Gentleman’s concern in this area. Let me be clear about that. However, I would say to him that the system there now is not designed to deal with 3 million. That has been made plain. In fact, if he goes on the Home Office website, he will see that it says not to make an application now—there is no need to. When we move the primary legislation it will be a matter for the Home Office, but I believe it will be very simple when it comes to that point.

Keir Starmer: As the *Financial Times* reported yesterday, the Home Office is now saying, “Don’t apply”. Is that the Government’s official position for EU nationals—“Don’t apply for permanent residency”? Is that how they will deal with that anxiety?

Mr Davis: What that is about is a reflection of what is on the Home Office website, which essentially points out that EU citizens do not need to apply for their rights to be underpinned. That is the approach we are taking. The hon. and learned Gentleman should bear in mind that for the next two years, irrespective of anything that the Government do, all the existing rights and privileges continue to apply. There will be no change in that respect. Before we come to the point of exit from the European Union, we will have made that very clear in primary legislation.

T3. [909896] **Victoria Atkins** (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): From Donna Nook to Chapel St Leonards, the Lincolnshire coastline is the best place in the country for a traditional seaside holiday. However, the coastline also has pockets of deprivation, and investment in infrastructure, such as broadband, traffic solutions and renovated beach huts, are key to the local economy. Will my right hon. Friend reassure my constituents that the coastal economy, and the rural economy, will be central in preparations for our exit?

The Minister of State, Department for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Jones): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question; indeed, leaving aside the north Wales coastline, hers is one of the most beautiful in the UK. Coastal communities contribute an important part of our economy. They are part of the study that we have been undertaking, and we intend to make sure that their interests are reflected post-Brexit.

T2. [909895] **Mr Chuka Umunna** (Streatham) (Lab): The Prime Minister called the general election in the name of building unity to strengthen her EU negotiating position. However, this is the Prime Minister who sent “Go home” vans around parts of urban Britain with high immigrant populations, this is the Prime Minister who aided and abetted the most disgraceful campaign against the first Muslim Mayor of our capital city, and this is the Government who, with their hard Brexit allies, seek to call anyone who calls into question their negotiating strategy a bunch of saboteurs. Is not the truth that, far from uniting this country, this Tory Government and its Ministers have been dividing it since they took office?

Mr David Davis: If the hon. Gentleman wants an answer to that, the first place he should start is on the streets of Britain, where he will find massive support for our Prime Minister, massive respect for our Prime Minister and a belief that she will deliver the best outcome in the Brexit negotiations.

T6. [909902] **Chloe Smith** (Norwich North) (Con): Last week I met staff from Norwich manufacturing firm Teknomek, a small firm with impressive productivity and export links to Ireland and the continent. Firms such as that need the freest possible trade in services and goods between Britain and the other EU member states. Will my right hon. Friend look for security, stability, certainty and simplicity for small firms up and down the country?

Mr David Jones: We fully understand the importance of these issues to SMEs, including those in my hon. Friend’s constituency. Let me repeat for the umpteenth time in this Question Time that we are pursuing a bold and ambitious free trade agreement, which will benefit firms such as those and others around the country.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Thousands of my constituents work in Edinburgh’s financial sector, which is the second largest in the UK. Following the EU 27’s announcement this week that they intend to exclude the financial services sector from any future trade deal with the UK after Brexit, will the Minister tell me what contingency planning he is carrying out to protect my constituents’ jobs?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker): I would say to the hon. and learned Lady, as I said in answer to an earlier question, that we seek a comprehensive trade deal, which absolutely would include financial services. However, as I said previously, we have engaged with the Edinburgh financial services sector, which has been clear with us that access to European Union markets is enormously important, but even more important is its access to the United Kingdom as a whole and Scotland’s relationship with the rest of the United Kingdom.

T4. [909900] **Sir Nicholas Soames** (Mid Sussex) (Con): As my right hon. Friend proceeds with the immense task of delivering a responsible and good Brexit for the country and, most especially at these difficult times, for Mid Sussex, does he agree that we cannot pretend to be a global player without running an open economy, with an orderly, non-bureaucratic immigration policy that allows our businesses and public services to access the people and skills that they need?

Mr David Davis: The first thing I will say is that Mid Sussex is in good hands. My right hon. Friend is right: the balance that any Government strike when they control their own immigration policy and borders—which is something that he has fought for down the years—not only provides proper security and proper policy, in terms of the delivery of social services and housing, but at the same time allows our businesses, universities, research centres and financial centres to take part in the battle for talent that makes our country one of the greatest in the world.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): May I thank you, Mr Speaker, for putting up with me so tolerantly for a long time? I warn you, however, that I will make every effort to come back and be troublesome in future. May I also surprise you by asking a topical question? People such as me were remainers. We accept the will of the British people, but we are darn sure that we want a great deal for this country and we are very worried that this election will get in the way. Has the Secretary of State seen this morning's reports that the pharmaceutical industry is going to move out of Britain for two reasons? The first is Brexit and the second is the fact that we have not put sufficient resources into our national health service.

Mr Davis: Before I answer the hon. Gentleman's question, may I say that he is the one person who has got me a rebuke from Mr Speaker in the past? I look forward to him coming back and continuing that tradition. Pharmaceutical industries have relocated here and companies such as GlaxoSmithKline have increased their expenditure here. As for the other aspect of that attempt by the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry, it seemed to me to be putting pressure on the spending of the national health service. That is an issue for the Health Secretary, who will make sensible decisions in the national interest, and not in that of an individual industry.

