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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Monday 15 October 2018

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WORK AND PENSIONS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Disabled Entrepreneurs

1. **Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to assist disabled entrepreneurs. [907035]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Ms Esther McVey): Will you indulge me for a moment, Mr Speaker, to allow me to congratulate my fellow Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the hon. Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson), on his wedding at the weekend? Some eyes may have been observing events in Windsor; others of us were viewing events in Swindon.

Let me turn now to the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean). Disabled people are more likely than others to be self-employed. Access to Work now has specialist self-employment teams to help disabled entrepreneurs, and the new enterprise allowance schemes help anyone who is claiming eligible benefits to move into self-employment.

Rachel Maclean: I thank the Minister for that answer and join her in congratulating my hon. Friend on his recent wedding.

Disabled people can benefit from self-employment because it provides much-needed flexibility in the workplace. To that end, there is a group in my constituency called Disability Support Project. Will the Minister congratulate it on its recent launch and look at what more can be done to enable other such organisations to offer employment advice?

Ms McVey: I will, indeed, congratulate and thank the Disability Support Group in Redditch for its excellent work and for what it does. I also congratulate and thank my hon. Friend for all that she does in assisting disabled people into work and for so passionately pursuing this cause. There is more that we can do. I know that she visited her jobcentre to see how we are working with charities and organisations. I can also assure her that we have never spent more supporting people with disabilities and health conditions—it is now £54 billion a year, up £9 billion since 2010.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Is the Secretary of State aware of the neuro-diverse person who wants to become an entrepreneur and of the people with autism and the people on the autistic spectrum who want to get apprenticeships? Is it not a fact that the inability to get basic GCSE maths and English is a barrier to anyone getting an apprenticeship that will lead to entrepreneurship? What can she do to open up that pathway?

Ms McVey: The hon. Gentleman raises a good point: how do we support disabled people. As I have said, we are supporting more through Access to Work and through other support groups. We have also given easements to make it easier for disabled people, because it really is important that they do internships, apprenticeships, and work experience.

Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): One of the very best ways of helping disabled entrepreneurs, and indeed all disabled people who are looking for work, is to get them access to the best assistive technology that can help them when they are in the workplace and also give them confidence while they are looking for that work. What steps is the Secretary of State taking to ensure that disabled people have those opportunities?

Ms McVey: My hon. Friend is correct in what he says: we should be using technology even more. We should be making sure that it does assist disabled people. To that end, we are doing more through Access to Work and we should continue on that path.

Dr Paul Williams (Stockton South) (Lab): The disability employment gap in my constituency is, at 37%, higher than the national average. What message does the Secretary of State have for disabled people in my constituency who want to work and who are not getting the support that they need?

Ms McVey: The hon. Gentleman is correct: there is a big disability gap in employment rates. That has come down, but we need it to come down even further. We have pledged to get 1 million more disabled people into work by 2027. Between 2013 and 2017, there were 600,000 more disabled people in work, but there is always more that we can do.

Universal Credit Roll-out

2. **Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): What assessment she has made of her Department's preparedness for the roll-out of universal credit to people in receipt of working tax credits. [907037]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Ms Esther McVey): We are working closely with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and stakeholders to ensure that our testing covers the full range of tax credit claimants. With parliamentary approval, our managed migration regulations will allow for transitional protection. This will make sure that nobody loses out financially when they are moved to universal credit.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Speaker: If only the right hon. Gentleman had known how popular he was.

Mr Carmichael: Yes, but for how long? One of the fundamental principles of universal credit was to design a welfare system where people would always choose to be in work. The money that the Chancellor took out in 2015 fundamentally undermined that principle, so will the Secretary of State speak to the current Chancellor about restoring work allowances to the levels originally planned?

Ms McVey: I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to know that I have of course been having discussions with the Chancellor, and we will all know the result of those discussions two weeks to this very day.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend take the time to listen to the voices of those on the frontline—the work coaches in the jobcentres, who have experience of how this policy functions in practice, who know what works and what does not work, and whose views about universal credit are overwhelmingly more positive than those of the Opposition critics?

Ms McVey: My right hon. Friend is correct to point out these facts. When we visit jobcentres, work coaches say that this is the best system that they have ever had to help people into work. We know the validity in that statement because 1,000 more people have been getting into work each and every day since 2010. We have to ensure that the system works for claimants and taxpayers.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Ind): May I raise the question about which I wrote to the Secretary of State, regarding how universal credit is being rolled out in Birkenhead? It is not going as well there as we are told it is in the House of Commons, and some women have taken to the red light district for the first time. Will the Secretary of State come to Birkenhead to meet women's organisations and the police, who are worried about the security of women being pushed into this position?

Ms McVey: The right hon. Gentleman knows that my door is always open to him. I did receive a letter on Friday, but really we need to work with those ladies and see what help we can give them—from work coaches right the way through to various charities and organisations. In the meantime, perhaps he and the work coaches could tell these ladies that there are currently a record 830,000 job vacancies, and that perhaps there are other jobs on offer.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): Just to draw on a point that we have already heard in the Chamber this afternoon, is the Secretary of State aware how much support she has on the Conservative Benches for our desire to see extra funding in the Budget to restore the work allowances to where they should be?

Ms McVey: I thank my hon. Friend. I know that all Members of the House want to ensure that universal credit works for all claimants. It is helping people into work and is built on sound principles, unlike the legacy system, which trapped people and locked them into

unemployment. Now we are helping people into work, but we have to listen, learn and adjust where we can, as we have done in the past, with a £1.5 billion package this year. We are still adjusting, learning and helping the most vulnerable.

19. [907054] **Ruth George** (High Peak) (Lab): [907054] The Secretary of State recently admitted that groups such as lone parents will be £2,400 a year worse off under universal credit. How is the Department going to support such lone parents when their transitional protection ends, as it very soon will?

Ms McVey: When we came into office in 2010—and then in 2015 and 2017—it was really important for the country to take difficult decisions about what we needed to do to ensure that the benefit was sustainable and affordable, because it had grown by over 60% under Labour. We still have to ensure that the benefit is sustainable and affordable, and that we support the most vulnerable, and that is what this Conservative Government are doing.

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con): When we move people over, it is vital that we get them on to the right amount of benefit at the right time, so will the Secretary of State agree to put in place some targets for accurate performance, and to delay the roll-out if those targets are not achieved?

Ms McVey: Under the process of managed migration, the roll-out will be slow and measured. It will start not in January 2019, but later in the year. For a further year we will be learning as we go with a small amount of people—maybe 10,000—to ensure that the system is right. The roll-out will then increase from 2020 onwards. It will be slow and measured, and we will adapt and change as we go.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): Has the Secretary of State requested any additional funds for universal credit from the Chancellor ahead of the Budget?

Ms McVey: I do not let people know what we do in private meetings, old-fashioned as that may be, but what the hon. Gentleman can know is that I am championing UC to make sure that it works the best it can possibly work. He can take from that what he will.

Neil Gray: That was barely a response, let alone an answer. Given the week that universal credit has had, where the Secretary of State has suggested that it will cost claimants up to £2,400 a year; two former Prime Ministers have called for her to rethink; dozens of Back-Bench MPs led by the former Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), have called for a rethink; and expert groups like the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the Resolution Foundation and the Child Poverty Action Group have all called for a rethink, does she not see that universal credit in its current form is causing misery? The roll-out must stop and the cuts must be reversed at the Budget.

Ms McVey: We all agree on the founding, sound principles of this benefit, which is helping more people into work. It will give extra money to the most vulnerable.

One million more disabled people will get, on average, £110 more a week. We will also be helping the 700,000 people who were getting the incorrect amount of benefit, plus we will be bringing in transitional protection to help them. If the hon. Gentleman wanted to reverse this, what would he do for those most vulnerable people?

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend commend the work of the jobcentre in Haywards Heath, which I visited last Friday, for the extraordinarily effective, humane and decent way in which they are rolling out universal credit?

Ms McVey: I thank my right hon. Friend for that. Of course I want to thank not just Haywards Heath jobcentre but all the jobcentres across the country, who are saying that this is now enabling them, for the very first time, to help people into work. We know that that is the case, as we have record numbers of people getting into work—3.4 million more than in 2010.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): At the Conservative party conference, the Prime Minister announced that austerity is over. Only a few days later, it was reported in *The Times* that families who are required to transfer to universal credit could lose up to £2,400 a year. The Prime Minister then denied it, but the following day the Secretary of State admitted that in fact some people would lose out. The confusion of the past week will have caused real concerns for families who will be affected. They have a right to know. If austerity is really over, will the Government ensure that nobody loses out?

Ms McVey: As I have said both on TV and in the House, we took difficult decisions, as did the country, in 2015-16 because we had a benefits system that had grown by over 60% under Labour. Now it is on a sustainable footing and is fair to the taxpayer and fair to the claimant. One million more disabled people will be getting, on average, £110 more a month, and 700,000 who were not getting their full amount of benefit now will. There will be transitional protection. We are listening, we are learning, and we will adapt and change as need be.

Margaret Greenwood: Almost 30% of universal credit claims started are not completed, according to the latest figures, and the Government do not appear to have any idea about or interest in what happens to those people. In the next phase of the roll-out, the Government are placing all the responsibility for making a universal credit claim on to the 2.87 million people required to move across, and they admit that they do not know how many will need additional support. There is a real danger that hundreds of thousands of people could fall out of the social security system altogether and be pushed into poverty—even left at risk of destitution. So will the Government step back from the brink and stop the roll-out of universal credit?

Ms McVey: I have to say that that is some of the worst scaremongering I have ever heard. At the last Budget and this year, we put in another £1.5 billion when we knew that we had to provide more support. I announced in June that we would be helping another

half a million disabled people on the severe disability premium. I have agreed to do more for kinship carers and the most vulnerable 18 to 21-year-olds. We are also agreeing to work with Citizens Advice—an independent and trusted organisation—to help people to get on to the benefit. When we hear what we need to do, we will do it.

Job Creation

3. **Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): What estimate the Government have made of the number of jobs created in the UK since 2010. [907038]

20. **Trudy Harrison** (Copeland) (Con): What estimate the Government have made of the number of jobs created in the UK since 2010. [907055]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Ms Esther McVey): Employment in the UK has increased by more than 3.3 million since 2010 and is currently at a near record high of 32.4 million. Since 2010, the UK has created more jobs than France, Spain, Ireland, the Netherlands, Austria, Sweden and Norway combined.

Robert Courts: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. What support are the Government offering to build on that employment success?

Ms McVey: That is precisely why we brought in universal credit, which made sure that people could work each hour they wanted to work and were not trapped by barriers to work, such as the 16-hour rule. We know that there are now 113 million more hours that people can work and that there will be more than 200,000 more jobs that people can go for.

Trudy Harrison: Nationally, youth unemployment is down. How will the Government ensure that it continues to fall, to give young people the best start to their working lives?

Ms McVey: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. I know how important youth employment is to her, and I know that she has visited her local jobcentre. She is quite right in saying that since 2010, youth unemployment is down by 48%. I remember when we brought in work experience, the Opposition were saying how awful it was and that it was slave labour and people did not want to do it—how wrong they were and have proved to be. We will be bringing more schemes forward, to make sure that we have record low unemployment for young people. That is what this party is about—youth and the future.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): The growth in jobs is very welcome news, but at the same time, we have to tackle the rise in in-work poverty. For the first time in modern history, there are more families in poverty in work than out of work. The benefit freeze is a key part of that, and there is another £1.9 billion to come off working-age benefits in April. Will the Secretary of State be making representations to the Treasury to ensure that that does not go ahead?

Ms McVey: As I said earlier, I will not say exactly what I have been saying in private conversations, but the hon. Lady can be sure that I will be championing our claimants and making sure that what we do is fair to claimants and the taxpayer.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): The Secretary of State will be aware that the TUC announced earlier this year that just under 4 million people were in insecure work. Can she tell us how many of the jobs that have been created are in agency work, zero-hours contracts or low-paid self-employment?

Ms McVey: The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know that the number of people on zero-hours contracts this year has dropped by 100,000, and full-time and permanent work accounts for 75% of employment. We are creating real jobs and real growth in this economy.

Contracted-out Health Assessments

4. **Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): What recent assessment she has made of the (a) accuracy and (b) efficiency of contracted-out health assessments for employment and support allowance and personal independence payment. [907039]

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Sarah Newton): Let us not forget that behind every statistic is a person. That is why I focus on the claimant satisfaction survey data. Overall the customer satisfaction rate is positive, with 87% for PIP and over 90% for the work capability assessment in ESA. We continually look at how we can improve accuracy in our processes.

Ruth Cadbury: Many of my disabled constituents are contacting me about their assessments for PIP and ESA. Of just two who contacted me about their health assessments, I identified 14 failures of due process—for just two cases. Given that 65% of appeals completed on the initial fit-for-work decisions were overturned and that the courts have consistently struck out DWP assessment decisions, does the Secretary of State not think that the money spent on defending those cases would have been better spent supporting disabled people?

Sarah Newton I thank the hon. Lady for bringing up those specific cases, and of course I would be happy to meet her to look into them. Actually, of all the millions of people who have been assessed for PIP, only 9% have appealed those decisions, and 4% have been upheld, mostly because at that point, more medical information is brought forward. One person's mistake is one too many, and that is why we are constantly improving the process.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): Given that people with autism can become particularly distressed and anxious at the prospect of a face-to-face assessment, what more can be done to support those people and perhaps conduct the assessment without the face-to-face interview?

Sarah Newton: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. It is important that we put people at the centre of our processes and make sure that they work for everyone, irrespective of their impairments, and that is what we seek to do.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): My constituent David Gamble has a number of degenerative conditions that are so serious that he was granted higher-rate mobility DLA indefinitely, but when

it came to his PIP assessment he was given a score of zero. It has been 18 months since then, his appeal has been adjourned three times through no fault of his own and still the DWP has not even applied for his full medical records. Will the Minister intervene to ensure that he can have a proper decision?

Sarah Newton: Something clearly has gone terribly wrong in that situation and of course I would be delighted to meet the hon. Lady.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): NHS survey data show that, under the Conservatives, 43% of those in receipt of ESA have attempted suicide. Leading academics, disabled people's organisations and clinicians have raised concerns that the work capability assessment is causing a mental health crisis. The WCA is not fit for the 21st century—it is outdated and is causing preventable harm—so I ask the Minister: is it not time that the Government scrap the WCA that is pushing so many people to suicide?

Sarah Newton: First, I remind the hon. Lady that it was the Labour party in 2008 that introduced the work capability assessment. Ever since then, we have been using independent advice to reform the work capability assessment.

Marsha De Cordova: It is shocking.

Sarah Newton: What is absolutely shocking is to misuse—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I apologise for barking at the hon. Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova). She has asked her question with considerable force and eloquence, but the Minister is entitled to reply. It is not for the Chair to take sides in these matters, but I do want to say that the Minister is unfailingly courteous and she must be treated with courtesy, whatever people think of the answer. The Minister must be heard.

Sarah Newton: Especially on such an incredibly sensitive subject as people wanting to take their own life. Our chief medical officer, Professor Gina Radford, has made it absolutely clear that the NHS data shows there is no causal link between applying for benefits and people tragically taking their lives.

Transition to Universal Credit

5. **Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): What assessment she has made of the effect on the public purse of the five-week wait to transition to universal credit. [907040]

The Minister for Employment (Alok Sharma): Claimants are entitled to benefits from the moment of making a successful claim. The first payment under universal credit is made five weeks after the claim date, and all subsequent payments are made monthly thereafter. The five-week wait has no savings implications for the Exchequer.

Luke Pollard: Unlike the Health Secretary, a lot of people I represent get in touch with me about universal credit, and in particular about how they struggle to repay the loan given to them during the five-week wait period. If entitlement has already been established, will

the Minister consider, instead of issuing loans, giving them the money they deserve and are entitled to in the first place?

Alok Sharma: We talk about giving support to people and, as the Secretary of State pointed out, £1.5 billion of support was put in, so those who are on housing benefit get two weeks' housing benefit run-on in actual cash and of course people can take advances. I would say this to the hon. Gentleman and all his colleagues sitting there now who are talking about supporting the vulnerable: if that is what they want to do, why did they not support us when we voted for the £1.5 billion?