T7. [909903] **Andrew Stephenson** (Pendle) (Con): Pendle is home to a cluster of outstanding aerospace businesses, including Euravia, Senior Aerospace Weston, Merc Aerospace, T&R Precision Engineering and, of course, the crown jewel, Rolls-Royce in Barnoldswick. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the sector is absolutely vital to the UK economy, and will he assure this House that it will have a strong voice in the negotiations under a Conservative Government?

Mr David Jones: May I say that Pendle has a strong voice going into the general election? Aerospace is a key industry for this country, which is why, as I said earlier, we have paid so much close attention to it. We will make sure that we continue to have the most important aerospace industry in Europe.

Heidi Alexander (Lewisham East) (Lab): Far from there being an extra £350 million a week to spend on the NHS following Brexit, we are likely to face an NHS staffing crisis and slower access to cancer drugs and treatments because of the loss of the European Medicines Agency. Is the Secretary of State going to put that sign on a bus in the next few weeks?

Mr David Davis: One of the oddities of the Labour party's position is that on the one hand it says, "You must represent everybody," which is entirely proper, but on the other hand it wants to revisit—

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): Where's the £350 million?

Mr Davis: I will answer the question when the heckling stops. Clearly, the hon. Gentleman is getting ready for the hustings in his constituency—they may be the last he takes part in. I am not going to revisit the arguments of the past. I am going to work on delivering the best outcome for the future.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. As this is the last day and, other than points of order, we will be suspending, my instinct is to hear colleagues who want to ask questions, but I hope that they will not expect to be heard without limit. Therefore, if colleagues now want briefly to put their questions to the esteemed Secretary of State and his colleagues, I am open to that. I call Suella Fernandes, who will speak with great brevity, I am sure.

Suella Fernandes (Fareham) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State agree that financial services in London, Edinburgh and throughout the country will be able to benefit from principles of equivalence and mutual recognition as an alternative to passporting, to ensure that that sector remains open and thriving, as stated recently by Mark Carney, the Governor of the Bank of England?

Mr Robin Walker: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We will continue to work closely with the regulators to ensure that we have some of the best, and best regulated, financial services in the world.

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): The Secretary of State is a wise man, and we all read his wise article in *The Irish Times* on 5 September last year, in which he said that Ireland did not have to choose between Europe and the United Kingdom but could commit itself to expanded trade and commerce with both. Ireland is a big market for England, but it is not the biggest. Given the Secretary of State's wise words in Ireland, what patience has he with those who suggest that England would want trade barriers with its largest market in Europe, and, with exports worth £50 billion, its second largest export market in the world—Scotland?

Mr Davis: Before I answer the right hon. Gentleman's question, let me say this to him. He is an old friend of mine, and, politics notwithstanding, I wish him well. As for the answer to his question, I do not want to see any trade barriers within the United Kingdom, which, of course, is why I support the Union.

Alistair Burt (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): While all of us in this place want a good negotiated settlement, it is vital to some, not least those in the agricultural sector, which stands to lose significantly if there is no deal. Will my right hon. Friend continue to reassure us that despite the necessary shorthand of our approach to the negotiations, the need for the agricultural sector to be secure is uppermost in his mind, and that the sector will not be disadvantaged either by no deal or by the terms of trade in new arrangements with other countries?

Mr Davis: My right hon. Friend is right to suggest that the agricultural sector is the most sensitive to the issue of tariffs, and indeed to the issue of customs, because of the nature of the product, which, for instance, is often biodegradable. However, that is also true the other way round. We are an enormous market for France, Bavaria and many other agricultural areas in Europe. We have at dead centre the aim of securing frictionless trade in that sector in the future, and we are confident that it is in the interests of the whole European Union, not just us.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State tell us why we are going into this premature election? Those of us who voted to remain in the EU have fully accepted the decision that was made, and voted for the triggering of article 50, as did those in the other House; so that is not the reason. Will the Secretary of State confess today that the real reason we are having this election is the Government's wish to escape from the promise that they made two years ago—a five-year promise—not to raise taxes, and to respect the triple lock? Is it not true that what lies ahead on the economic front is a great sinkhole into which our economy will fall in a tailspin?

Mr Davis: I note the attention paid to your call for short questions, Mr Speaker, but I will give the hon. Gentleman's question a short answer. Throughout this process the Labour party has maintained its interesting schizophrenia, first saying, "We respect the outcome of the referendum", and then, at every turn, trying to thwart it. Labour Members say, "You have a mandate to leave, but not on those terms." Well, when the election is over, we will have a mandate on those terms.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Will the Secretary of State consider holding a west midlands Brexit summit with the new mayor of the west midlands—who we hope will be Andy Street—and with key regional businesses, so that we can ensure that the interests of the west midlands are considered in the Brexit negotiations and that Brexit delivers for the west midlands as well as for the rest of the country?

Mr Davis: One of the best things that could happen to the west midlands would be the election of Andy Street, and I will make time to see him as soon as he is elected.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): London is the pre-eminent economic force in the country. What assistance and co-operation has my right hon. Friend received from the Mayor of London and, indeed, local authorities in London, to ensure that we have a smooth, clean Brexit that benefits the capital and the country as a whole?

Mr Davis: My hon. Friend is dead right. The financial sector in London is, of course, the largest, but it is not the only one that is important. We should not forget that Scotland has a major financial sector. All the Ministers in my Department, the relevant Ministers in the Treasury, and, when appropriate, the relevant Ministers in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy have been in constant communication with the whole sector, with all the representative groups in the sector and, indeed, with a large number of companies in the sector.

To give him his due, I have also received representations from Sadiq Khan, the Mayor of London, and have had very useful conversations with him. He has had the grace to recognise that we in the Government also have the best interests of London at heart.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): What kind of deal does the Secretary of State think he is likely to get if he and the Government refuse to pay their dues in Europe? Surely negotiations are about give and take.

Mr Davis: It is interesting that the Scottish National party wants to give €60 billion; I had not realised that up until now.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): My constituents in Bromley and Chislehurst welcome the emphasis given to financial services, our largest employer. Does the Secretary of State also recognise that financial services are important to the Crown dependencies, which require protocol 3 access, which will be lost upon our leaving the EU, and also to the British overseas territory of Gibraltar? Will he make sure that those two key areas also get the full benefit of our ambitious free trade deal?

Mr Davis: My hon. Friend is just about old enough to remember that I have had to defend Gibraltar before. We succeeded then; we will succeed now.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Blaenau Gwent was a net beneficiary from the EU. To boost our economy, we need continuous investment for jobs, so will the Minister commit to the same high levels of infrastructure investment for the future?

Mr David Jones: The hon. Gentleman will know that the Government have guaranteed structural fund payments to 2020. He must also understand that responsibility for delivering infrastructure in Wales lies with the Welsh Assembly Government, so no doubt he will be speaking to his colleagues as soon as Parliament has risen.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: I thought we were about to hear the mellifluous tones of the hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr Bacon), who has periodically bobbed and then ceased to do so, but we are gratified if we are going to hear the hon. Gentleman.

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): I am grateful to you, Mr Speaker. I had earlier wished to ask about the pig industry, a very important industry across East Anglia. Can the Minister tell us what prospects he sees for the industry? It is an industry that does not have

subsidy from the public purse, but which has made huge gains, particularly in China where the pigs' ear deal added £5 per carcass? What prospects does he see for this important sector?

Mr Jones: Given my hon. Friend's surname, I am sure that he will be declaring his interest. I assure him that the Government fully understand the importance of pigmeat to the economy of this country. I have had a meeting with the National Pig Association, and I am glad to say that it is very positive about the future.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): Can the Secretary of State name one power or policy area that he can definitely guarantee will be devolved to the Scottish Parliament in the event of Brexit?

Mr Davis: All the ones it currently has, for a start, and some more.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): In an earlier question reference was made to the English regions, which are of course an EU construction. They divide great counties such as Lincolnshire between the east midlands and Yorkshire and the Humber. Is it too much to expect a future Government to scrap these regions when we regain our independence, or at the very least ensure that Lincolnshire is in one of them?

Mr Davis: All I can say is that my hon. Friend tempts me too much.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Taking into account the state of devolution, how will Northern Ireland be represented in the preparations for the United Kingdom to leave the EU, and, specifically, how will the Minister be able to meet the intricate needs of Northern Ireland at this time?

Mr Robin Walker: We continue to urge all parties to come together so that the devolved Assembly can be restored and we can engage with all parties and communities in Northern Ireland to ensure that their views are represented throughout this period. Earlier this week I attended the British Irish Chamber of Commerce, where there was huge interest in maintaining strong and positive relations between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and the UK.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): How can any negotiator achieve any concession from any other negotiator if it is known in advance that he will not walk away if no concessions are given?

Mr Davis: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. He crystallises the point on "no deal is better than a bad deal", and he clearly demonstrates why the Labour proposal, apart from being completely impractical, would never be deliverable.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Can the Secretary of State guarantee regional aid for the west midlands after Britain leaves the EU? More importantly, we have a very fine candidate for the mayor's job in the west midlands: Siôn Simon.

Mr Jones: The west midlands is certainly one of the powerhouses of this country that will be important for powering the economy after we have left the European Union. These are matters that will be discussed in the fullness of time with the new mayor, Andy Street.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): Three years ago, David Cameron and I launched my first election campaign, at British Sugar in Newark. Three years—and approaching three elections—later, the sugar industry continues to employ hundreds of my constituents in Nottinghamshire, keeping the fields of the county full of rich beet crop. Furthermore, the sugar industry is intensely optimistic about the prospects for Brexit. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has acquired a reputation as something of a bruiser over the years, but with his 13 years of experience at Tate & Lyle, will he retain his sweet tooth as he approaches the negotiations?

Mr Davis: I must admit that I am standing here wondering whether I should declare an interest, on behalf of my pension fund if nothing else. Of course we will fight for the interests of the sugar industry as much as we do for everything else, and we will be successful.

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): Energy is the largest sector in my constituency. We have wind farms, nuclear power and gas. We even have a tunnel under the bay to carry electrical cables from one end of Cumbria down into Lancashire. EDF Energy is the largest employer in the constituency, and it is continually reinvesting and has plans to expand. Do my right hon. and hon. Friends agree that this is a sign of things to come?

Mr Walker: We have had a number of meetings with the energy industry, including EDF Energy. I would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend to discuss this further, because ensuring that we continue to have the energy to power the British economy in the years ahead will be a vital part of our considerations.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): Can the Minister confirm that Britain's withdrawal from the EU will not affect the border and immigration controls that people from the EU are currently subjected to as they enter the United Kingdom?

Mr Davis: Clearly it is part of our negotiating aims to have free and frictionless travel as well as trade. Obviously there will be more control of our borders in the future, but it will not be designed to inconvenience people. It will be control designed to deliver the national interest and to keep this a free and open country that welcomes people from all over the world in the way we have done for centuries and will do for centuries to come. Was that the last question, Mr Speaker?

Mr Speaker: It was indeed.

Mr Davis: In that case, I should like to wish everyone in the House a happy six weeks, and I look forward to seeing some of them here again.

Mr Speaker: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for what he has said, and also for his kind remarks about me earlier.