Greg Hands (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con): One certain way in which universal credit is helping the public purse is by getting more people into work. Can my hon. Friend confirm that universal credit is forecast to help an additional 200,000 people find work in the coming months?

Alok Sharma: I can—200,000 people over the roll-out period. Not only that, but people will be taking on extra work as well.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Astronomical numbers of people are applying to food banks during that critical five-week period. Has the Minister—yes or no—read the Trussell Trust report on universal credit roll-out?

Alok Sharma: I met the Trussell Trust last week and had a very constructive discussion. *[Interruption.]* I had a very constructive discussion. What I would say to the hon. Lady is that, when it comes to food banks, as she knows, the all-party group on hunger put out a very good report and said there were complex reasons for the use of food banks. You cannot put it down to any one reason.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Five hundred and thirty households presently receive universal credit in the Kettering constituency, but with the roll-out this Wednesday up to 7,700 households could be affected. Can the Minister assure me and my constituents that Kettering jobcentre is ready for the change?

Alok Sharma: I go up and down the country to jobcentres, and they invariably tell me they are having a good experience. They are learning from the past. What I think my hon. Friend will find is that his jobcentre is absolutely prepared for this further roll-out.

Universal Credit: Blind and Partially Sighted People

6. **Liz Twist** (Blaydon) (Lab): What steps her Department has taken to ensure that claiming universal credit online is accessible to blind and partially sighted people. [907041]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (**Guy Opperman**): The online system has been designed with accessibility in mind, and it has been audited and approved by the Royal National Institute of Blind People for all accessibility needs. Face-to-face and telephone support are in place for those vulnerable claimants who cannot self-serve online.

Liz Twist: Many disabled people are already having problems claiming universal credit. With the regulations for managed migration expected shortly, the Disability Benefits Consortium fears that many people with disabilities will fall through the cracks and lose transitional protection. What steps is the Minister taking to ensure that people with physical or mental disabilities are given the specialist help they need to migrate, and should we not delay migration until that is sorted?

Guy Opperman: There is extensive engagement with the various organisations, and the Department is working hard to ensure there is full support for the disabled claimant, whether that is through the severe disability premium or our recently announced universal support fund.

Universal Credit: Scotland

7. **Stephen Kerr** (Stirling) (Con): What assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the advice and support offered to recipients of universal credit in Scotland. [907042]

The Minister for Employment (**Alok Sharma**): We have over 1,600 work coaches across 84 jobcentres in Scotland, who are trained to offer support and advice to claimants. As the Secretary of State pointed out earlier, we have a brand-new partnership with Citizens Advice Scotland.

Stephen Kerr: Citizens Advice's Stirling district is a superb independent source of advice, having published a plain English guide to universal credit. Does the Minister agree that independent advice on benefits is essential and that ensuring it is provided without political point scoring from the Scottish Government and local government will serve claimants better?

Alok Sharma: I congratulate my hon. Friend, who is a great champion of his constituents, and he works very well with the local jobcentre. He is absolutely right: what Citizens Advice is providing is a huge amount of experience; it is an independent organisation with a national footprint. I absolutely agree that the last thing the vulnerable need is political point scoring. What they want is support, and that is what they are getting under universal credit.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): What assessment has the Minister made of the closure of six jobcentres across Glasgow—

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Seven.

Mr Sweeney: Seven jobcentres in Glasgow. What assessment has he made of those closures as universal credit rolls out this month?

Alok Sharma: As the hon. Gentleman will know, we have reconfigured our estate. One of the reasons that has happened is that we had over-provision of space—20% more than we needed—and we now have jobcentres that are actually delivering. At the end of the day, one of the reasons for this is that we have much lower levels of unemployment than in 2010. I hope that is something the hon. Gentleman welcomes.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I recently held a drop-in surgery at the Kinning Park Complex in my constituency, because roll-out in Glasgow has already begun. The big issue that people raised was that they did not even know that this was going to affect them. There is a huge gap in awareness. What is the Minister going to do about this so that people actually get the benefits they are entitled to and do not lose out on transitional payments?

Alok Sharma: As I said, when I go to jobcentres, it is very clear to me that they are working extremely hard in engaging and in letting claimants know things ahead of time, and indeed in engaging with local Members of Parliament. I hope the hon. Lady has had a chance to visit her jobcentre. If she wants to have a detailed discussion about this, I am very happy to have a discussion with her after these oral questions.

Universal Credit: Household Debt

8. **Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): What assessment her Department has made of recent trends in the average level of household debt for people in receipt of universal credit. [907043]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Justin Tomlinson) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his wedding, and we look forward to his reply.

Justin Tomlinson: A truly memorable day.

Alongside the personalised and tailored support of universal credit, claimants have access to extended childcare support, increases in the personal tax allowance and the introduction of the national living wage. For those transferring from legacy benefits, there is an additional two weeks of housing benefit support.

Alex Cunningham: It is all too easy for people to fall into debt with universal credit failures. My constituent Kayley Aithwaite gets paid on the last working day of each month, meaning she had two lots of wages considered in the last calculation period, and was denied her usual universal credit. How common is this particular problem and what is the Minister going to do about it?

Justin Tomlinson: I thank the hon. Gentleman. Universal credit is designed to mirror the world of work, with monthly payments. It is far better that, through the personalised and tailored support of their individual work coach, claimants are able to be given the support to navigate that now and not on the first day of entering work.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): What sort of honeymoon is this?

Justin Tomlinson: It is a great honour to share my honeymoon with so many wonderful colleagues.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman almost kept a straight face, but not quite.

18. [907053] **Eleanor Smith** (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): Due to the massive backlog in universal credit appeals in Wolverhampton, what steps will the Minister

take to ensure that my disabled constituents do not have to wait months on end without benefits for their court appeals?

Justin Tomlinson: This is an issue that has been raised and that is why additional judges have been recruited to the tribunal system to make sure that goes as quickly as possible. Through their individual work coach, people will get the tailored support as quickly as they can.

Mr Speaker: I thought we might hear from the voice of South Suffolk, but the hon. Gentleman seems disinclined to participate in this exchange even though he has a comparable question. He is not obliged. If he is more interested in his phone, so be it. [*Interruption.*] Get in there, man. I call James Cartledge.

15. [907050] **James Cartledge** (South Suffolk) (Con): I also extend my congratulations to my hon. Friend. Does he agree that universal credit is not just about getting more people into work, but people currently working part-time working longer hours by getting rid of the disincentives they used to face on 16 hours and so on?

Justin Tomlinson: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. That is absolutely key: with universal credit you will always be better off in work. UC removes the effective 90% tax rate of the legacy benefit and the cliff-edges of 16, 24 and 30 hours. It is a far simpler benefit, which is stopping the £2.4 billion-worth of benefits that were missed in claiming.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): From July 2019, up to 2.8 million people will be required to move from their existing benefits by making a new claim for universal credit. Many are set to lose up to £200 a month. The Trussell Trust, the Child Poverty Action Group, Disability Rights UK, two former Prime Ministers, the future Chancellor and even the Archbishop of Canterbury have all called for a halt to this process, which is driving the growth of poverty in our communities. At what stage will the Secretary of State take her fingers out of her ears, listen to reality and halt this chaos?

Justin Tomlinson: This is the reality, as it stands today: complex legacy benefits of £2.4 billion-worth of benefits not being claimed—an average of £285 a month. As the roll-out of universal credit continues, it will remain a test-and-learn process. Where we can see improvements—we have made many already—we will continue to make them.

Universal Credit

9. **Stephen McPartland** (Stevenage) (Con): What steps the Government have taken to improve universal credit since autumn 2017. [907044]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Ms Esther McVey): We are constantly improving universal credit in response to feedback and have implemented a wide-ranging package of improvements worth £1.5 billion, some of which my hon. Friend campaigned for. We will continue to do that when we need to.

Stephen McPartland: Universal credit can work only if it is fully funded. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the effective tax rate of 63p in the pound for people moving into work is set at a punitive level and that the Treasury should loosen the purse strings for her?

Ms McVey: My hon. Friend is always a good campaigner on these causes and we of course meet to discuss these matters. At the moment, the taper rate is 63%, as he says, but it was over 90% under the legacy system. We have dropped it considerably and when we can, when the economy is on a sounder footing, we will seek to drop it even further to make sure that work pays, which is something this Conservative Government do.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): The Secretary of State says that universal credit is constantly improving, but unfortunately the number of people coming to my office for food bank vouchers is constantly increasing. More and more of the people coming are families with kids. The public are angry. Has the Secretary of State made an assessment of how many families using food bank vouchers are lone parents with children?

Ms McVey: The hon. Lady raises a good question about what happened under the previous Labour Government—[*Interruption.*] Can I just put this on the record, Mr Speaker? Under the previous Labour Government—[*Interruption.*] Labour Members are huffing, puffing, tutting and shaking their heads, but the number of households where no one had ever worked doubled under Labour. That is where the problem started and we are changing that. It has been a quick change—to 3.4 million people in work—and we have to help those people now to get a higher income, which we are doing.

Mr Speaker: I call Richard Graham. Why is he surprised by that? He is standing. Get in there.

23. [907058] **Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con):** The Secretary of State knows that one of the difficulties with trying to correlate the people on universal credit with those who go to food banks is that there is no precise data to compare the two. I know anecdotally that the number of foreigners claiming food bank vouchers is quite high. Is there a state at which we can, with the Trussell Trust, arrange to have data that tells us much more about who is going to food banks and what sort of help they need, including DWP people in their food banks?

Ms McVey: Of course we have to understand the underlying issues and problems and support people as best we can. I met the Trussell Trust and various poverty groups and we have talked about how we best support families. We believe that the best way to support a family out of poverty is by getting them into work—hence why I pointed out that, under the previous Labour Government, the number of households where no one ever worked doubled. This Government believe that work is the best way out of poverty and we will continue helping people.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): One million householders, 750,000 disabled people, 600,000 working single parents, 600,000 self-employed people and 300,000 families with three or more children

will all be worse off under universal credit. Will the Secretary of State finally admit that, for these people, austerity is far from over?

Ms McVey: I have said that, under this benefit, what we sought to do was get more people into work, because that is the best way out of poverty, and that is what we have done. We are helping 1,000 people each and every day into work. We also said that we would make this benefit fair to the taxpayers, who are paying for it, and fair to those claimants, and that is what we are doing.

Benefits System: Claimants' Needs

10. **Lee Rowley (North East Derbyshire) (Con):** What steps the Government are taking to ensure that the benefits system is able to meet the changing needs of claimants. [907045]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Justin Tomlinson): This Government are delivering the biggest changes to the welfare system since its inception, creating flexibility to adapt to changing working patterns and offering personalised support.

Lee Rowley: I thank the Minister for his response. An increasing number of people in my constituency are self-employed and setting up their own businesses. Will the Minister outline what universal credit is doing to support people who are setting up their own businesses?

Justin Tomlinson: I thank my hon. Friend, who is a real champion of the self-employed community, and I am proudly a former business owner myself. Universal credit is far more flexible to adapt to changing circumstances, particularly for those who are starting up on their career of owning their business.

21. [907056] **Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab):** Under the managed migration plans, are there any proposals for vulnerable people—particularly those with a mental health issue or a learning difficulty—to be guaranteed face-to-face and telephone support, as opposed to just online support?

Justin Tomlinson: Yes, absolutely. This is an important point, and that is why we have improved the training for all work coaches to identify as quickly as possible those who need that additional support. It is a really important and key part of UC.

Work: People with Disabilities

11. **Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con):** What steps the Government are taking to help people with disabilities into work. [907046]

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Sarah Newton): We support disabled people into work through a wide range of initiatives, including our £500 million Work and Health programme and the £330 million personal support package, and Access to Work supported over 25,000 people last year. I had meetings all through the summer with our Work and Health Programme providers, including Reed in Partnership

in Yorkshire, and I saw fantastic work being done to take a health and wellbeing approach to enable people back into work.

Andrew Jones: Many employers have signed up to the Disability Confident scheme—as I have—to ensure that disabled people have the opportunity to achieve their ambitions and employers can choose from a wider selection of talent available. I am now encouraging businesses in Harrogate and Knaresborough to sign up. Will the Minister join me in encouraging employers right across our country to sign up to this impressive initiative?

Sarah Newton: I thank my hon. Friend for his question and for his fantastic leadership in his constituency. I am delighted to say that hundreds of employers are signing up every week to the Disability Confident scheme, with more than 8,300 having signed up in total, including well over 800 in his own constituency. Many Members have taken up the community challenge, and it is not too late for those who have not participated. I encourage everyone to help people to sign up to be disability confident.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: The hon. Lady has what might be called the Oral-B approach to getting called, which is to offer the House a beaming smile.

Lucy Powell: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, but I am afraid that I am not smiling about the Minister's replies, because they are so far detached from the reality that many of us are seeing on the frontline. She will know that those facing a change in circumstance are not protected by the transitional protections. This is affecting dozens of disabled constituents of mine, such as Dean, who has lost £300 a month, having lost his disabled premium going from tax credits to universal credit, and Erica, who has now built up £5,000 of overpayments due to the same thing. The principles of universal credit are now in tatters—it is not helping people to work. When will the Government review this?

Sarah Newton: I am afraid that the hon. Lady is completely wrong. We have put in place transitional protection for people on the severe disability premium; under our new regulations, that protection is now there.

Pensions Dashboard

12. **David Warburton** (Somerton and Frome) (Con): What steps the Government have taken to enable industry to deliver the pensions dashboard. [907047]

14. **Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): What steps the Government have taken to enable industry to deliver the pensions dashboard. [907049]

16. **Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): What steps the Government have taken to enable industry to deliver the pensions dashboard. [907051]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman): An industry-led pensions dashboard, facilitated by Government, will harness industry

innovation and provide an opportunity for the pensions industry to step up and take a leading role. We have engaged with the industry and are assessing the feasibility of a dashboard. We will report shortly on the findings.

David Warburton: Ten thousand of my constituents have been automatically enrolled on the pensions dashboard under this Government. Will the Minister confirm that this is one of many options for my constituents for receiving pensions information, and that the dashboard will remain firmly in place?

Guy Opperman: My hon. Friend is right. The dashboard will transform how his constituents keep track of their growing number of pensions. This, along with the Single Financial Guidance Body, which the Government set up last year, will provide free and impartial information and guidance to help people plan for their retirement.

Nigel Huddleston: Will the Minister explain how the development of this online system will benefit my constituents?

Guy Opperman: Some 15,000 people in my hon. Friend's constituency have been auto-enrolled thanks to the 2,010 employers supporting the system. As auto-enrolment expands, there will be a number of different pension pots, and having an online tool that everybody can access will be a massive addition for his constituents.

Mr Speaker: If the Minister could be good enough to face the House, it would be hugely appreciated.

Mike Wood: Does the Minister agree that for the pensions dashboard to be effective, it must be comprehensive, which means enjoying support right across the sector? If so, what is he doing to achieve this?

Guy Opperman: It was a pleasure to visit my hon. Friend's constituency in the summer and to meet many of the 10,000-plus people there who are auto-enrolled. We are in daily contact with industry figures as we prepare our feasibility report and plan for the roll-out of the dashboard.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Will the Minister give us a date for full implementation of the dashboard?

Guy Opperman: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be pleased to await the feasibility report that is pending.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Will the pensions dashboard be clear about all the costs related to its production?

Guy Opperman: That is part of the feasibility study and something that we are looking at on an ongoing basis, but I am happy to discuss this in more detail with the hon. Gentleman.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): It is nothing short of astonishing that the Secretary of State sought to pull the plug on the groundbreaking cross-party pensions dashboard, designed to help workers know what they have saved and what they have to save to

ensure a decent income in retirement, and all easily accessible in one place. Will the Minister now ensure an obligation on providers to supply the necessary information to the pensions dashboard, and can we be confident that the Secretary of State, whose capacity to get it wrong knows no bounds, will not make a renewed attempt to thwart the pensions dashboard?

Guy Opperman: Is it not rich that the Labour party, which never came up with or implemented a pensions dashboard, is criticising us, who are doing exactly that? Let me make it acutely clear that this is a party that works together, and that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I, and all the members of the DWP team, are completely behind the pensions dashboard.