Points of Order

10.52 am

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Have you had any notification of a statement from the Minister at the Cabinet Office—or, indeed, the Prime Minister herself—on the Channel 4 report of last evening, which suggested that the Crown Prosecution Service has to report on 30 individuals for possible prosecution between 20 May and the early part of June? Given that many of them are Members of this House, we must consider the implications that that could have for the reporting and coverage of any such decision and the position of the candidates during an election campaign. It would be a scandal of enormous proportions if any attempt had been made to influence the timing of any such reports. Has any provision been made for coping with such an eventuality if it occurs during an election campaign? The Prime Minister has decided to reappoint all of the campaign team responsible for this boorach, who have already been fined by the Electoral Commission, but that campaign team—up to and including Lynton Crosby—having successfully bought one election, must not be allowed to buy another.

Mr Speaker: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his point of order. My response is as follows: the rules governing the conduct of elections are not a matter for the Chair. I hope that the House will understand that, although I have given the right hon. Gentleman a full opportunity to register his concerns, I have no intention of being drawn into this matter. That would be quite improper. What the police and the Crown Prosecution Service do, and when, is a matter for them. Members with views on these matters can, and doubtless will, express them. I will express no view on the matter.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker—

Mr Speaker: Very well. I am not sure it is, but I will give the hon. Gentleman the benefit of the doubt.

Mr Skinner: I raised this matter with the Prime Minister a week ago yesterday—this is a matter for you really, Mr Speaker—and did not get an answer from her. I was then fortunate enough to be called by you to raise the matter again with the Secretary of State for Justice and, once more, I did not receive a reply from the Government. What has now emerged is that you, in the Chair, are saying, “It is not a matter for me.” The Prime Minister did not respond to my accusation that the election should not have been called. She did not get a revelation on the Welsh hills; she called a snap election to try to beat the Crown Prosecution Service. That is what this election is all about, and that is why it is a point of order for you, Sir.

Mr Speaker: The nature of the system is as has been described. I think that there will be a general acceptance that the police and the prosecuting authorities have responsibility in these matters. My responsibility is most certainly to hear colleagues and to err on the side of latitude in hearing colleagues who want to raise points of order, and I think that I have done that very fairly. I have never ducked anything that is my responsibility, but I think that I know that which is not.

Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. There are long-standing problems with academy sponsor AET—the Academies Enterprise Trust. Yesterday, it unceremoniously sacked the board of governors of Sandown Bay Academy on the Isle of Wight. There is a great deal of concern about local accountability being dispensed with immediately before this House is dissolved. What steps can be taken before 8 June to make AET accountable for its actions?

Mr Speaker: I think that there are two answers to the hon. Gentleman, and I respect him for raising a matter of real concern to him and doubtless to many others. First, his concerns can and doubtless will be expressed during the election campaign. Conversations do not cease, and he must avail himself of the opportunities that will be forthcoming, that will present themselves or that he will create.

Secondly, I make the constitutional point that the government of this country continues. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to raise his concerns with relevant Ministers, it is absolutely open to him to do that, but there is no further opportunity for the matters to be aired in this Chamber.

The hon. Gentleman, to use a word deployed by the right hon. Member for Chelmsford (Sir Simon Burns) yesterday, has demonstrated again his perspicacity, upon which I congratulate him.

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The threat of deportation hangs over the head of my constituent Mr Pride Mbi, who originates from the Anglophone minority in Cameroon. I have been in correspondence with the Home Office about the lack of published guidance for Cameroon given that Pride has been a long-standing champion of the rights of English-speaking Cameroonians, who face a very specific threat in that country. I am concerned that, as Parliament is to be dissolved and as the civil service is already in purdah, my options for raising this case are extremely limited. With the threat of deportation remaining, can you advise me on how I will be able to ensure that Pride’s position is properly considered?

Mr Speaker: The short answer is that I can advise the hon. Gentleman that he should continue his casework. Casework continues to be conducted during election campaigns, and in the friendliest and politest possible way I say to the hon. Gentleman, who I am sure is well capable of this, that he must balance whatever activities he is undertaking in the attempted pursuit of his re-election—by knocking on doors, delivering leaflets or engaging in public meetings—with his continued diligent attention to his casework on behalf of constituents. That is what he must do. He is going to be a busy bee, but he will not be alone in that regard.

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

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: A specialist delicacy must be kept until a bit later.

Hannah Bardell: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You will be aware that a number of reports are going to be coming out from various Committees, including the Public Accounts Committee. What can he do to support

[Hannah Bardell]

me in my efforts to make sure that this House gets the opportunity to scrutinise the report properly—I do not wish to foresee its results—on Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs closures, which will affect my constituents? I take on board the point he makes about government continuing, but the Government must not put out their trash and be allowed not to be properly scrutinised. What can he do to support me in my efforts to make sure that those reports are properly scrutinised and no decisions are made about jobs in my constituency until we return after the election?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her point of order. If when she says, “What can he do,” she means me, I must be honest with her and say that I can do absolutely nothing to assist her in the course of the election campaign, for the simple reason—this is an inescapable fact and always has been—that when the House has been dissolved, the House does not meet. When the House does not meet, there is no Speaker in the Chair and there are no exchanges on these green Benches. However, the documents to which she refers are, or when they are published will be, public documents, so she will be able to study them carefully, marshal her arguments and write to Ministers. If she wishes to expatiate on these important matters in her constituency, it is perfectly open to her to do so—and I have a feeling she probably will.

Mr Sheerman *rose*—

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I think that I must take the hon. Gentleman now, as he is looking pained.

Mr Sheerman: I am actually very happy. On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In all my years in this House, I have never heard of a case of bullying in this House of one Member by another, but I have just heard of such a case. The House will not be sitting for some time now, but you will be here, and I am sure that you would not approve of one Member acting in a bullying way toward another in the environs of this House. This case is shameful. I am not going to name names, but it involves a male Government Member and an Opposition female Member. I do not want an inquiry on it, but I do want a set of rules that state that verbal or any other sort of bullying of one Member by another is not allowed in this House or anywhere in its environs.

Mr Speaker: There is a code of conduct, which binds all Members. I manifestly cannot comment on a particular case, not least because the hon. Gentleman has not given and would not give me—and I would not ask him to give me—the details. But the principle that the code of conduct must be observed is sacrosanct, and if he does know—I am sure he does, by definition—of the personalities involved, it may be that, as he is extremely experienced, he can remind Members of that code of conduct.

Mr Sheerman: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. This was so serious that Whips on both sides of the House were involved, so I am sure you could make the inquiries to find out the facts of the matter.

Mr Speaker: I am very happy to inquire of the respective Whips Offices, as the hon. Gentleman has given me an indication that his concern relates to a Member from each of the two sides of the House. I am happy to make that inquiry, but I do not want to raise his expectations, because it is not for me to act as arbiter in the matter, unless the alleged conduct relates to proceedings in the Chamber, in which case I would take a very definite and distinct interest. The holding response I will give him, which I think reasonable, is that I am happy to make limited but necessary inquiries of a kind that I think are proper for me to make.

Seema Malhotra: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. On Tuesday, my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) raised the devastating case of baby Charlie Gard, whose family live in her and my constituency. Her question was met with short shrift by the Government. This continues to be an incredibly tough time for the family, and our hearts go out to Connie and Chris, the parents, as they continue their campaign, which is supported by the huge well of support from those known now as “Charlie’s army”. I appreciate that Parliament is being cut short by this election, but is it not right that the family continue to get the support they need and that there is clarity on entitlement to legal aid in such cases? I call on the Justice Secretary also to do all that she can, and I would like to put on the record my support today for the family and my view that, particularly in this complex case, it should be the parents who have the final say on the treatment of their son.

Mr Speaker: I hope that the hon. Lady will understand if I feel that almost everything that could properly be said on that matter today has just been said by the hon. Lady. In so far as she requires any indication from me on what might usefully be done in the days or weeks ahead, my counsel to her would be similar to that which I proffered to the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield)—namely, that casework continues. The hon. Lady should feel free and emboldened to make representations in pursuit of justice and closure for the family concerned. I thank her for raising this matter and putting it on the record, and I am sure she will want to share it with those on whose behalf she has spoken.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I wish to raise a matter that strikes right at the heart of the integrity of our democratic system. It is based on the final report of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, as well as two articles in *The House* magazine, one by a Conservative Member and one by a Labour Member, all of which sound notes of alarm that our electoral system is the most vulnerable it has been since 1880. There is powerful evidence of foreign Governments interfering in the elections in America and possibly here. There is also overwhelming evidence of money being paid in huge amounts, entirely invisible to the system, by the use of methods including algorithms, botnets and artificial intelligence in a manner understood by nobody except those who participate in it. We should be vigilant in this election, because the Electoral Commission does not have the tools to deal with interference of this kind, and we are trying to run a modern election with the tools of the 19th century.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. He has registered a strong and deeply felt concern, and it is now on the record. It is not, however, a matter for me, and I do not say that flippantly. Algorithms are certainly not a matter for the Chair, and I am sure that colleagues will be greatly reassured to hear me say that. The wider issues are ones for us all.

The hon. Gentleman, who has now served in this House without interruption for three decades, the overwhelming majority of which, by his choice, has been as a Back-Bench Member, has demonstrated once again, not least for the benefit of Members completing their first Parliament, that he has written the textbook on how to be a Back Bencher. He has written the textbook in that he has published such a book, which is a well-thumbed tome of which I am proud to possess and to have read a copy, and he has written the textbook in the sense that he exploits—I use that word non-pejoratively—every last opportunity to give voice to his concerns. Unless someone is about to surprise me gratuitously, his has been the last point of order. I thank him, and I hope that we can leave it there.

The sitting is suspended. Shortly before the sitting resumes, I shall cause the Division bells to be sounded.

11.8 am

Sitting suspended.

MESSAGE TO ATTEND THE LORDS COMMISSIONERS

5.20 pm

Message to attend the Lords Commissioners delivered by the Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod.

The Speaker, with the House, went up to hear Her Majesty's Commission; on their return, the Speaker sat in the Clerk's place at the Table.

ROYAL ASSENT

Mr Speaker: I have to acquaint the House that the House has been to the House of Peers where a Commission under the Great Seal was read, authorising the Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Finance Act 2017

Parking Places (Variation of Charges) Act 2017

Broadcasting (Radio Multiplex Services) Act 2017

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

Intellectual Property (Unjustified Threats) Act 2017

National Citizen Service Act 2017

Children and Social Work Act 2017

Pension Schemes Act 2017

Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Ratification of Convention) Act 2017

Technical and Further Education Act 2017

Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017

Bus Services Act 2017

Criminal Finances Act 2017

Health Service Medical Supplies (Costs) Act 2017

Northern Ireland (Ministerial Appointments and Regional Rates) Act 2017

Local Audit (Public Access to Documents) Act 2017

Merchant Shipping (Homosexual Conduct) Act 2017

Guardianship (Missing Persons) Act 2017

Farriers (Registration) Act 2017

Higher Education and Research Act 2017

Digital Economy Act 2017

Faversham Oyster Fishery Company Act 2017

Her Majesty's Most Gracious Speech

Mr Speaker: I have further to acquaint the House that the Leader of the House of Lords, one of the Lords Commissioners, delivered Her Majesty's Most Gracious Speech to both Houses of Parliament, in pursuance of Her Majesty's Command. For greater accuracy I have obtained a copy, and also directed that the terms of the Speech be printed in the *Journal* of this House. Copies are being made available in the Vote Office.