Universal Credit Roll-out

13. **Andrew Bowie** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): What progress she has made on the roll-out of universal credit throughout the UK. [907048]

The Minister for Employment (Alok Sharma): Universal credit is now live in 495 jobcentres available to new claimants, and within weeks it will be available throughout the country.

Andrew Bowie: In two weeks' time the remaining two thirds of my constituency will receive universal credit, following the one third who have already received it. Notwithstanding the frankly irresponsible narrative that we hear from Opposition Members, the work and pensions staff in the Aberdeen jobcentre cannot wait to get started and to deliver this transformative benefit. Can the Minister confirm that it is on track to be rolled out in two weeks' time?

Alok Sharma: I thank my hon. Friend for engaging with his local jobcentre, which is not always done by Opposition Members. I hear the same thing from other jobcentre staff across the country. Universal credit is working, and I say to the Opposition, "Stop scaremongering: you are not helping the people who need the support."

Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab): As universal credit is rolled out, the Government have announced that they are removing local authority funding support for claimants and placing the role solely with Citizens Advice. When will Doncaster Citizens Advice, and all the other branches in the country, know for sure exactly what resources they will receive, and when?

Alok Sharma: Let me be clear. Local authorities will continue to provide that support until the end of the current financial year, and will work in parallel with Citizens Advice, which is starting its work in the autumn.

Topical Questions

Mr Speaker: We now come to topical questions. Brevity is of the essence.

T1. [907060] **Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Ms Esther McVey): When we were here last, Members in all parts of the House were asking whether Citizens Advice could be more involved with universal credit. I am pleased to inform them today that I went away and secured that agreement, and that Citizens Advice, as an independent organisation, will be giving universal support and assisting claimants with universal credit.

Kevin Hollinrake: Universal credit was introduced in my constituency early in 2017. Although there were initial problems following the changes made by the Government at the end of last year, Citizens Advice has reported a significant reduction in the number of difficulties. Jobcentre Plus staff also report a very positive effect in getting people back to work. Does that endorse the principle that we should seek not to reject universal credit, but to reform it?

Ms McVey: My hon. Friend is right. Work coaches are saying that this is the best system that they have ever had. It has been helping 1,000 people into work each and every day since 2010. My hon. Friend is also right to say that when we see that things need to be improved and adapted, we listen, we learn, and we change it as it goes.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): Under universal credit, severely disabled people will lose out on disability premiums worth up to £80 per week, and will also lose the £30 "limited capability for work" component. Last week, the Secretary of State said that 1 million disabled people would be "significantly better off" under universal credit. Let me ask her now whether that is really the case. Is not the reality that after the premiums and the £30 component have been scrapped, disabled people will in fact be worse off overall under universal credit?

The Minister for Employment (Alok Sharma): The Secretary of State has made it absolutely clear that we will be protecting people who currently receive the severe disability premium. [Interruption.] Will the hon. Lady just listen? A million disabled households who are now receiving legacy benefits will gain, on average, £110 a month on universal credit. Those are the facts, and the hon. Lady should try to accept them.

T2. [907062] **Eddie Hughes** (Walsall North) (Con): The roll-out of universal credit will come to Willenhall in my constituency on Wednesday. Will the Minister join me in endorsing the work of Walsall Housing Group and its Rent First programme, which is helping tenants to prepare for that transition?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Justin Tomlinson): I know that my hon. Friend has great experience in this area, and I should be very excited to hear about those proposals in more detail. I am keen to meet him to establish whether any lessons can be learned.

T4. [907064] **Stephen Lloyd** (Eastbourne) (LD): Shortly after the 2015 general election, the then Chancellor removed £3 billion per annum from universal credit. That would never have been allowed to happen had the Liberals still been in government. Members of all

parties in the House have urged the Secretary of State to urge the Chancellor to replace the £3 billion work allowance so that work really does pay; will she do so?

Alok Sharma: It is absolutely clear that under universal credit work is paying. That is why we have over 3 million more people in jobs than in 2010.

T5. [907065] **Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): I welcome the announcement that Citizens Advice will be providing universal support in Dudley South and across the country. Can the Minister explain how this will benefit my constituents, and particularly their timely access to universal credit?

Alok Sharma: Through Citizens Advice, which we are rolling out across the country, it will be possible particularly for the most vulnerable to get support in terms of budgeting help and also digital support.

T3. [907063] **Chris Williamson** (Derby North) (Lab): We have heard a lot of warm words from the Secretary of State and Members on the Government Benches about universal credit, but I was recently approached by a constituent who has had to give up a well-paid job because of severe anxiety and depression and who, after the wait for universal credit, is going to be £400 a month worse off, so will the Secretary of State disown the Prime Minister's assertion that austerity is over, because it certainly isn't for people on universal credit?

Alok Sharma: We have been absolutely clear that there are going to be protections in place for those currently on legacy benefits as we move across to universal credit. I do wish the Opposition would stop scaring people from moving on to universal credit.

T7. [907067] **Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): I welcome the announcement that the Department is providing work experience, and working with Barnardo's to provide work experience, for care leavers. What further support is my hon. Friend offering to care leavers to ensure they fulfil their potential?

Justin Tomlinson: This is a real priority for our Secretary of State and it will involve building on our work to enable care leavers to make advanced UC claims, access to the youth application support programme, early access to the work and health programme and extensions to second chance learning, and we will work with employers to create more opportunities to build on this partnership with Barnardo's.¹

T6. [907066] **Lloyd Russell-Moyle** (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): I had a constituent with severe learning impairment who, being unable to read the letters she received about the transition to PIP, had her DLA payments suspended. How can the Secretary of State justify a managed migration for disabled people when the Government cannot even get the basics right of communicating with people?

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Sarah Newton): I advise the hon. Gentleman's constituents to use the telephone service or for one of their friends or family members to call up, because it is absolutely essential that people who have any sort of disability that

prevents them from accessing their benefit have those barriers overcome: so pick up the phone and the support will be available.

T9. [907069] **Andrew Bowie** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): How many people in West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine have benefited from automatic enrolment thus far?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman): Some 10,000 of my hon. Friend's constituents are benefiting from automatic enrolment, with thanks to the 1,800 employers involved, and nationally workplace pension provision for women and young people has now doubled in the last five years.

T8. [907068] **Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): Ministers defend the five-week wait for universal credit on the basis that employees will have had a month's pay in their bank account when they left their previous job. Does the Minister accept that that case simply does not apply to employees paid weekly or those on zero-hours contracts?

Alok Sharma: I have huge respect for the right hon. Gentleman, as he knows, but that is precisely why we introduced this £1.5 billion of support earlier this year, which means people can get advances up front—up to 100%—and those on housing benefit get a two-week run-on, which is money that does not have to be repaid.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): I recently hosted a Disability Confident event in Baildon in my constituency. As somebody who employs somebody with multiple disabilities, I know that many workforces are losing out on a huge pool of talent. May I therefore urge the Minister to advertise the benefits of Access to Work more widely so we can get even more disabled people into work?

Sarah Newton: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his personal leadership in his constituency and for employing a disabled person and drawing on all the talents that our nation has to offer. Access to Work is a fantastic scheme helping record numbers of people and we will continue to do everything we can to make sure disabled people can work.

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): My constituent Paul is agoraphobic and has a personality disorder, heart damage and a history of self-harm. After a tribunal accepted that he could not attend an assessment centre, the centre for health and disability assessment has blocked his employment and support allowance and universal credit by refusing him a home assessment. Will the Minister apply some common sense and overrule the decision?

Sarah Newton: The hon. Gentleman raises a serious point. Home assessments are of course an important part of our processes. I am very disappointed to hear about that case, which I will be happy to look into.

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): I commend the staff at Ayr jobcentre, who recently hosted a successful employment fair at which we discussed the value of flexibility in the universal credit system in

1. [Official Report, 18 October 2018, Vol. 647, c. 10MC.]

helping vulnerable claimants back into work. Will my right hon. Friend consider what further support might be useful to jobcentres in hosting future employment fairs across the United Kingdom?

Ms McVey: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that point. I visited his constituency over the summer to see what terrific work his work coaches were doing. We will be implementing more work in outreach and developing our flexible fund to help more people.

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): Birmingham's food banks have had their busiest year ever—70% of their demand is due to universal credit. Can I give the Secretary of State a choice? Either pause this crazy roll-out or come to Birmingham and help us to raise the tonne and a half of food we need each month to replenish the empty food bank stock.

Alok Sharma: We have had this discussion in a number of questions now. Can I be absolutely clear? The right hon. Gentleman should look at the report produced by the all-party parliamentary group on hunger, which said that the reasons for food bank usage are complex and myriad, and cannot be put down to any single reason.

Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): I warmly welcome the announcement by the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman), of a consultation on collective defined contribution schemes. However, I had anticipated that it would come out before my ten-minute rule Bill on Wednesday. Will he give us an update as to when we might see it?

Guy Opperman: I am delighted that my hon. Friend has raised this point. The consultation will be of assistance to Royal Mail and the thousands of posties in his constituency. We will be consulting on the matter very shortly.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Under managed migration, claimants of legacy benefits will effectively have to apply anew for universal credit, and some vulnerable claimants may not realise and lose transitional protection as a result. Will the Minister look again at how those claimants can ensure that they retain their transitional protection?

Alok Sharma: The Secretary of State, other Ministers and I are having detailed engagement with the various health groups that the hon. Lady is talking about. We are, of course, looking at the recommendations made by the Social Security Advisory Committee.

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): On Friday, I am hosting Angus's first Disability Confident event in Forfar. Will my hon. Friend join me in celebrating employers who are taking part to learn how they can benefit from the untapped potential of those living with disabilities in our communities?

Sarah Newton: My hon. Friend is an absolute champion for all her constituents, but particularly those with disabilities and health conditions who want to work. I really welcome her setting up of this jobs fair in her constituency on Friday and encourage as many local people as possible to sign up to Disability Confident.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): One of the concerns being expressed by constituents about the universal credit roll-out is literacy levels and people's unwillingness and fear about being able to complete forms. Given that universal credit is to be fully rolled out in my constituency in December, what assurance can the Minister give me that those with poor literacy levels will receive the support they need to get the benefits that they need and deserve?

Alok Sharma: Universal support has been available since 2017, but our partnership with Citizens Advice is clearly a step up. I hope that that will make a positive difference to the hon. Gentleman's constituents.

EU Exit Negotiations

3.33 pm

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to update the House ahead of this week's European Council.

We are entering the final stages of these negotiations. This is the time for cool, calm heads to prevail, and for a clear-eyed focus on the few remaining but critical issues that are still to be agreed. Yesterday, the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union went to Brussels for further talks with Michel Barnier. There has inevitably been a great deal of inaccurate speculation, so I want to set out clearly for the House the facts as they stand.

First, we have made real progress in recent weeks on both the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration on our future relationship. I want to pay tribute to both negotiating teams for the many, many hours of hard work that have got us to this point. In March, we agreed legal text around the implementation period, citizen's rights and the financial settlement, and we have now made good progress on text concerning the majority of the outstanding issues. Taken together, the shape of the deal across the vast majority of the withdrawal agreement—the terms of our exit—is now clear. We also have broad agreement on the structure and scope of the framework for our future relationship, with progress on issues such as security, transport and services.

Perhaps most significantly, we have made progress on Northern Ireland, on which the EU has been working with us to respond to the very real concerns we had about its original proposals. Let me remind the House why this is so important. Both the UK and the EU share a profound responsibility to ensure the preservation of the Belfast/Good Friday agreement, protecting the hard-won peace and stability in Northern Ireland and ensuring that life continues essentially as it does now. We agree that our future economic partnership should provide for solutions to the unique circumstances in Northern Ireland in the long term, and while we are both committed to ensuring that this future relationship is in place by the end of the implementation period, we accept that there is a chance that there may be a gap between the two. This is what creates the need for a backstop to ensure that if such a temporary gap were ever to arise, there would be no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland, or indeed anything that would threaten the integrity of our precious Union.

This backstop is intended to be an insurance policy for the people of Northern Ireland and Ireland. Previously, the European Union had proposed a backstop that would see Northern Ireland carved off in the EU's customs union and parts of the single market, separated through a border in the Irish sea from the UK's own internal market. As I have said many times, I could never accept that, no matter how unlikely such a scenario might be. Creating any form of customs border between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK would mean a fundamental change in the day-to-day experience for businesses in Northern Ireland, with the potential to affect jobs and investment. We published our proposals on customs in the backstop in June. After Salzburg, I said that we would bring forward our own further proposals, and that is what we have done in these

negotiations. The European Union has responded positively by agreeing to explore a UK-wide customs solution to this backstop, but two problems remain.

First, the EU says that there is not time to work out the detail of this UK-wide solution in the next few weeks, so even with the progress we have made, the EU still requires a “backstop to the backstop”—effectively an insurance policy for the insurance policy—and it wants this to be the Northern Ireland-only solution that it had previously proposed. We have been clear that we cannot agree to anything that threatens the integrity of our United Kingdom, and I am sure that the whole House shares the Government's view on this. Indeed, the House of Commons set out its view when agreeing unanimously to section 55 in part 6 of the Taxation (Cross-border Trade) Act 2018 on a single United Kingdom customs territory, which states:

“It shall be unlawful for Her Majesty's Government to enter into arrangements under which Northern Ireland forms part of a separate customs territory to Great Britain.”

So the message is clear not just from this Government but from the whole House.

Secondly, I need to be able to look the British people in the eye and say that this backstop is a temporary solution. People are rightly concerned that what is only meant to be temporary could become a permanent limbo, with no new relationship between the UK and the EU ever agreed. I am clear that we are not going to be trapped permanently in a single customs territory unable to do meaningful trade deals. So it must be the case, first, that the backstop should not need to come into force; secondly, that if it does, it must be temporary; and, thirdly, while I do not believe that this will be the case, that if the EU were not to co-operate on our future relationship, we must be able to ensure that we cannot be kept in this backstop arrangement indefinitely. I would not expect the House to agree to a deal unless we have the reassurance that the UK, as a sovereign nation, has this say over our arrangements with the EU.

I do not believe that the UK and the EU are far apart. We both agree that article 50 cannot provide the legal base for a permanent relationship, and we both agree that the backstop must be temporary, so we must now work together to give effect to that agreement.

So much of the negotiations are necessarily technical, but the reason why this all matters is that it affects the future of our country. It affects jobs and livelihoods in every community. It is about what kind of country we are and about our faith in our democracy. Of course it is frustrating that almost all the remaining points of disagreement are focused on how we manage a scenario that both sides hope should never come to pass and that, if it does, will only be temporary. We cannot let that disagreement derail the prospects of a good deal and leave us with the no-deal outcome that no-one wants. I continue to believe that a negotiated deal is the best outcome for the UK and for the European Union. I continue to believe that such a deal is achievable, and that is the spirit in which I will continue to work with our European partners. I commend this statement to the House.

3.40 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I thank the Prime Minister for an advance copy of her statement.

This really is beginning to feel like groundhog day—another “nothing has changed” moment from this shambles of a Government. Almost two and a half years after the referendum, 18 months since the triggering of article 50 and with less than six months to go, what do we have to show for all that? Yesterday we saw another Brexit Minister shuttling over to Brussels only to come back, tail between his legs, unable to deliver because of divisions in the Conservative party. Over—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I appealed earlier for calm and I do so again. I will reiterate what people should know anyway by now: there will be ample opportunity for everybody who wants to ask a question—not to shriek across the Chamber, but to ask a question—to do so. Let us have a bit of hush on both sides of the House.

Jeremy Corbyn: Over the past 18 months, red line after red line has been surrendered. Even the Prime Minister’s much-vaunted Chequers plan now appears to be dead in the water. In fact, after countless resignations and the threat of even more, she could not even bring herself to mention Chequers in her own conference speech. The Prime Minister must stop the excuses. There is a Brexit deal that could command the support of Parliament and the country—a Brexit deal that would benefit Britain and allow us to rebuild our communities, regions and economy, and avoid any hard border in Northern Ireland—but that is not her deal.