The Speech was as follows:

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

My Government has pursued a programme that has delivered stability, security and strong leadership, and begun the task of making Britain a country that works for everyone. My Ministers have brought forward measures to build a stronger economy, a fairer society, and a more united nation, while also acting to counter threats to national security and to build a more outward-looking global Britain.

The defence of the Realm has remained an utmost priority for my Government. Legislation was passed to ensure that law enforcement, security and intelligence agencies have the necessary powers to disrupt terrorist attacks within a framework of robust oversight.

My Government has continued with a programme to reform the criminal justice system. New legislation passed in this session will help to make the police and fire services still more capable, efficient and locally accountable.

Building on the success of last year's London Anti-Corruption Summit, legislation was introduced to strengthen powers to tackle money laundering, seize criminal assets and combat terrorist financing.

To build a stronger economy, my Government has taken forward a range of measures as part of its plan for a stronger Britain, so the country is well placed to exploit new opportunities in the global economy and to ensure the benefits are spread throughout the entire country.

To ensure that the United Kingdom remains a leader in developing new technologies, draft legislation was published setting out a new framework to support the growing commercial spaceflight industry. To foster innovation and to support the creative industries, legislation was enacted to reform the law on intellectual property.

My Ministers have continued to prioritise investment in infrastructure projects to ensure that the economy and local communities can continue to grow and prosper. Legislation has been passed to support the building of a high-speed railway from London to Birmingham and to allow for better local bus services in England.

My Government has also legislated to ensure that all households can access fast broadband and allow new telecommunications infrastructure to be rolled out across the nation. Legislation has been passed to give communities more control over housing developments in their area.

To build a fairer society, my Government has brought forward measures to protect the most vulnerable and to drive greater social reform so that every child has the chance to make the most of their talents. To this end, legislation has been passed to enable a world-class technical education system that will provide opportunities for all young people.

Legislation has been passed to improve children's social care in England and to put the National Citizen Service on a permanent footing. My Government also supported legislation to tackle the scourge of homelessness and domestic violence.

Provision has been made to help the lowest-income families save for the future with a new Help to Save scheme, to help young people save for the long-term with a Lifetime ISA, and to protect pension schemes. In recognition of the important role charities play, legislation has been enacted to help charities and community amateur sports clubs by simplifying the Gift Aid Small Donations Scheme.

A new Act will enable the National Health Service, and the taxpayer, to secure better value for money from the growing cost of medicines.

To build a more united nation, my Government has made it a priority to strengthen the union between all parts of the United Kingdom. Legislation was passed to establish a long-term devolution settlement in Wales and, in England, significant new powers have been devolved to directly elected mayors. My Government has taken steps to enable the resumption of devolved government in Northern Ireland when an agreement is reached between political parties to form an executive.

To deliver the result of the 2016 referendum, Parliament approved legislation allowing the United Kingdom formally to signal its intent to withdraw from the European Union.

My Government has worked to ensure that a global Britain plays a leading role in world affairs and provided assistance to British citizens overseas.

In order to bolster the United Kingdom's role in developing countries, new legislation will allow further investment to create more jobs and boost economic growth in the poorest countries in Africa and South Asia. Legislation was also enacted to protect cultural property in times of war.

The Duke of Edinburgh and I were pleased to welcome His Excellency the President of the Republic of Colombia in November, strengthening the United Kingdom's friendship with an important partner in Latin America.

My Ministers have established a close relationship with the new administration in the United States of America.

My Government has continued to play a leading role in the global coalition against Daesh and deployed British forces in Estonia and Poland as part of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence, while maintaining the European Union consensus in favour of sanctions against Russia.

My Ministers have pursued a campaign against modern slavery and helped to secure pledges of four point six billion pounds for the humanitarian crisis in Syria during a conference in Brussels in April.

Members of the House of Commons

I thank you for the provisions which you have made for the work and dignity of the Crown and for the public services.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may rest upon your counsels.

PROROGATION

Mr Speaker: The Commission was also for proroguing this present Parliament, and the Leader of the House of Lords said:

“My Lords and Members of the House of Commons:

By virtue of Her Majesty's Commission which has now been read, we do, in Her Majesty's name, and in obedience to Her Majesty's Commands, prorogue this Parliament to Tuesday the second day of this May to be then here holden, and this Parliament is accordingly prorogued to Tuesday the second day of May.”

*End of the Second Session (opened on 18 May 2015)
of the Fifty-Sixth Parliament of the United Kingdom of
Great Britain and Northern Ireland in the Sixty-Sixth
Year of the Reign of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the
Second.*

Written Statement

Thursday 27 April 2017

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

General Affairs Council: April 2017

The Minister of State, Department for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Jones): I attended the General Affairs Council on 25 April 2017. The meeting was held in Luxembourg and chaired by the Maltese presidency.

The meeting was dedicated to cohesion policy and the agenda items included modification of the common provisions regulation; bringing cohesion policy closer to citizens; and Council conclusions on macro-regional strategies.

A provisional report of the meeting and the conclusions adopted can be found on the Council of the European Union's website at:

<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/gac/2017/04/25/>

Modification of the common provisions regulation

The presidency provided an update on the proposed revision of the common provisions regulation, which sought to provide a higher level of EU cohesion funding

in response to natural disasters. The Committee of Permanent Representatives has agreed a compromise and a discussion between the European Parliament, the Council and European Commission was scheduled for 3 May.

The presidency also provided an update on the "omnibus" regulation proposed by the European Commission to simplify cohesion funding and announced that it would begin discussions with the European Parliament on this matter as soon as possible.

Council conclusions on bringing cohesion policy closer to citizens

The presidency reiterated their views on the benefits of cohesion policy but recognised that funding pressures continued and that a lack of awareness of the EU's contributions towards cohesion policy remained. I intervened to welcome the improvements to cohesion funding during the current period but recognised that further innovation should be encouraged. I also recalled the Prime Minister's commitment that the UK would seek a fair settlement of its rights and obligations during the negotiations on the UK's departure from the EU.

Council conclusions on macro-regional strategies

The presidency highlighted progress in developing macro-regional strategies. Discussions on the conclusions were agreed.

[HCWS620]

Petitions

Thursday 27 April 2017

OBSERVATIONS

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Proposed development of two distribution buildings on land South of Meadow Lane, Raunds

The petition of residents of the UK,

Declares that residents of Raunds and Stanwick wish to oppose the planning application Ref.16/02119/FUL for a proposed development of two distribution buildings, on land South of Meadow Lane; further that at a meeting in the town and at the town Council there was very strong support for refusal of this development; further notes that the grounds for refusal include that this is a protected open space listed in the proposed Neighbourhood Plan; further that the plans are contrary to the aims of the Nene Valley Nature Improvement Plan recently adopted by East Northamptonshire Council; further that the proposed development is close to a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest; further that the transport assessment has calculated there will be daily just under 800 HGV movements as well as employees' cars, including during the night with significant pollution effects and that the increase in traffic to the site and along the A45 will have a detrimental effect upon local air conditions; further that reversing alarms, loading and unloading and vehicle movements will cause significant noise pollution day and night; further that light pollution will inevitably increase especially with a 24 hour operation; further that there is a considerable hydrology and flood risk; further that the development will create an industrial feel to anyone walking down Meadow Lane, which could not be mitigated by any planting due to the height of the proposed building and earth formed platform approaching 29 metres above ground level; further that as employees at the current site near Northampton are to be given inducements to move their work place to Raunds there would be minimal employment opportunities for local people; further that the proposed large visually solid buildings will have a detrimental effect on the setting for Stanwick Lakes as they will be clearly visible from this country park and will also have considerable impact on the setting for Raunds and Stanwick; further declares that the submitted Neighbourhood Plan seeks to protect this area of land from development, to protect the rural character of the area and those who regularly use Meadow Lane to connect to Stanwick Lakes; further that allowing this development will seriously undermine the Neighbourhood Plan objectives and will be against the wishes of the local community.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to urge East Northamptonshire Council to refuse the planning application Ref. 16/02119/FUL for a proposed development of two distribution buildings, on land South of Meadow Lane.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Tom Purslove, *Official Report*, 8 March 2017; Vol. 622, c. 911.]

[P002026]

Observations from the Minister for Housing and Planning (Gavin Barwell):

East Northamptonshire Council is responsible for the day to day planning of its area. The Government's policy is not to interfere with the jurisdiction of a local planning authority unless it is necessary to do so. This is because local authority councillors are elected to represent the views of local people and, in the main, it is these councillors who are in the best position to decide whether a development should go ahead. In determining a planning application the local planning authority is required to have regard to all material considerations including the development plan, national policies and views expressed by third parties. It is, of course, for local planning authorities to provide whatever justification that may be appropriate to give for their decisions and procedures.

Following the receipt of a separate third party request to call-in the application the Secretary of State has considered whether to intervene on this application, having regard to the development plan, national planning policies and his call-in policy. This policy gives examples of the types of issues which may lead him to conclude, in his opinion that the application should be called in. The Secretary of State has decided, having had regard to this policy, not to call in this application. He is content that it should be determined by East Northamptonshire Council.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Transitional state pension arrangements for women born in the 1950s

The petition of residents of the Rhondda,

Declares that the 1995 Pensions Act has been implemented unfairly; further that Women Against State Pension Inequality (WASPI), agree with equalisation, but don't agree with the unfair way the changes were implemented—with little/no personal notice (1995/2011 Pension Acts), faster than promised (2011 Pension Act), and no time to make alternative plans; further that retirement plans have been shattered with devastating consequences; and further that hundreds of thousands of women have had significant changes imposed on them with a lack of appropriate notification.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to make fair transitional arrangements for all women born on or after 6th April 1951 who have unfairly borne the burden of the increase to the State Pension Age (SPA).

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Chris Bryant, *Official Report*, 27 April 2017; Vol. 624, c. 1187.]

[P002043]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Damian Green):

The pension system, along with the whole welfare system, needs to change to reflect the reality of today. In recent decades we are living longer, and we are able to work for longer as we become healthier.

The equalisation and acceleration of State Pension age for both men and women was necessary to ensure the system's sustainability in light of increasing life expectancy and increasing pressure on public resources, and the package now in place is balanced and affordable.

The changes to the State Pension age began with the gradual equalisation of State Pension age at 65 for both men and women, which was first set out in the Pensions

Act 1995. This was necessary to meet the UK's obligations under EU law to eliminate gender inequalities in social security provision.

The increase of the State Pension age to 66 was set out in the Pensions Act 2007 and due to increasing life expectancy the Pensions Act 2011 accelerated this process to allow for a rise to 66 by 2020 for both genders and provided for the equalisation of the State Pension age to 65 by November 2018.