As we reach a critical point in this nation’s history, we need a Prime Minister who will for once make the right decision, put the country before her party and stand up to the reckless voices on her Back Benches and within her Cabinet. For too long this country has been held hostage to those in her party who want to drive through a “race to the bottom” Brexit deal that lowers rights and standards, and sells off our national assets to the lowest bidder. It is clear—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. Mr Heappey, you are normally such a good-natured and laid-back fellow. I do not know what has happened to you. I do not know what you had for breakfast, but tip me off afterwards and I will make sure to avoid it. We need an atmosphere of calm. Nobody in this Chamber—questioner or anybody answering, namely the Prime Minister—will be shouted down, and that is the end of it. It is as simple as that.

Jeremy Corbyn: It is clear that the Prime Minister’s failure to stand up to the warring factions on her own side have led us to this impasse. Let me remind the Prime Minister and Conservative Members what they signed up to just 10 months ago:

“In the absence of agreed solutions, the United Kingdom will maintain full alignment with those rules of the Internal Market and the Customs Union which, now or in the future, support North-South cooperation, the all-island economy and the protection of the 1998 Agreement.”

Does that still stand? That is an interesting question for the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister is now hoping that she can cobble together a deal that avoids all the big questions as to what our future partnership with the European Union will be. Is it not the case that the backstop is necessary only because the Government will not agree to a new comprehensive customs union with the EU, with a say

for Britain in future trade deals? How long is her envisaged temporary deal? One year? Two years? Five years? More? Britain deserves a bit better than this. The blindfold Brexit that the Government are cooking up is a bridge to nowhere and a dangerous leap in the dark.

Let me be clear that the only thing we can trust this Government to do is to impose more years of austerity on the people of this country. The Prime Minister wants to present Brexit as a choice between her deal and no deal. This is simply not the case. There is an alternative option—an alternative that can command the support of Parliament and the country. Labour has set out our six tests. Indeed, at times the Prime Minister has said that she will meet them. Labour’s plan—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. An even better-natured fellow, the hon. Member for Colchester—normally the embodiment of charm and good grace—is very overexcited. We will get you in in due course, Mr Quince, do not worry.

Jeremy Corbyn: Labour’s plan is for Britain and the EU to negotiate a permanent customs union to protect jobs and manufacturing. We want a deal that allows us to strengthen rights and working standards so that we can avoid a race to the bottom, and we want a deal for all regions and nations that allows us to invest in local infrastructure, local transport and energy markets so that we can grow our economy again. Labour will not give the Government a blank cheque to go down the reckless path they are set on at present.

Let me be clear that the choice for this Parliament should never be the Prime Minister’s deal or no deal. If this Government cannot get a good deal for this country, they have to make way for those who can. The Prime Minister faces a simple and inescapable choice: be buffeted this way and that way by the chaos of her own party, or back a deal that can win the support of Parliament and the people of this country.

The Prime Minister: Perhaps I could point out a few things to the right hon. Gentleman. He says that the discussion on the backstop was in order to avoid the questions of the future relationship. If he had actually listened to my statement—in fact, he received an early copy of it—he would have heard me make it clear that we have made good progress on both the structure and scope of the future relationship, which we have been discussing alongside the withdrawal agreement. He also talks about there being a better deal available. Well, we never hear from the Labour party exactly what deal it thinks it wants. What we have seen—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. There is far too much noise. I said a moment ago that the Leader of the Opposition must be heard, and the Prime Minister must also be heard.

The Prime Minister: What we have heard from Labour Members is that at one point that they want to do really good trade deals around the rest of the world, and the next moment they want to tie us into the Brussels trade deals by being part of the customs union. One minute they say they want to respect the vote of the British people in relation to free movement; the next minute

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they say, “Well, actually, no, free movement is still on the table.” What we constantly see from them is no firm proposals on this particular issue.

Labour Members also talk about being in a customs union. May I say to the right hon. Gentleman—this is perhaps the sort of detail he may not have recognised—that even if we were to go down the route of the sort of deal that might involve being in a customs union, it would still be necessary to have a backstop, in case there was a delay between bringing that in and the end of the implementation period. Certainly, on this side of the House, we are very clear about our commitments to the people of Northern Ireland and our commitments to the United Kingdom.

The right hon. Gentleman then said, “What have we got to show for all of this that has been undertaken?” What we have got to show for it is: the vast majority of the withdrawal agreement agreed; and significant progress and agreement on the structure and scope of the future relationship. What we also have to show for it is a Government who are determined to deliver on the vote of the British people, unlike an Opposition who want to frustrate the people’s vote and frustrate Brexit.

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): May I urge my right hon. Friend not to listen to the groundhog opposite, who does not have any interesting questions, but to rely on one specific question? I agree with my right hon. Friend that we are not going to be and will not be in the customs union—being out of the customs unions is a pledge that she made and that the British people voted for. The question I ask her is: she made her decision on that, but how long does she think this temporary arrangement might last and, most importantly, who would make the final decision on when it ends?

The Prime Minister: In relation to the UK-wide customs arrangement, we set out when we published our proposals in June that we would expect that to end by December 2021. My right hon. Friend asked me what I want to see and what I think in relation to this arrangement. I do not want to see the backstop having to be used at all. I want to ensure that we deliver for the people of Northern Ireland through the future relationship and that that future relationship comes into place on 1 January 2021, when the implementation period ends, so that we do not have to see this backstop arrangement being used at all.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I am grateful to the Prime Minister for advance sight of her statement. First, may I apologise on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), who, as is often the way when coming from a remote location, has been delayed in transit?

This morning, Scotland’s First Minister launched “Scotland’s Place in Europe: Our Way Forward”, which is the latest in a series of analyses on the ongoing negotiations and sets out the best—or least worst—possible future for Scotland. The first of these Scottish Government analysis papers came 18 months before Chequers and, to date, has not led to a single resignation from the Scottish Cabinet. The sense of unity and the responsibility

being demonstrated by the Government in Edinburgh could hardly be in more marked contrast to what we see from the UK Government here today.

Last night, the negotiations collapsed again. Did the Secretary of State go dashing off to Brussels just to fail? Or did he go because his officials had told him a deal was close? If that is the case, surely this House is entitled to know what, yet again, went wrong at the last minute. The Government’s official explanations only make sense if the Prime Minister has decided that the proposal she signed up to last December is unworkable.

The reality of all this weighs heavily across communities, particularly on the island of Ireland. We are three days away from the EU Council summit, and the UK Government continue to show at best disdain and at worst open contempt for the people of Ireland and for the Good Friday agreement. The Government clearly have no real understanding of what communities on both sides of the border are feeling about these negotiations. As long ago as last December, the Brexit Select Committee, despite an over-representation of hardliners, made it clear:

“We do not currently see how it will be possible to reconcile there being no border with the Government’s policy of leaving the Single Market”—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I am trying to hear the hon. Gentleman. Let’s hear the fella. [*Interruption.*] Order. I know that there is much noise. The hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) was pointing out that there is a lot of noise. I am well aware of that fact, and he does not need to conduct the orchestra.

Peter Grant: We can see how the Prime Minister’s Back Benchers have responded to her appeal for cool, calm heads. We can understand why she struggles to keep her party together when there are hard questions to be answered.

What was striking was the contrast in reaction from the Tory Back Benchers: when the Prime Minister committed to defend the Good Friday agreement, there was at best a lukewarm response, but there were then three hearty cheers when she said that we were taking Northern Ireland out of the customs union. It tells us where the Tory party’s priorities lie. A Conservative party playing politics with people’s lives for the sake of its own political survival is nothing short of disgraceful.

There is a better way. It is time for the Prime Minister to disown the extreme hard-line minority in her own party. She has the chance to resolve the question of the Irish border to protect jobs, to prevent the economic catastrophe that we face and to respect the result of the referendum in 2016. Will she now accept that she got it wrong? Will she now commit to a damage limitation Brexit and accept that there is a significant consensus in this House in favour of remaining in the single market and the customs union? I say to her to ignore her own career prospects, to ignore the career ambitions of those behind her and to look instead at the hundreds of thousands of people whose jobs are at risk if this goes wrong. Will she take her head out of the sand and work with those on all Benches in this House to ensure that a United Kingdom stays in the single market and in the customs union?

The Prime Minister: I will pick up on a number of those points. It interests me that the hon. Gentleman was talking about the importance to him of staying in the single market, presumably because of his concern about trade with the European Union. Well, we want to have a good trade deal with the European Union, but we also want to be free to be able to negotiate our own trade deals around the rest of the world. He asked what were still the areas of disagreement between us and the European Union in relation to the withdrawal agreement, and I set those out in my statement. I am afraid that he used a very unfortunate term. He said that we were showing contempt for the people of Northern Ireland and Ireland. Far from that, it is precisely because we recognise our commitment to the people of Northern Ireland that we are working hard to ensure that we deliver no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland and to ensure that people and businesses in Northern Ireland are able to carry on their day-to-day lives and their business as they can do today.

The hon. Gentleman also started off by referencing a piece of work that talked about the best economic future for Scotland. I hate to have to remind the Scottish National party yet again, but the best economic future for Scotland is to remain in the United Kingdom.

Boris Johnson (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con): I know that my right hon. Friend will appreciate that, in deciding to remain in the customs union, the Leader of the Opposition is guilty of a shameless U-turn and a betrayal of millions of people—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I want to hear the right hon. Gentleman. Let's hear the fella.

Boris Johnson: In that case, I will repeat that the right hon. Gentleman, the Leader of the Opposition, is guilty of a shameless U-turn and a betrayal of millions of people who voted leave. Will my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister confirm, as I think she has just said, that the very latest deadline by which this country will take back control of our tariff schedules in Geneva and vary those tariffs independently of Brussels in order to do free trade deals will be, as I think she has just said, December 2021? If that is not the deadline, will she say what it is?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right in pointing out the U-turn of the Leader of the Opposition. As I referenced in my response to him, the Opposition cannot hold the position both that they want to do trade deals around the rest of the world and also that they want to be part of a customs union. As I said, when we published the temporary customs arrangement proposal back in June, we set as a point of expectation that that would be completed by December 2021. As I indicated in my statement, one issue that we are discussing with the European Union is how we can ensure that we do reflect—properly reflect—the temporary nature of the backstop. I continue to believe that what we should all be doing is working to ensure that the backstop never comes into place and that, actually, it is not December 2021 that we are talking about, but 1 January 2021.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): In the paper that was published on 7 June, proposing a way to keep an open border in Northern Ireland, the Government said that their temporary customs arrangement would be in place

“until the future customs arrangement can be introduced”.

The Prime Minister has just reminded the House that she expects those arrangements to be in place by December 2021 at the latest—which, incidentally, is a whole year after the end of the proposed transition period—but since the expectation of an end date is not the same as a definite end date, when is she going to tell her party that we cannot have a fixed artificial time limit on the fall-back that the Government are trying to negotiate with the EU?

The Prime Minister: May I say, as I have in relation to a number of questions on this point, that we are very clear on this? The purpose of the backstop is to be an insurance policy such that if the future relationship is not in place by 1 January 2021, there is an arrangement that ensures no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland; so it is there for the time until the future relationship can come into place. As we indicated in June, we expect that to be no later than December 2021, but we will be working to ensure that that point comes as early as possible because it is in everybody's interests to ensure that we are able to move seamlessly into the future relationship after the implementation period without actually having to enter into another sort of relationship in the interim period. That is what the backstop would be, and that is why we want to work to ensure that the backstop never has to come into place.

Amber Rudd (Hastings and Rye) (Con): This is a moment of great importance, which is why the Chamber is so full of Members of Parliament who are here to speak on behalf of their communities and—given the relevance of this particular discussion—on behalf of their businesses. As the Prime Minister listens to the very many different voices in this House that she is blessed to hear from, I urge her to respond by working on those compromises with the EU not just on behalf of the 52%, but also on behalf of the 48%. It is on behalf of the 100% that we need to deliver on leaving the European Union.

The Prime Minister: Let me give my right hon. Friend the assurance that the Government and I are looking for a deal on the future relationship with the European Union that is good for the whole United Kingdom and that reflects the interests of the whole United Kingdom. We want to ensure that we have the freedom to do trade deals around the rest of the world and that we protect the jobs and livelihoods that today depend on the relationship and the trading relationship with the EU. What we are looking for, what I am looking for and what I am sure my right hon. Friend and other right hon. and hon. Friends are looking for is a deal that is good for the whole United Kingdom.

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): Why does the Prime Minister really find it necessary to make this statement today, given that it does not advance one iota our understanding that, in relation to Ireland, Brexit means borders, bureaucracy and—ultimately—betrayal of the Good Friday agreement?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman frequently stands up in this Chamber to complain about the lack of members of the Government coming to the House of Commons to inform Members about matters, but I

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have come here today to inform the House of Commons about the position, and he complains about that as well. That is typical of the Liberal Democrats; they do not know where they stand on the issue.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that if we go one second beyond 31 December 2020, we will automatically fall into the multiannual surveillance framework and will therefore be accumulating tens of billions of pounds extra year on year. Does she accept that, and does she also accept that if we continue to be dictated to by the EU in the way in which things are going at the moment, this country will be brought to a humiliating conclusion?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is obviously one of my hon. Friends who has paid particular, very careful attention to these issues, but I do not agree with the situation that he has set out. We have been negotiating with the European Union. That has seen both the European Union recognising our arguments and moving its position in relation to some issues, and our recognising our need to put forward proposals that are acceptable to us but that recognise the concerns that have been expressed by the European Union.

But what we are doing, and what I am doing, is making sure that any deal that we have is the deal that is best for the future of the United Kingdom. That is a deal that delivers on the Brexit vote but does so in a way that protects jobs and livelihoods.

In relation to the future relationship, I want to ensure that that future relationship can start at the end of the implementation period, in which case, of course, there would be no question of a different relationship with the European Union for any period of time. We have agreed the financial settlement as part of the withdrawal settlement, as my hon. Friend knows, but I remind the House, yet again, that—this was a phrase first used, I think, by the EU themselves—nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): The Prime Minister will know that there is a real fear that the Government will delay pinning down any deal until the last possible minute so that they can try to bounce Parliament with the threat that it is her deal or no deal. She knows that that would be unacceptable to Parliament, but she also knows how damaging no deal would be in terms of security as well as jobs and the economy. So will she confirm that it would be better to apply for an extension to article 50 than to crash out with no deal?

The Prime Minister: I do not believe that we should be extending article 50. I have been very clear that we should not be extending article 50. I am a little bemused by the right hon. Lady's first suggestion. We have legislated here in Parliament for a process that ensures that there will be not just the deliberations that this House will rightly have on the withdrawal agreement and implementation Bill, but a meaningful vote in this House prior to that. [HON. MEMBERS: "When?"] Labour Members say "When?" Of course, we are still in negotiations with

the European Union in terms of delivering on the deal, and we continue to work to the timetable that has recently been set out.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that this is not what leave voters voted for? Leave voters and businesses in Broxtowe were promised a deal on trade not after we have left the European Union, but at the time that we leave the European Union. They were told that it would be the easiest deal in the history of trade deals. They were told that it would convey the "exact same benefits" as our membership of the single market and the customs union. What we now see is complete chaos and a total mess. Would the Prime Minister consider that, if her Government cannot get a grip on this, and if Parliament cannot get a grip on this, then it is time to face up to the fact that Brexit cannot be delivered, take it back to the people, and have a people's vote?

The Prime Minister: As I have consistently said on this issue, this Parliament voted overwhelmingly to give the choice to the British people as to whether to leave or remain in the European Union. The people voted to leave the European Union, and I believe it is a matter of faith in our democracy, and the integrity of politicians, that we deliver for people on that vote. That is why it is so important to recognise—there is talk of a people's vote; of going back to the people for a vote—that the people were given a vote. The people's vote happened in 2016 and the people voted to leave.

Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): In order to avoid a hard border on the island of Ireland, which nobody wants, it can never be right that we have any kind of borders in the Irish sea between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom. The Prime Minister knows that we

"could not support any deal that creates a border of any kind in the Irish Sea".

Those are not my words—they are the words of Ruth Davidson, the leader of the Scottish Conservatives. Will the Prime Minister confirm today that, as she said in her statement, she could never accept a proposed

"backstop that would see Northern Ireland carved off in the EU's customs union and parts of the single market, separated through a border in the Irish sea from the UK's own internal market"?

Would she confirm that the UK is leaving the EU together with no part hived off either in the single market or customs union differences?

The Prime Minister: When we leave the European Union, it will be the UK that leaves the European Union. We will be leaving the European Union together. I am very clear that there should be no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland, but, as we have put forward in our proposals, we can deliver on that and maintain the integrity of our Union. We made that very clear when the European Union made its backstop proposal that would effectively have carved Northern Ireland away from the rest of the United Kingdom. We cannot accept the EU's backstop to a backstop precisely because it continues to want to see that. In fact what we want to see in a backstop is a situation where Northern Ireland businesses can export freely to Great Britain and to the European Union. That would be a good position for Northern Ireland businesses.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Trying to sign a withdrawal agreement without having legally binding texts on the future partnership would leave the UK in a deeply vulnerable position and unable to negotiate properly. Will the Prime Minister confirm that, in her view, no deal is still a lot better than a bad deal, and that a bad deal is giving £39 billion away, for no good reason, that we need to spend on our priorities?

The Prime Minister: I still believe that no deal is better than a bad deal. I am still working for what I believe is the best outcome for the UK, which is a good negotiated deal with the European Union for the future, but of course, we continue with our no-deal preparations. As my right hon. Friend will know, the negotiations on the financial settlement have already taken place. We are clear about the importance of linking the withdrawal agreement to the future relationship, such that we cannot find ourselves in a limbo situation and that we are able to see that future relationship committed to by the European Union and put in place. As I say, I want to see it put in place on 1 January 2021.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): The issue over the Irish border is a direct result of the wilful dismissal of its importance before the referendum campaign and the wilful disregard of its importance by leading Brexit advocates since the referendum. They now advocate a Canada-style free trade agreement. Will the Prime Minister confirm that she rejects a Canada-style agreement as being completely unsuitable for the UK not only because of the huge economic damage it would do to industries dependent on multinational supply chains but because it would result in a hard border, which would break commitments that this country has made?

The Prime Minister: Of course, what we have seen from the European Union is that a Canada-style deal is not available or on offer for the whole of the United Kingdom; it is only on offer for Great Britain, with Northern Ireland effectively carved out from the rest of the United Kingdom. The proposals that the Government have put forward following the discussions that the Cabinet had in July at Chequers are focused on a free trade deal with frictionless trade at its heart. A Canada-style deal does not deliver on frictionless trade and therefore does not deliver the absolute guarantee of no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland or, indeed, frictionless trade at our other borders.

Nicky Morgan (Loughborough) (Con): The Prime Minister is right to say that a negotiated deal is the best outcome for the United Kingdom. She is also right to say that protecting the Union is of fundamental importance to Members on all sides of the Brexit debate on the Government Benches. But as we just heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood), there are people who disagree with what she said in her statement about the “no-deal outcome that no one wants”.

There are people in this House and on the Government Benches who want a no-deal outcome.

John Redwood *indicated assent.*

Nicky Morgan: My right hon. Friend is nodding.

People in this country are now really concerned and worried about no deal, including businesses, EU citizens living here and British citizens living in the EU. I urge the Prime Minister to ensure that we do not slip into any kind of no-deal scenario, because I believe that this House will not support it and therefore would have to step into the negotiations.

The Prime Minister: As I said earlier in response to a question, I am clear that we are working to get a good deal for the whole of the United Kingdom, but it is also right that we continue our preparations for no deal because we do not know what the outcome of those negotiations will be. I think it is right that we ensure that the deal we bring back is a good deal for the whole of the United Kingdom.

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab): Does the Prime Minister stand by the commitment made by the Brexit Secretary to this House last week that the Government will publish a specific end date to the Irish backstop as part of the withdrawal agreement?

The Prime Minister: As I said both in my statement and in response to other questions, one of the issues that we are discussing with the European Union remains this issue of ensuring that the backstop is a temporary arrangement and that we cannot be kept in a permanent relationship of that sort with the European Union. The backstop is intended as an insurance policy for the people of Northern Ireland. I do not want that backstop ever to be put in place; I want to ensure we negotiate a future relationship that can start at the end of the implementation period.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): After the referendum, a large majority of MPs across the House were elected to help this country to negotiate a future outside the EU, with trade arrangements that are sensible and that allow us to use our control over money, borders and the like in a way that is beneficial to us and beneficial to others. Will my right hon. Friend assure our negotiating partners that less friction is better than more friction?

The Prime Minister: Yes, it is precisely because we believe in the value of frictionless trade that we have put forward a proposal that would indeed deliver on frictionless trade.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): It must be obvious to the Prime Minister that there is no majority in this place for a hard or no-deal Brexit, and she cannot do the sensible thing on the customs union and the single market because half her party and the DUP will not let her, so is she never tempted by the suggestion of her right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) that the way out of this mess—for her and for the country—will be a people’s vote?

The Prime Minister: No. I am going to repeat what I have said, in response to the right hon. Gentleman. The people had a vote in 2016. It was in a referendum. This Parliament gave the people that vote. The people voted to leave, and that is what we will deliver.

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con): Whether leave or remain, we can all agree that in the past Britain may have pooled its sovereignty, but we have never just given it away. Does the Prime Minister accept that the common rulebook represents a unique loss of sovereignty for Britain, but that for the first time we will have tied the hands of future generations, to be bound by rules they will have had no chance to write?

The Prime Minister: No, I am afraid I do not agree with my right hon. Friend on the definition she has set out, precisely because the proposal that we have put forward involves a parliamentary lock. It will be this Parliament that will decide on those rules—whether we adopt those rules and whether we adopt any further changes to those rules.

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): Is not the Prime Minister's problem that she is dancing to the tune of the hard Brexiteers—the duo from Uxbridge and Somerset—and we should not therefore be surprised that she is taking the country towards an inferior, low-grade, hard-Brexit FTA deal? Will she give an undertaking that, when this House—when Members of Parliament—look at that deal and decide that, actually, it is not right for the country and we decide a different course, she will respect the decision of Members of Parliament to put this question to a people's vote?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will know full well that it is very clearly set out what the process would be—what the procedure would be—were it to be the case that this Government were to bring a proposal back to this House and the meaningful vote were not to support that particular proposal.

Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): What are the cross-border transactions between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland that so threaten the integrity of the European single market and customs union that they cannot be resolved by existing techniques or existing processes under existing law, none of which requires hard infrastructure on the border?

The Prime Minister: There are arrangements in relation to customs checks that would be put in place were it not the case that we had come to an agreement to have a customs arrangement that did not require those checks to take place. I have seen and have heard of a number of proposals for technical solutions to deal with those issues. I have to say to my right hon. Friend that some of those technical solutions effectively involve moving the border—and it would still be a border. Some involve equipment, which could come under attack, and some involve a degree of state surveillance that, frankly, I think would not be acceptable in Northern Ireland.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): It is reported today that the Prime Minister wants the meaningful vote to take place on 27 November. The 27 November is the same day that the European Court of Justice will hear the Scottish Court's referral on the question of whether article 50 can be unilaterally revoked. My question for the Prime Minister is, is she afraid of MPs knowing the answer to that question before we have the meaningful vote?

The Prime Minister: First of all, the hon. and learned Lady is making an assumption about the date of the meaningful vote, and we are still in negotiations. Secondly, no, because the point about whether article 50 can be revoked is that this Government will not be revoking article 50—we are going to keep article 50.

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): The Government were clearly right to reject that part of the Commission's proposals that would have threatened the integrity of the United Kingdom, but it is salutary that what the European Commission produced was a deal that would have been worse than no deal. Despite that, can my right hon. Friend assure me and the House that she will continue to work very hard to make sure that we get a deal? I believe that, apart from a relatively small number of people who genuinely believe that no deal would be a good thing for this country, and apart from a few people who would vote against a deal for purely partisan reasons, there is an enormous majority in this House for a negotiated settlement to this procedure.

The Prime Minister: I can give my right hon. Friend that assurance. We will continue to work for a good deal, because I believe a good deal is the best outcome for the people of the United Kingdom.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): The DUP, which has sustained the Prime Minister in office, has made it clear that it thinks no deal is almost inevitable. What does she think?

The Prime Minister: We continue to work for a good deal for the whole of the United Kingdom.

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): I wish my right hon. Friend every good thing in this negotiation, but I do point out to her that we are heading towards a conclusion where we are going to be in an at least two-year relationship with the EU—which is a condition of vassalage, because we have absolutely no say in the rule making, but we are tied to it—and we are going to be bound by a common rulebook afterwards, even if she is successful. I have to say to her that, in those circumstances, I will not be able to support the Government in this, unless this matter is put to the British people again. It is entirely different from what was discussed and negotiated during the referendum in 2016.

The Prime Minister: I say gently to my right hon. and learned Friend that I think I recall the time when he was in favour of the Government negotiating an implementation period for our withdrawal from the European Union, to bridge the point between our leaving on 29 March 2019 and the point at which the future relationship would come into place. We have set out the reasons why it is important for us to ensure that at the heart of our future relationship is a free trade deal that has frictionless trade at its heart—that is a good trade deal for the United Kingdom, but also enables us to undertake good trade deals with others around the world.

Emma Little Pengelly (Belfast South) (DUP): Can the Prime Minister give a firm commitment that nothing will be agreed with the European Union that would exclude Northern Ireland from any part of any future UK trade deals?

The Prime Minister: In the future relationship, we will be negotiating trade deals on behalf of the whole of the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): My right hon. Friend made the excellent point that it would be unlawful to have a separate customs arrangement for Northern Ireland. Why did that point escape the negotiators until so late in the process?

The Prime Minister: The point about not having a customs border down the Irish sea is not one that has escaped negotiators. We have been very clear: we were clear when the proposal was first published by the European Union earlier this year and we have consistently been clear that such an arrangement was one that the UK Government could not accept.

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): Does not the existence of a backstop serve only to illustrate the fact that the Prime Minister has actually wasted the last two years?

The Prime Minister: No.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): Employees in the car manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, and food and drink manufacturing sector in Eddisbury want to manufacture to a single rule book, with frictionless trade. Can the Prime Minister confirm that this remains her negotiating position?

The Prime Minister: We continue to negotiate on the basis that the best deal for the future is one that has frictionless trade at its heart. That would be good for businesses here, and good for jobs and livelihoods here, but it would also deliver on the vote of the British people.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): Given the trouble being caused to the Prime Minister by a relatively small number of Members, does she not now regret not seeking cross-party consent for her negotiating objectives?

The Prime Minister: We have a very clear negotiating objective in relation to the deal we are getting from the European Union. Sadly, what I see from the Labour party Front Bench is not a consistent approach in relation to that. The Government set out our approach in Lancaster House and we have followed that through at every stage of the negotiations.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): When it comes to signing the political declaration on the future relationship, will my right hon. Friend confirm that it will be clear, specific and binding, so that business has more certainty and that we do not just begin another period of Brexit fog and uncertainty?

The Prime Minister: This is precisely why we want to ensure that there is a proper linkage between the withdrawal agreement and the future relationship, so that certainty can be given on what the future relationship is and that that is going to come into place. I think that that is what the House will want to see as well when it comes to look at the meaningful vote.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): The Prime Minister has chastised Labour's six tests. Let us look at the one she set, which is that frictionless trade must be the condition for signing up to the withdrawal agreement. Two and a half years on, all the whizz-bang technology you like and a temporary customs arrangement later shows that only staying in the customs union can do that. So in meeting her own test, the Prime Minister will face the same challenge she faces now: is it friction with the European Research Group or the future of the people of Northern Ireland that matters more? Her refusal to let the British public sort this out through a final-say deal shows that it is not the country.

The Prime Minister: As I have said to others, the British people made their decision on our leaving the European Union. If the hon. Lady wants to know how to deliver frictionless trade, she should read the White Paper.

Greg Hands (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con): I am delighted that my right hon. Friend has rejected the Opposition proposal to be in a customs union in the EU, which was of course rejected by this House only in July. Apart from the most important reason—having our tariffs and trade policy determined by Brussels without our having a seat at the table—it would also mean we would have no control over trade defences, dumping, unfair trade practices or trade preferences for the developing world. Does she therefore agree with me that it would be illogical to agree to be in a customs union with the European Union beyond December 2020?

The Prime Minister: First, I commend my right hon. Friend for the work he did on our trade policy when he was a trade Minister. I absolutely want to see that we are able to put those new trade arrangements into place at the end of the implementation period. I want to see that future relationship coming into play at that point, which of course would be 1 January 2021.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Does the Prime Minister accept that the best interests of the country are not served by a gaggle of self-serving Cabinet Ministers threatening to resign, but by allowing the people a vote in a people's vote?

The Prime Minister: I am quite happy to repeat what I have said in answer to all those Members who have proposed a people's vote. We had a people's vote. It was called the referendum and the people voted to leave.

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): I welcome the Prime Minister's statement and the progress that has been made, but will my right hon. Friend make it clear that throughout the tangle of these incredibly complex and difficult negotiations, security co-operation must remain a national priority, and will she confirm unequivocally that this will be the case?

The Prime Minister: I am very happy to give that reassurance to my right hon. Friend. I am pleased to say that we are making good progress in our discussions with the European Union on both internal and external security matters.

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): The Prime Minister has clearly ruled out a Canadian-style free trade agreement. As she rightly says, such an agreement would not lead to frictionless trade, and indeed would be disastrous for our food, automotive and aerospace industries, among others. However, will she explain how she will guarantee jobs in these industries and deliver frictionless trade if the UK leaves the customs union, and will these customs arrangements be detailed in the political declaration that we will have to vote on?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady wants to know how we will deliver frictionless trade in the circumstances—read the White Paper.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): The Prime Minister spoke about the need to take a cool and calculated approach to the negotiations and that everything that has been achieved so far in the negotiations has been a result of that approach. But does she agree that to have the sort of free trade that we want, it must be frictionless, or as frictionless as possible, with the EU so that our manufacturers can continue to have those very important businesses and all the jobs that go with them? With that in mind, I hope that she will send our Brexit Secretary over the channel as often as possible to achieve the result we want—that is, a good deal for Britain.

The Prime Minister: Like my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North East Hertfordshire (Sir Oliver Heald), I absolutely agree on the importance of the point about frictionless trade, because what we want to see in the future is a United Kingdom that not only is able to have good trade deals around the rest of the world, but has a very good trading relationship with its near neighbours in Europe, so that manufacturers here are able to continue to operate on the basis that they have done so far.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister update the House on the progress being made on the other border between the UK and the EU—the border between Gibraltar and Spain?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to say that discussions are continuing in relation to the matter because it will of course be part of the withdrawal agreement that we will look to enter into. There have been positive and constructive negotiations taking place, but they are still in progress.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): The Prime Minister has always said that the United Kingdom will leave the EU on 29 March next year and that any agreement will be based on ending the free movement of people, not sending billions and billions of pounds to the EU each and every year, and making our own laws in our own country, judged by our own judges. Does she still believe that that is possible?

The Prime Minister: Yes.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The Good Friday agreement took months of intensive negotiation and was then agreed in simultaneous referendums by overwhelming majorities in both Northern Ireland and the Republic. The petition as regards the 2016 referendum

was that it was a narrow majority on an advisory referendum. Which does the Prime Minister think is more important?

The Prime Minister: I think that both of these are important. That is why the Government, as we negotiate the terms on which we are leaving the European Union and the terms of our future relationship, are very clear that we remain fully committed to the Belfast agreement.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): I do not wish to labour the point, but like my right hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan) my businesses and constituents in South Cambridgeshire are terrified of a no deal, too. If that comes to pass and the Prime Minister will not entertain an extension of article 50, but accepts the reality that there is no way that no deal will pass through this House, I ask with the greatest respect: what option does that leave us other than going back to the people? What else can we do?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend's question involves a number of assumptions. We are working to get a good deal with the European Union. If, at the end of the negotiation process, both sides agreed that no deal was there, that would actually come back to this House, and then we would see what position the House would take in the circumstances of the time.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): The Prime Minister keeps advising hon. Members that if they want to know how to keep frictionless trade, they should just read the White Paper, but surely the Salzburg summit taught her that the White Paper was completely and utterly dead in the water. What is her plan B?