During the 2011 Pensions Act the Government made a concession which slowed down the increase of the state pension age for women so no one would face an increase of more than 18 months compared to the increase as part of the Pensions Act 1995. Transitional arrangements at a cost of £ 1.1 billion were made in order to lessen the impact of these changes for those worst affected, and for 81% of these women the increase will be no more than 12 months. This concession benefited almost a quarter of a million women who would otherwise have experienced delays of up to two years.

Reversing the 1995 Act would be unaffordable—costing a minimum estimate of £77 billion. Without equalisation, and in 2010, women would spend on average 41% of their lives in retirement with a State Pension age of 60.

These changes were fully debated and voted on in 2011 when legislation was before Parliament, and all those affected by increases in State Pension age by the 2011 Act were written to in the period between January 2012 and November 2013.

The Department for Work and Pensions provided a range of additional information in order for all individuals to find out their State Pension age and the conditions of their benefits. Since April 2000, the Department has provided more than 14 million personalised State Pension estimates to people who requested them either online, via telephone or post, and encourages people to request these State Pension estimates as part of ongoing communications.

In addition, employment maximises people's opportunities to build up savings, helps to maintain social networks, and is beneficial to health provided the employment takes into account the person's broader circumstances. For most people work is beneficial not only because it provides an income, but also because it also gives individuals greater control over their own lives, and independent analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies has shown that the rise in women's State Pension age since 2010 has been accompanied by increases in employment rates for the women affected.

For those who struggle to find employment and where people need it, there is a safety net in place through the welfare system.

Supporting individuals aged 50 years and over to remain in the labour market and tackling the barriers to them doing so is a key priority for this Government. By the mid-2030s the number of individuals aged 50 and over will represent over half of the UK adult population and employers increasingly need to employ and retain the skills and experience of older workers. To support these individuals the Default Retirement Age was abolished, so individuals can retire when it is right for them, and the right to request flexible working was extended.

This Government are deeply committed to ensuring that employers are aware of the wealth of skills and

experience that older workers bring to the workplace, and on 4 October the Government announced the appointment of the Business in the Community Age at Work leadership team led by Andy Briggs, CEO of Aviva UK and Ireland Life, as Business Champion for Older Workers. Mr Briggs and this team of employers will spearhead the Government's work to support employers to retain, retrain, and recruit older workers.

Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches have the flexibility to offer all claimants, including older people, a comprehensive menu of help which includes skills provision and job search support. Work Coaches undertake extensive training before taking up the post, and build up a wide range of skills and in-depth labour market knowledge, and additional training modules are available for Work Coaches when they deal with older claimants to support them more effectively and in understanding the challenges older claimants face.

Older Claimant Champions were introduced, in April 2015, in the seven Jobcentre Plus Regional Groups to tackle the barriers faced by older claimants in getting back to work. Older Claimant Champions work with Jobcentre Work Coaches—and other staff—to emphasise the importance of supporting older claimants, share best practice and challenge out of date perceptions to support this group of people.

Where there are health conditions or disabilities, the Department has published the Work, Health and Disability Green Paper which looks at ways of better joining up the health, welfare and employment systems to support those seeking work as well as those in work. A Carers in Employment pilot has been established across nine Local Authorities to explore how businesses can give employees with caring responsibilities more help, for example promoting flexible working patterns and setting up carers surgeries to help carers manage their caring responsibilities alongside their paid work.

In addition to increasing employment prospects for women above the age of 60, this Government have introduced the New State Pension. The system in place for people who reached their State Pension age before 6 April 2016 was extremely complex and the new State Pension brings greater clarity by helping people to understand their State Pension more easily. It is also much more generous for many women who have been historically worse off under the old system. On average, women reaching State Pension age last year get a higher state pension over their lifetimes than women who reached State Pension age at any point before them, even when the acceleration of State Pension age is taken into account. And, by 2030, over 3 million women stand to gain an average of £550 extra per year as a result of these changes.

The New State Pension works hand in hand with Automatic Enrolment, enabling many more people to save in a workplace pension. And, combined with reviews of the State Pension age, these measures are designed to form the main elements of a sustainable basis of retirement income in the decades to come.

The Government have already made transitional arrangements for those most affected by changes to their State Pension age and introducing further concessions cannot be justified given the imperative to focus public resources on helping those most in need.

ORAL ANSWERS

Thursday 27 April 2017

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION	1197	EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION—continued	
Aerospace Industry	1211	Support for Farmers	1213
Devolved Matters.....	1209	Topical Questions	1216
Employment and Workers' Rights	1204	Tourism.....	1197
English Regions	1207	Trade and Customs Agreement.....	1212
Financial Services Industry	1201	UK Rebate.....	1215
Great Repeal Bill: Future Trade Terms	1206	UK Universities	1215
Northern Ireland.....	1200	Welsh Sheep Meat Trade.....	1210
Scottish Food and Drink Sector.....	1214		

WRITTEN STATEMENT

Thursday 27 April 2017

	<i>Col. No.</i>	<i>Col. No.</i>
EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION	69WS	
General Affairs Council: April 2017.....	69WS	

PETITIONS

Thursday 27 April 2017

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ..	19P	WORK AND PENSIONS	20P
Proposed development of two distribution buildings on land South of Meadow Lane, Raunds	19P	Transitional state pension arrangements for women born in the 1950s	20P

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons,*

not later than
Thursday 4 May 2017

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF BOUND VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

CONTENTS

Thursday 27 April 2017

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 1197] [see index inside back page]
Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union

Royal Assent to Acts passed [Col. 1230]

Prorogation [Col. 1232]

Written Statement [Col. 69WS]

Petitions [Col. 19P]
Observations

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