The Prime Minister: That is not the case. We have been negotiating with the European Union on the structure and scope of the future relationship, and we have been doing that on the basis of our proposals in the White Paper.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): In trying to come up with a constructive solution, will my right hon. Friend remind the EU of what it signed up to in last December's joint report? It signed up to unfettered access for Northern Ireland's businesses to the whole of the rest of the UK, and also to her commitment to follow only those rules that would be necessary for that north-south co-operation. If she reminded it of what it signed up to, we might make some progress.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend makes a very good point. It was a joint report, and the basis on which we were looking to avoid a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland was very clear.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): Some people in the House who have been supporting the Government seem to think that the solution is to have a hard border in Northern Ireland but not to enforce it. Is not that prospect just a myth?

The Prime Minister: The Government are committed to ensuring that we have no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland, and that is what we are working for.

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that when she meets her EU counterparts later this week, she will tell them that although we are a patient people, our patience is not inexhaustible, and that if it continues to maintain its present negotiating stance of seeking to divide the United Kingdom internally, we will have to assume that it is not serious about achieving a negotiated settlement and therefore be obliged to prepare for no deal?

The Prime Minister: We are all operating to a timetable—we will leave the European Union on 29 March next year—and we are clear that to get legislation through the House, we must follow a timetable and the negotiations need to end to match that timetable. I have said—I am very clear; the Government are very clear—that we cannot accept Northern Ireland effectively being divided from the rest of the UK.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): Of course there has been a people's vote since the referendum—the general election—when the public sent the Prime Minister the clear message that there was no majority in the country for a hard Brexit. Given that, and given that she was told very clearly that there was no majority in the House for Chequers and the White Paper, why does she expect Labour MPs to ride to her rescue and vote for a hard Brexit that would cost people's jobs in our constituencies and the country at large?

The Prime Minister: There has indeed been a general election since the referendum. Over 80% of Members stood on a manifesto promise to deliver on the vote of the people to leave the EU.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Were it to become necessary to implement a backstop agreement, the subsequent ending of that arrangement must be a matter for the British Government, must it not?

The Prime Minister: As I said in my statement, if it is necessary to implement a backstop agreement, we will want to ensure that we, as the British Government, can ensure that it is indeed temporary and does not become permanent.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): It has been suggested that the Brexit Secretary has promised the Prime Minister that he will deliver Chequers while at the same time assuring the ERG that he will stop it. Will she confirm that this cannot possibly be the case and that she has full confidence in her Secretary of State?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I have absolute full confidence in my Secretary of State. The Government have been negotiating with the European Union on the basis of the White Paper, and that continues to be the case.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Next spring, when the Duke and Duchess of Sussex are having their first baby, I want this country to be at a time of economic stability, and no deal is unpredictable. May I encourage my right hon. Friend to continue to press the case for innovative customs solutions that will deliver frictionless trade while listening closely to the concerns of other

EU member states about the risks that they face? Only when we make progress on finding a long-term solution will the difficulties of the backstop disperse.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend's question gives me an opportunity to say what I am sure was said earlier in the Chamber and give my personal congratulations to the Duke and Duchess of Sussex on the great news that we have heard today.

I assure my hon. Friend that, absolutely, concentrating on the long-term solution will not only deliver a good economic future for the partnership with the European Union for this country, but ensure that we deliver on our commitment to the people of Northern Ireland.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): During the referendum and since, the people running Britain's businesses have been promised repeatedly that they will enjoy the exact same benefits that they currently enjoy once we have left the EU. After two years of negotiation, it is patently clear that they will not. Does the Prime Minister empathise with them? Does she understand why they want to have a say on the deal themselves, and to decide for themselves whether it is fit for British business?

The Prime Minister: We have indeed been listening to British business. We have put forward a proposal for frictionless trade and a free trade area between the United Kingdom and the European Union that would deliver for British business and meet its concerns.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Last month, Michel Barnier very helpfully said that the border that he envisages down the middle of the Irish sea would be heavily reliant on innovative technical solutions. If that is true, why is he so dismissive of the same solutions, approved and endorsed by the European Parliament, in respect of the land border on the island of Ireland?

The Prime Minister: As I said earlier, a number of comments have been made about issues relating to the border and the possibility of technical solutions. We have made it very clear to the European Union—including, obviously, Michel Barnier—that any suggestion that there should be a customs border down the Irish sea is one that this Government cannot accept.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): The Republic of Ireland is the main trading link with the United Kingdom, through the port of Holyhead in my constituency. I have been raising this issue with the Prime Minister for the last 18 months. Businesses are worried because contingency plans have been undertaken by Irish companies to go directly to the European continent. What assurances can the Prime Minister give to businesses in my community that that will not happen?

The Prime Minister: We continue to negotiate in relation to our future economic partnership. We have put forward proposals that would enable that frictionless trade to continue to take place across the sea between the hon. Gentleman's constituents and Ireland. We continue to work on those proposals, and we are making good progress on that future relationship.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): I heartily welcome the Prime Minister's firm assurances that any backstop will be temporary. Businesses that wish to trade outside

[Mrs Anne Main]

the EU would like to plan for that event, and, in my opinion, they need to have an idea of how long the backstop would last. If the Prime Minister is not prepared to specify a date, will she tell us how we can shore up the fact that nothing can derail the temporary nature for which she wishes? May I also ask her to update the House on the future of British citizens in the EU during that temporary period?

The Prime Minister: As I have said to other Members, we are very clear that this should be temporary. As I said earlier, when we published the proposals for a UK-wide customs backstop, we included the expectation that it should end by December 2021, because the future economic relationship should be in place at that point. We are also clear about the fact that we cannot be in a position in which we would be potentially trapped in a permanent backstop, for a number of reasons, one of which is that we want to negotiate trade deals around the rest of the world and gain the economic advantage for this country of doing so.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I will ask this question again because I have not had an answer from the four different Ministers to whom I have asked it: after 29 March, which queue will British passport holders use when they land in Spain, France, Germany or Greece, and which queue will EU citizens use when they arrive in the UK?

The Prime Minister: The Home Office is looking at the arrangements that will take place at the border after 29 March 2019. As to those arrangements for UK citizens entering other countries within the EU, of course they are a matter for those countries. One of the issues that we have put forward in the White Paper, which we will discuss with the European Union, is precisely about ensuring that those who wish to travel as tourists, for example, between the United Kingdom and the 27 member states of the European Union will be able to continue to do that as easily as possible in the future.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): There are no hardcore Brexiters on this side of the House; there are only those who want to honour the referendum and do the best for their country. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this is now a question of trust and that, on the backstop, there is deep unease that somehow we will be left in the EU indefinitely? May I ask her this again: if we have to fall back on a backstop, will the UK have the sole right—the sole right—to pull out of it?

The Prime Minister: The point about the backstop is that it is an insurance policy for the people of Northern Ireland. I am clear that, first, it must be temporary and, secondly, we must be able to ensure that there is no way in which we can be left within that backstop as a result of a decision that the European Union takes in relation to this issue. There is a concern, I know, that somehow this will be an arrangement in which the EU does not negotiate the future economic partnership—the future relationship—and therefore we are left in limbo. That is why it is so important that we get a number of things, not least the linkage between the withdrawal agreement

and the future relationship, and also reassurance in the withdrawal agreement about the temporary nature of the backstop.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): There are many of us who genuinely accept the referendum result and want the Prime Minister to agree a good deal, but we are also realists and accept that there will be trade-offs in the different deals and options. The problem with the Prime Minister repeating today her belief that we will somehow agree the Chequers proposals is surely that the EU has clearly said it will never agree to them, that the Conservative party has said it would never vote for them, if they were agreed, and, crucially, that Chequers does not resolve the big issue of substance: the question of whether the ability to unilaterally agree free trade deals is really worth the loss to the UK of frictionless supply chains in manufacturing and of market access for financial services and, even more importantly, the risk to future stability and peace in Northern Ireland.

The Prime Minister: The proposals that have been put forward that form the basis on which we are having discussions with the European Union precisely address the issues the hon. Gentleman has raised in relation to frictionless trade, and ensuring that we maintain our commitments to the Belfast agreement and that there should be no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): Here is some Brexit reality: AstraZeneca has announced just this afternoon that it is stopping investing in the United Kingdom. We have just 165 days to go until we leave the EU and we still have no deal, with disastrous consequences. The Prime Minister says that we cannot have a people's vote, but is not the truth here that the people were not able to see—there is no consensus about this—which of the many versions of Brexit we will be heading towards? Once we know that final deal, would it not be reasonable to go back to the British people, present them with what is involved and what the consequences are—both positive and negative—and then allow them to give their informed consent to moving forward?

The Prime Minister: I have answered this question on a number of occasions before this afternoon in relation to the fact that I believe it is imperative for Members of Parliament across the House to deliver on the decision that we freely gave to the people of the United Kingdom and to deliver on the vote that they took in relation to leaving the EU. My hon. Friend references the fact that there is no deal yet, but we are continuing to work for that deal. We continue in those negotiations and look forward to continuing to work with the member states of the EU and the European Commission towards that end.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): In 2015, David Cameron was elected on a promise of a referendum on the EU, but promised to stay in the single market. Given that the current Prime Minister has decided to break that latter promise, and given the other promises broken since 2016—not least, those written on red buses—does she not agree that this mandate about the single market and the customs union fundamentally undermines the integrity of Britain and Northern Ireland?

Should the situation not ultimately be resolved not by a simple choice between a bad deal and no deal, but with the option of remaining in the EU through a people's vote so that the people can look again?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman will know, I have answered the question about the people's vote on a number of occasions already. I refer him to my previous answers.

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Ind): My understanding—and that of the whole House, I believe—is that the £39 billion divorce bill is predicated on our leaving the implementation period at the end of December 2020. If the period continues until December 2021, will that be included in the divorce settlement or will it be extra?

The Prime Minister: The arrangement to which I think my hon. Friend refers is whether or not the backstop will be in place up to December 2021. That, of course, is a different arrangement from the implementation period, and it has different aspects to it from the arrangements that will be in place during the implementation period.

I repeat what I have said on a number of occasions: what I want to do, and I believe others want to do, is to work to ensure that we do not have to have that period when a backstop is in place, so that we are able to see our future relationship come in place at the end of the implementation period and we have that seamless transition.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): This country is divided, and that was both a cause and consequence of the referendum two years ago. What is the Prime Minister's vision for uniting the country, so that my constituents, four out of five of whom voted to remain, as well as those who voted to leave, can feel that there is something that we can all truly unite behind? I do not see it.

The Prime Minister: First, we are working to get a good deal that will deliver for the whole United Kingdom. But I would remind the hon. Lady, as I did one of her hon. Friends earlier, that the vast majority of people sitting in this Chamber were elected on a mandate to deliver on the vote of the British people.

Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con): My right hon. Friend has rightly said that she seeks a resolution on behalf of all the people of the United Kingdom and all its citizens. More than a million of those live in other countries of the European Union, and others will wish or need to leave and live in those other countries. Is she going to protect their interests, please?

The Prime Minister: When we were negotiating the citizens' rights element of the December joint report, I was asked in this House on many occasions to give a unilateral declaration of the rights of EU citizens here in the UK. I refused to do that until we could negotiate reciprocal arrangements for United Kingdom citizens living in the remaining member states of the European Union. In some of those member states, the precise technical details of those reciprocal arrangements are still being worked through, but that was part of the citizens' rights agreement that we came to in the December joint report.

Graham P. Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): If the European Parliament, the EU 27 or this Parliament vote against any deal that the Prime Minister brings forward, what next?

The Prime Minister: As I said earlier, this House has set out clearly what the process would be were it to be the case that, on a meaningful vote, the position that the Government set forward was not agreed by this House.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): Will the Prime Minister give a commitment that the interests of our fishermen will be considered in any agreement with the EU? Will she ensure that the full benefit of leaving the EU will be available to our fishermen when we leave?

The Prime Minister: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. We are absolutely clear that we are coming out of the common fisheries policy and that we will be an independent coastal state. We will be able to decide and negotiate who has access to our waters.

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): The Prime Minister has ruled out putting a date on the backstop. Can she also rule out an indefinite backstop with a notice period?

The Prime Minister: I am very clear that we are not going to have an indefinite backstop and that we will ensure that the backstop is a temporary arrangement. As I said in my statement,

“while I do not believe that this will be the case...if the EU were not to co-operate on our future relationship, we must be able to ensure that we cannot be kept in this backstop arrangement indefinitely. I would not expect this House to agree to a deal unless we have the reassurance that the UK, as a sovereign nation, has this say over our arrangements with the EU.”

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): During Saturday's excellent victory by Gloucester rugby club against the French league champions Castres Olympique, several representatives of small and medium-sized businesses focused on telling me how disastrous no deal would be, both for their and their European partners' trade. May I therefore encourage my right hon. Friend and the Secretary of State for International Trade to highlight for EU officials the fact that the huge risks and unintended consequences of failing to reach a sensible agreement with us on the Irish border would be much greater than has hitherto been highlighted?

The Prime Minister: We continue to work for the good deal that I know my hon. Friend and others want us to be able to agree with the European Union. Obviously, we remain committed in relation to the hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland, but we continue to make the point to the European Union that the integrity of the United Kingdom is of key importance to us and that we cannot accept anything that would challenge that integrity. Congratulations to Gloucester rugby club.

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): Recent Government figures show a 7% increase in Welsh exports to the EU, and the fact that the EU single market accounts for 61% of total exports from Wales. Given the importance

[Ben Lake]

of the single market and the customs union to the Welsh economy, what representations has the Prime Minister received from the First Minister of Wales in relation to her policy of leaving both?

The Prime Minister: I talk to the First Minister of Wales, and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office has spoken to Welsh and Scottish Ministers today to update them on where we are. We keep in regular contact with the Scottish and Welsh Governments on these matters.

Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): A few weeks ago, the Prime Minister made the very welcome statement following Salzburg that in the event of no deal, the rights of all lawfully resident EU nationals in this country—such as my parents and other family members—would be guaranteed. Will she take this opportunity this afternoon to repeat that statement in the House for the benefit of all MPs, so that they understand clearly that it is a Conservative Government who will protect the rights of EU nationals?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I am happy to repeat that commitment to protect those rights of EU nationals in the event of no deal. I hope that we will see a reciprocal arrangement from the member states of the European Union for UK citizens in the event of no deal.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): I never thought I would see the day when the Prime Minister's Secretary of State for Scotland and the leader of the Scottish Conservatives, Ruth Davidson, were prayed in aid by the Democratic Unionist party in support of its arguments on the backstop. Will the Prime Minister confirm that the only way in which a backstop can function and succeed is if it undertakes the same functions as the single market and the customs union on that border? Will she stop pandering to reactionary nationalists such as our ex-Foreign Secretary and his cohort?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman wants to see the details of the proposal that we put forward on the customs arrangement—[*Interruption.*] “Oh, we've heard that,” says the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy). I think if she waits, she will hear a slightly different answer to the one she thinks I am about to give. If the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) wants to see the arrangements for the UK-wide customs proposal that we put forward in response to the EU's suggestion of a customs border down the Irish sea, he should look at the paper that we published in June.

Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): So far today, my right hon. Friend has failed to reassure the House that we will definitely be able to leave the backstop by 31 December 2020. She continues to argue for a common rulebook that many of us on the Government Benches will not be able to support. Will she not pivot to a super-Canada policy and focus the remaining negotiating time on the technical solutions that have been set out? I urge her to do so, please, before it is too late.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises a number of issues. I have been clear in this House that one of the areas where we are continuing discussions with the EU in relation to the Northern Ireland protocol, precisely because of our concerns about the issue, is the question of the temporary nature of the backstop and of ensuring that we have the means to ensure that the backstop is temporary were it ever to come into place. As for the common rulebook, there would be a parliamentary lock on that issue, and our manufacturers tell us that they would be abiding by those rules in any case, regardless of whether there was a lock. The offer that was on the table from the EU in relation to the Canada-style free trade agreement was one that related only to Great Britain and essentially carved Northern Ireland away from the rest of the United Kingdom on such matters.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): It is an indisputable fact, if regrettable, that a majority of Members of this House voted to trigger article 50. Can Parliament overturn that decision?

The Prime Minister: It is an indisputable fact that the majority of Members of this House voted to trigger article 50, but it is also an indisputable fact that this Government have no intention of revoking article 50.

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): People may not have listened or liked what they heard, but is it not the case that not a single argument has been made since the referendum that was not made before the referendum? As such, anyone who is a democrat should reject a second vote.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Many issues have been raised in this House as though they were not discussed during the referendum. There was a full debate during the referendum process on issues about our remaining in or leaving the European Union, and it is a matter of faith in our democracy and the integrity of politicians that we deliver on that vote.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): The Prime Minister appears to be heading towards a deal that enjoys the support of almost nobody. She is saying to the Brextremists that they need to vote for her deal otherwise Brexit will collapse, and she is saying to more moderate voices that they need to back her deal otherwise there will be no deal. Is it not the truth that neither of those positions is actually true?

The Prime Minister: We are working for a good deal; we will bring that deal back; and there will be a vote in this House of Commons.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): As we approach this crucial phase, I am convinced that my constituents want to be assured of one thing: that my right hon. Friend is not negotiating in her interests or in the interests of our party but, quite properly as a sensible Prime Minister, in the interests of the country, our people and our businesses. Will she confirm that that is the case?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to confirm that. It is important that this Government and I put the national interest first in the negotiations, and that is exactly what we are doing.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): The Brexit Minister luckily made it back okay from the continent yesterday, but my son's school trip letter about Berlin in June warns that in the case of a no-deal Brexit the projected price may rise due to the pound sterling rate relative to the euro and that additional fees may be incurred for visas—not to mention what will happen to the plane if the open skies agreement is not renewed. If Elthorne Park High School is not prepared to take the whole “It'll be all right on the night” line that we be keep being fed, surely “Project Fear” is fast becoming “Project Reality”.

The Prime Minister: We are working for a good deal, but it is right that the Government, as we have done through the publication of the technical notices and our work on the matters that are the responsibility of government, prepare for the possibility of no deal. The European Union is preparing for the possibility of no deal, but both sides are working to ensure that we get a deal.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): My hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) brought more tourists to my constituency for the rally on Saturday. Obviously, tourism is big business for Torbay, so what are the Prime Minister's thoughts about tourism after we leave the European Union?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises an important sector, and there are many areas that we must consider when looking at our future relationship. One of the key issues—I have referred to it already this afternoon—is the question of ensuring that tourists can move across the border as easily as possible, and preferably as easily as they can today, so that there is no further encumbrance on tourists who want to visit my hon. Friend's beautiful constituency.

Anna McMorrin (Cardiff North) (Lab): Despite her protestations, it is becoming increasingly clear that the Prime Minister is unable to hold her party together, let alone the country. There is no doubt about it: my constituents did not vote to become poorer, which is what will happen if she proceeds along this route. Will the Prime Minister do the right thing and give the people a final say on the deal?

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the answer I have given previously.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): Talk of no deal is now commonplace, but the hard reality is that it will be very damaging to the people of the UK and the EU, and, indeed, to our future relationship. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is incumbent on both sides to strain every sinew to avoid no deal?

The Prime Minister: I agree. It is important for both sides to work as hard as we can to get a good deal. As I have always said, a deal that is good for the UK will also be good for the EU.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): I did not realise until today that the Prime Minister is an Eagles fan. In her announcement, she said that the backstop could last as long as 2021. She has put her

country into Hotel California: we can check out anytime we like, but we can never leave. When is she going to put workers, businesses and consumers first and, at the very least, look at a customs union between the United Kingdom and the EU?

The Prime Minister: We are putting the interests of people across the United Kingdom—workers, consumers and businesses—at the forefront of what we are doing. That is precisely why we have proposed a free trade area that includes frictionless trade.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): I entirely recognise the strong potential economic upside of being able to negotiate our own free trade deals, but surely we need to remember that the very same firms we would expect to invest into and benefit from those trade deals would be hit hard if friction on our border disrupted supply chains. Surely we have to get it right on both counts.

The Prime Minister: Yes. We want to ensure that we have a good trade relationship with the European Union. Our proposal has frictionless trade at its heart, but we will also get the benefit of those great trade deals around the rest of the world.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): The Prime Minister has come here today and failed to outline how her backstop is going to meet the impossible conditions of the ERG and the DUP. She is just going to act as their fall guy, is she not? Why does she not put herself out of her contortionist misery and put this question to a general election or to a third referendum, with remain as an option? [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. It is immensely stimulating to listen to the hon. Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson), but it is even more interesting to listen to the Prime Minister's answer.

The Prime Minister: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am not quite sure where a third referendum came from, but I refer the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) to the answer I have given previously.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): The European Union's negotiating position on the Irish backstop appears to imply that the only way it can believe we could avoid a hard border is by maintaining a customs union. Does the Prime Minister join me in rejecting that premise? There are two ways to avoid it: one was outlined in July's White Paper; and the second is evident from studying the Swiss-French border, which crosses the customs union—there are different arrangements on the single market—where there is pretty much no infrastructure on most A-roads, barring a little French sign and a single camera of a kind seen on most high streets.

The Prime Minister: I do believe there is a way to ensure that we avoid a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland, and it is by having an arrangement with the European Union on frictionless trade—that is a customs arrangement that does not include us as part of the customs union.

Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): No sooner were rumours circulating at the weekend of a differentiated deal for Northern Ireland than the Scottish Government wanted in on the act. They want the same bespoke deal to apply to them, even though it would cause a hard border at Berwick. Is the Prime Minister absolutely clear that any new differences that are needed to make a frictionless border in Northern Ireland, beyond what already exist on an all-Ireland basis, will apply UK-wide and that we will leave together with one deal?

The Prime Minister: We are indeed working for a deal that ensures we leave the European Union as the whole United Kingdom. The circumstances of Northern Ireland having a land border with a country that will remain within the EU are different from those at Scotland. Of course, some checks already take place, for example, in relation to livestock moving between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I cannot really believe that the Scottish Government or the Scottish National party want to impose those checks on livestock that would be moving from Scotland to northern England.

Trudy Harrison (Copeland) (Con): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that her plans mean we will leave the common agricultural policy?

The Prime Minister: Yes.

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): The Prime Minister has an excellent record of standing up for the interests of Britain's defence workers, especially the 6,000 Eurofighter workers at Warton in my constituency. Will she impress upon our European counterparts the importance of doing a deal, because hundreds of thousands of jobs across Europe are at risk if they do not come to the table with her?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. When we talk about the importance of frictionless trade, often the sector referred to is the automotive sector, but the aerospace industry also has a real interest in it, and we will continue to make the point about the importance of that frictionless trade.

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend reconfirm that she would reject any plans or deal that would break up the United Kingdom or threaten our precious Union?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to give that commitment. That is precisely why we have been clear that we cannot accept the proposals that the European Union has put forward which would, in effect, mean a customs border down the Irish sea and so break Northern Ireland away from the rest of the UK.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con) *rose*—

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con) *rose*—

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I call Nigel Huddleston.

Nigel Huddleston: Does the Prime Minister agree that compromise on both sides, whether in politics, business or any human relationship, does not mean giving in, giving up and being humiliated, but is a perfectly sensible and reasonable route to getting a mutually beneficial and desirable outcome?

The Prime Minister: Yes. By definition, negotiations mean both sides sitting down, talking about the issues and coming to an agreement that both can accept. Very often, that does mean both sides having to accept some degree of compromise.

Stephen Kerr *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Mr Chalk, you seem to be losing your appetite—I hope not.

Alex Chalk: It is just because the question was asked so artfully before that I do not want to repeat it. May I repeat it, Mr Speaker? My right hon. Friend has made it clear that there is an impasse over the Northern Ireland backstop, but is she confident that with a constructive approach and good will on both sides it remains possible—and, indeed, it must be possible—to cut the Gordian knot?

The Prime Minister: Yes. I reassure my hon. Friend that I do believe it is possible for us to come to an agreement that meets our requirements, and I believe it is possible for us to achieve the good deal that we want to see for the UK.

Stephen Kerr: I think I have heard very clearly the Prime Minister state and restate that our precious Union is not up for negotiation, but will she rule out any increase in checks on trade flowing between Great Britain and Northern Ireland?

The Prime Minister: What we have put forward in relation to the backstop proposal is a mixture of a UK-wide and Northern Ireland-specific proposal which meets the constitutional settlement that we have for Northern Ireland. As we have already recognised, a limited number of checks already take place. What we want to ensure, as I said earlier, is that businesses in Northern Ireland are able to have that free and unfettered access to the rest of the UK internal market and, indeed, in the backstop arrangement, have that unfettered access to the European Union as well.

Green GB Week and Clean Growth

5.14 pm

The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry): With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement to this House.

As the Prime Minister said earlier this year, the international determination to address climate change and deliver a cleaner future is one of the facts of our time and one of our greatest opportunities. Only this month, we had a reminder of the importance and urgency of our mission in the form of the publication of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's latest special report.

The report's conclusions are stark and sober. They show that we are not on track to cap global average temperature rises to below 2° from pre-industrial levels, let alone to reach 1.5°. The implications of this difference in warming are spelt out in the science: from flooding risk going up to fisheries going down; from extreme weather events to extinctions due to loss of habitat—serious, challenging and difficult outcomes. To mitigate against the impact of climate change, we need to understand how to best transform our energy generation, land use, transport systems, industrial processes, homes and buildings. That is why, earlier today, I officially requested the advice of our UK independent advisers, the Committee on Climate Change, on the implications of the Paris agreement, and this latest IPCC report, for the UK's long-term emissions reduction targets.

We are the first major industrial economy to seek such advice, which again reaffirms our determination to lead the world in this area. I have asked for this advice on when and how we could achieve a net zero target for our economy, including whether this is the right time to set such a target, and how reductions might be achieved across sectors in the most cost-effective way.

This request was the first event in our very first Green GB Week, which is designed to bring together businesses, government and civil society to celebrate the extensive cuts in emissions that we have achieved in the UK, and to open up the discussion about the challenges and opportunities from cleaner growth. The week involved tens of partner organisations, more than 100 events, and thousands of participants right across the UK.

No country other than the UK has done more to prove that action on climate change and economic growth can go hand in hand. Since 1990, we have led the G7 group of countries in cutting emissions and also in growing our economy. Since 2000, according to a recent report, the UK has cut emissions per unit of economic growth by an average of 3.7% a year—I know it is a bit technical, but the reduction of carbon for every unit of growth we deliver is how it is measured—which is well ahead of the G7 average of 2.2%. Last year, 2016-17, we achieved minus 4.7% compared with a global average of 2.6%.

This low carbon transition offers huge opportunities for the UK, which is why clean growth sits at the heart of our modern industrial strategy. It creates jobs. There are already more than 400,000 jobs in the UK's low carbon economy, and this thriving sector could grow by 11% a year up to 2030—four times faster than the rest of the economy. We are already seeing UK businesses leading the world. We have more offshore wind installed in the UK than any other country. Auction clearing

prices for offshore wind have halved in the past two years, which is great news for industries and consumers alike, and this progress is opening up new markets from North America to South Korea.

In the first half of 2018, one in five of electric vehicles sold in Europe was made right here in the UK. In the service sector, the UK is consulting, and engineering firms are international leaders for global sustainable and low carbon projects. Since 2010, we have invested £52 billion in renewable energy projects in this country and the result is that we now generate more than half our electricity from low carbon sources—32% came from renewables in 2017.

We have committed more than £2.5 billion in Government investment in low carbon innovation in this Parliament, and we have galvanised action and initiative internationally, helping to secure the historic agreement of 195 countries to sign up to the Paris climate agreement. We have also established the Powering Past Coal Alliance, which has seen more than 70 countries, cities, states and businesses commit to transition away from coal power generation. We are leading from the front. In April this year, our power sector was entirely coal free for three days and we will phase out coal entirely from our power generation by 2025.

In the last seven years, we have delivered international climate finance to over 200 programmes in more than 75 countries, improving access to clean energy for over 17 million people and building the foundations for cleaner economic development in some of the poorest parts of the globe. Our progress to date is cause for celebration. I am proud to think of the UK—through successive Governments' actions—as one of the greenest nations in the world. But while the world continues to deal with the implications of man-made climate change, we must not be complacent, and there is almost always more that we should be doing.

Today we publish our response to the annual progress report of the Committee on Climate Change, setting out what we have done since publishing our clean growth strategy this time last year and our next steps. The pace of innovation means that we cannot predict with certainty the most cost-effective path to our long-term carbon targets, but I can predict this: from how we travel to how we build our homes, we will need to make profound changes. Our strategy sets out some of the paths that we will need to take to do so.

This Government have set out the ambition to be the first to leave the environment in a better state than the one we inherited, but this must be consistent with strengthening our economy and providing opportunities for young people right across the country. Clean growth—which we are celebrating today and this week during the inaugural Green GB and Northern Ireland Week—can deliver all three, but to build on this success will require ongoing ambition and leadership from politicians right across the House, business, academia and civil society.

Ten years after the groundbreaking Climate Change Act 2008 was passed with almost unanimous support in this place, we want Green GB Week to bring the whole country together to celebrate the UK's success and to set our ambitions for the future. Crucially, we need to understand that there are profound risks to our planet from uncontrolled warming, but that there are also huge opportunities in rising to this challenge. This Government are committed to maximising those opportunities. I commend this statement to the House.

5.21 pm

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): I thank the Minister for advance sight of her statement today. I am pleased to be responding to the news that she has written to the Committee on Climate Change asking for advice on setting a date for achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions. However, despite any good intentions she may have had in writing that letter, she must understand that Government policy is demonstrably incompatible with that goal.

First, investment in renewable energy has undergone what the Environmental Audit Committee refers to as a “dramatic and worrying collapse”—falling 56% in 2017. Changes in planning rules and Government funding since 2015 have seen the rate of deployment of new solar fall 95%, and planning applications for new onshore wind fall 94%. The Government now plan to remove support to small-scale renewables, which according to the Solar Trade Association, risks the almost total collapse of the industry. How is this compatible with net zero emissions?

Secondly, this Government and the last have sadly overseen a collapse in investment in energy efficiency, with Energy UK pointing to a 53% drop in investment between 2012 and 2015, an 80% reduction in improvement measures, and further declines projected to 2020. Again, how is this compatible with net zero emissions?

Thirdly, this Government have pursued a policy of fracking at any cost, overruling local planning decisions and reportedly even considering relaxing earthquake regulations. Shale gas can only be described as low carbon if it replaces coal in the energy mix, but coal is already on its way out of the UK’s energy mix, before fracking has even started. If shale gas were to come online now, it would be displacing genuinely low-carbon energy, not coal. James Hansen, the former NASA scientist known as the father of climate science last week slammed this Government’s decision to pursue fracking as “aping” Donald Trump. What a terrible irony it is that the first day of Green Great Britain Week is the day that fracking is due to commence in Preston. How is this compatible with net zero emissions?

Fourthly, last week the Government announced that they are cutting the electric vehicle plug-in grant by £1,000—a move described by industry as “astounding”. Fifthly, according to the Committee on Climate Change, the Government are off course to meet existing carbon budgets, which are set with a view to achieving an 80% reduction in emissions by 2050. So I ask again: how is this compatible with meeting the more ambitious target of net zero emissions?

I believe that the answer to that question is contained within today’s letter to the Committee on Climate Change, in which the Minister describes carbon budgets 3 to 5, which run up to 2032, as “out of scope” of the referral. By effectively ruling out any additional action on climate change in the next 14 years, the Government seem to be asking the committee for advice but only in so far as they do not actually have to act on it. Unlike Labour’s plan to dramatically decarbonise energy supply and insulate 4 million homes as part of a green jobs revolution, the Government do not expect actually to implement any of the real measures needed to avert dangerous climate change. Sadly, without more robust and radical action from the Minister, she must realise that her Government’s vision for a green Great Britain is just a great green washout.

Claire Perry: Is it not disappointing, on a day when we should be celebrating what politicians can come together to do, that the hon. Lady could not bring herself to do anything remotely cross-party?

I think the fundamental mistake that the hon. Lady and many other Labour Members make is that they confuse Government spending with results. We have seen a dramatic fall in the price of renewable energy, of solar panels and of energy efficiency measures, so thankfully we no longer need to make enormous subsidies with other people’s money in order to deploy the energy. In terms of the results, as I mentioned, we are now at 32% of renewables, and we had our first coal-free day. I know that the leader of her party, as long ago as 2015, was calling for reopening all the deep-cast coalmines in the north-east and has said that he will rule out nuclear.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab) *indicated dissent.*

Claire Perry: He has changed his policy now, but back then it was not at all obvious what it would be.

The hon. Lady knows that investment in this sector is very lumpy. We have brought forward some of the biggest offshore wind projects the world has ever seen. One would always expect that money to go up and down.

The hon. Lady talked about feed-in tariffs. We have spent nearly £5 billion in subsidising feed-in tariffs since 2010, and it has indeed worked. We are now seeing record levels of solar deployment. We signalled back in 2015 that we would be seeking to remove subsidy from the sector. We have had a call for evidence to see what we will replace that with, and I look forward to making some announcements on that shortly.

The hon. Lady is right that we all need to do more on energy efficiency. That is why we have set out the most challenging targets the country has ever seen in order to improve efficiency both in our homes and in our other buildings.

The hon. Lady talked about shale gas. I find it amazing that so many Labour Front Benchers will take the shilling of the GMB union but will not take its advice on shale gas extraction. They are claiming that this does not create jobs; the union fundamentally disagrees with them. They claim that it is not consistent with a low-carbon future. The Committee on Climate Change has said that it is entirely consistent with our measures. When they go home tonight to cook their tea, I ask them to think about what fuel they are going to use, because we know that 70% of the country relies on gas for cooking and heating. We have a choice. On current projections, we are going to move from importing about half our gas to importing almost 75% of it, even with usage falling, as it needs to go forward. I know that some Labour Members would love us to be spending more hard currency with Russia, but I am quite keen to soberly—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps if Labour Front Benchers would all like to stop mansplaining, I could actually make some progress. I would like to answer the hon. Lady’s questions without a whole load of chuntering as if I am the referee at Chelsea.

As I was saying, the challenge on shale is that we do use gas. We want to rapidly decarbonise gas as we will continue to do. This is entirely consistent with all our low-carbon pathways. It is even consistent with the hon. Lady’s proposals for the renewable economy, because

she will need 40% of that to come from some sort of thermal generation. It seems crazy to me not to soberly explore the science of exploiting a resource beneath our feet that could create thousands of jobs rather than importing it from an extremely unstable nation. *[Interruption.]* Well, do not listen to me—go and listen to your union paymasters.

We signalled that we would at some point have to stop subsidising electric vehicles. We have spent half a billion pounds of taxpayers' money since 2011 on driving up the deployment of EV, and three things have happened. First, the number of these vehicles has ballooned, with up to 13% of new car sales being electric in August this year. Secondly, the price of those cars is now falling, to the point where the decision to buy electric is becoming less of a challenge. Thirdly, the Government are investing £1.5 billion in the charging infrastructure that this country so desperately needs.

The hon. Lady talked about the carbon budgets. I have said this before, and I will say it again. Budgets 3 and 5 end in 10 and 15 years respectively. If we achieve budget 5, we will have achieved a cut of almost 60% in our emissions since 2010. We are on track already, without costing many of the policies and proposals that we set out last year, to deliver 97% and 95% of what is needed for those budgets. That is a pretty reasonable approach, and, given that we have made clean growth such a fundamental part of our industrial strategy, those figures will only accelerate.

Lastly, the hon. Lady invited me to talk about Labour's policy. Well, where to start? As always, there is no detail on how their targets would be met, whether they are technically feasible, how much they would cost, how much they would add to energy bills or whether the supply chain could deliver it. As always, it is a load of fantasy numbers designed to create a press release. Labour talks about getting 44% of homes to renewable heating within 12 years, but 80% of homes are on the gas grid. Is the hon. Lady going to add to people's energy bills the cost of disconnection and reinstatement of gas? I think we should know.

One of Labour's own MPs said that we do not need to

“talk about reationalising vast swathes of the economy or reopening the pits”,

as the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) made such a virtue of doing in his leadership campaign. We will get on with delivering policies that are realistic and fully costed and deliver the most ambitious decarbonisation of the economy, and we will leave the Labour party to play fantasy economics with its energy policies.

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): Our annual reduction in emissions per unit of GDP is roughly three times that of the European Union. My right hon. Friend articulately described how the efforts of this Government are starting to pay off. Does she agree that, however much effort the United Kingdom is putting in, we have to look at this as a global problem, continue with whatever arrangement we have with the European Union and encourage it to move and use our budgets in other parts of Government to ensure that this is a global endeavour and that we are using our skills in this country to create a world where there are much lower greenhouse emissions?

Claire Perry: I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend's long-standing work in campaigning and his ministerial work on the whole question of environmental sustainability. He is quite right that we are well ahead of our EU counterparts in decarbonising our economy. I was at the European Council on Monday, where we debated our emissions reduction targets. The Road to Zero is a very ambitious programme of emissions reductions, and we were among a handful of nations pushing for maximum ambition on reducing CO₂ emissions from cars and vans. We should continue to do that regardless of the technical rearrangements of our relationship with the EU, because when it comes to carbon, we are so much stronger working together.

John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP): I thank the Minister for advance sight of her statement and agree with her wholeheartedly that profound changes are needed and that more needs to be done. As a member of the Environmental Audit Committee, I share the concerns that it has raised.

It is surely obvious to all that we need to rebalance the economy urgently towards sustainable energy, sustainable business and sustainable manufacturing. However, what is the point in the UK Government launching a Green GB and NI Week at the same time as they are prioritising nuclear over renewables and dragging their heels on climate emissions reductions? Actions speak louder than words. I think the Minister recognises that we are at a privileged moment in time, with most of the world crying out for change.

Will the Minister match the Scottish Government's world-leading statutory climate targets of reductions of 56%, 66% and 78% by 2020, 2030 and 2040, as well as 90% by 2050? Will she tell the Government to stop dragging their feet and to use reserved powers, including subsidies and technology support, that would allow Scotland to achieve net-zero emissions sooner? Will she tell the Government to deliver their green obligations by scrapping plans for new and expensive nuclear power plants and instead bring back renewable subsidies, support the oil and gas sector by aiding the low-carbon transition, give Peterhead the £1 billion for a new carbon capture facility that it had expected and restore long-term certainty of policy to the whole sector?

Claire Perry: The hon. Gentleman makes some very good points. I am pleased to pay tribute to the work of his Committee, and indeed to the work of the Scottish Government and the other devolved Administrations in contributing to our world-leading climate targets. We do of course score our CO₂ emissions on a UK-wide basis.

The hon. Gentleman raised some important questions. He will of course know that UK energy policy is set in Westminster. Many of the subsidies that have been paid for—indeed, they have brought forward much of the renewables deployment in Scotland—have been set on a UK-wide tax basis. I do not think we should be bringing back renewables subsidies, as he called for, as we are getting to a point at which we no longer need to do so. We opened the world's first subsidy-free solar farm last year, and we are of course buying offshore wind at a very low rates.

I think we do have to work together. It is fantastic for all the Governments—I would expect the same of local authorities and Mayors of combined authorities—to set their own targets because there are so many levers

[Claire Perry]

that can be pulled on the ground, not least to motivate people and to motivate businesses to change the way in which they carry out their activities.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): Does the Minister welcome, as I do, the fact that recent research indicates that two thirds of millennials are looking for green jobs? What more can the Government do to encourage this very welcome news?

Claire Perry: I do welcome that, and it was my Department that conducted the research. There is a myth that we do not have many green jobs, as we already have 400,000 in the economy. On the basis of our current work, we think that the number could grow to almost 2 million. One of the reasons why so many large companies are changing the way they do business is that they think they have a bit of a recruitment crisis, because they know that so many young people would much rather work for a sustainable company than otherwise. Indeed, Thursday of Green GB Week is all about opportunities: how people can get into this business; and how we can motivate the next generation—from schoolchildren up to young adults—to think about working in what will be one of our great long-term growth areas.

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): The Minister's green words are great, but back on planet Earth the reality is somewhat different. What happened to the huge leap forward that Britain had with green power until recently? Does she think the present huge decline in renewables investment is anything to do with the Government? There is the ban on onshore wind, for example. How does she square that mad policy with the climate change challenge?

Claire Perry: Again, it is a bit sad to hear that from someone with whom I was very proud to work in coalition and who did so much in this area. I would unpick two of the right hon. Gentleman's points. First, there is no slowdown. Renewables usage is absolutely accelerating, and we are now at 32%—[*Interruption.*] Again, if we combine more for less as prices fall, why are we falling into the trap of defining success as how much we are spending rather than how much we are getting? We are getting 32% from renewables. That, along with the investment in new gas, is the reason why we are able to phase out coal.

The right hon. Gentleman raised the question of banning. There is no ban on offshore wind. In fact, he was the Minister who led so many of the fights about offshore wind farms. Frankly, those fights threatened to derail many of the conversations about clean growth, because they were so terribly controversial. [HON. MEMBERS: "Onshore wind!"] There is no ban on onshore wind. Onshore wind is still operating. What we were elected on in our manifesto—the Government's manifesto—was that we did not think large-scale onshore wind development was right for England, and I am afraid I believe in carrying out our manifesto commitments.

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): I urge my right hon. Friend not to take any lectures from the Labour party when it comes to shale gas, because it was under the Labour party that the current licensing round for the

shale gas that is being fracked today was issued. May I urge her to continue to put in place the relevant safety measures and environmental protections, as this Government have done, which were not there when the Labour party issued the licence round?

Claire Perry: I thank my hon. Friend for sharing that information with us. He is absolutely right. One of the reasons for believing that we can safely extract shale gas is that we have the strongest environmental standards in the world when it comes to oil and gas extraction. We believe that we may, indeed, need to continue to strengthen them.

However, is it not interesting? My hon. Friend has dealt with the brunt of a lot of the protests against the shale site to which we have granted a licence, and I was very disappointed to see the hon. Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey) having a bit of a chit-chat with the protesters without bothering to go into the site to see its potential and the number of jobs that could be created by that vital industry.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): As an electric car driver myself, I would point out to the Minister that the growth of electric cars means it is more imperative to invest in charging infrastructure, because it is pretty difficult at the moment to find a charging point that is not already being used. However, on the broader point, we are now talking about trying to move from a target of 80% in 2050 to net zero. Can she name one new thing she is doing, rather than going backwards, that will help us to meet that goal?

Claire Perry: I again have to commend the hon. Lady's long-standing and non-virtue-signalling commitment in this area; she is one of the few people who takes the advice on diet. I would love to know about electric charging stations between Bristol and London, because I will hopefully be making that transition shortly.

The hon. Lady is right, however. One of the key things that came out of the IPCC report, and will come forward, is that we may overshoot. What are we going to do about that? What are the technologies that will help us get back under 2°? We are one of the first Governments in the world to invest substantially in greenhouse gas removal technologies. I am not saying that that is the answer—I would not want to go there, and I would rather change—but if we have to pull CO₂ out of the air or somehow get it out of the ecosystem, we will be one of the first Governments who are able to do that. That is something—[*Interruption.*] Well, I am afraid we need to consider it, and that is what the IPCC and the CCC have advised us to do.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): First, I commend my right hon. Friend on the advances she is making in asking when and how we might reach a net-zero carbon economy, because that laudable endeavour fits entirely with the Government's moves to leave the environment in a better place than we found it in. However, does she agree that reducing our greenhouse emissions need not come at the expense of growing the economy, because we can invest in new technologies to achieve that? That would cut our energy bills, reduce emissions and increase efficiency. All those things were covered by my recent ten-minute rule Bill, and my right hon. Friend was extremely supportive of it.

Claire Perry: Indeed I was. The idea that we need a jolly good recession to get emissions down is not in any way appealing, and I hope there is cross-party consensus on that. We of course need to grow in a sustainable way, but in pursuing this opportunity for the UK and to help the world, there is an absolutely immense and incredible opportunity to create jobs, prosperity and growth right across the UK. It is a complete win-win situation, which is why we should be pursuing it, and are pursuing it, so vigorously.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Is it still the Minister's plan to end the export tariff on new solar installations from April next year? If so, what assessment has she made of the impact on the solar industry?

Claire Perry: The right hon. Gentleman raises an important point. He will know that the signalling of the ending of the current tariffs was done several years ago. He will also know that we have just had a call for evidence, and I am reviewing that information. I will come back to the House shortly with proposals on those policies.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that reducing greenhouse gases need not come at the expense of growing the economy? Will she continue to make available funds for innovative energy sources such as geothermal energy from the projects currently being explored in Clackmannanshire in my constituency?

Claire Perry: My hon. Friend has already made a powerful case for investment in geothermal. In many constituencies, we have old mine workings and we have some pockets with natural currents of geothermal—the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead) has worked hard on that in the past. We do have some opportunities to extract relatively warm water and to use it for district heating. Indeed, one of the announcements I made today was about how we are going to bring forward some of the competitions to improve the way we collect waste heat and potentially reuse it. The projects in hon. Friend's constituency are interesting, and I am sure he will continue to make strong representations about them.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): In terms of joined-up Government, I wonder whether the Minister has had an opportunity to discuss Clean GB Week with the Transport Secretary, who seems to be merrily cancelling rail electrification schemes in favour of polluting bimodal trains.

Claire Perry: I think that is a little unfair, because the bimodal trains that have been put in place have substantially lower CO₂ emissions than the diesels they are replacing. The hon. Lady will know better than most the economic benefit that can come from this clean growth transition, because she has the new Siemens wind turbine factory in her constituency, creating many relatively well-paid, highly productive jobs, and we want to see a lot more of that.

In terms of the transport industry, I am very struck that, in Europe, we are able to push at the maximum envelope for ambition because of our "Road to Zero" strategy. We are pushing the envelope when it comes to transport emissions.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Aside from cutting the emission of hot air in this Chamber, we can do a number of things individually. Will the Department be issuing advice to nudge us in the right direction?

Claire Perry: If my right hon. Friend has a moment to go on to the fantastic Green GB Week website, he will find 10 things that he and local businesses in his constituency can do, ranging from test driving electric vehicles to upgrading heating controls and understanding where his pension is invested. If he wants to signal the importance of this transition, he should make sure that his investments are in a pension plan that is not investing in unsustainable businesses. There are many things he can do and I would love to hear back from him about which ones he does.

Mr Speaker: I trust that the right hon. Gentleman will be accessing the said website within a matter of minutes, if not indeed seconds.

Sir Desmond Swayne *indicated assent.*

Mr Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman is nodding in a way that is encouraging.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): Many of my constituents, as well as thousands of people across the country, have been subject to mis-selling under the Government's green deal scheme, which was launched in 2013. Many are still paying the price and are thousands of pounds in debt. What will the Government do to compensate them and address the long-standing toxic legacy of the green deal scheme?

Claire Perry: There are examples of mis-selling—and, indeed, under the current energy company obligation scheme. There is the usual redress through consumer channels, which hopefully the hon. Gentleman's constituents know about. If he has specific cases he would like me to take up, I would be happy to look at them. I am working with a number of MPs. The Government do not step in—this was always a third-party scheme—but we do have an ombudsman in the green deal finance sector. It is important that whatever responsibilities and rights are there are used for the benefit of all our constituents.

Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): I was delighted to mark the launch of Green GB Week up at Whitelee wind farm in Eaglesham, the largest onshore wind farm in the UK, to which my right hon. Friend has an open invitation any time she can fit it into her schedule. Does she agree that Green GB Week is not just about recognising how far we have come, but recommitting ourselves to where we want to get to, and, most importantly, how we want to get there, such as by committing to this as part of our industrial strategy?

Claire Perry: When we talk about climate change, it can seem like an incredibly powerful threat that we are all completely powerless to deal with, but that is simply not true. We have already cut our emissions by 30-odd per cent. since 1990. In fact, the last time emissions were as low as this in the UK, Queen Victoria was on the throne. We can do it and we can lead the world in doing it, but there is no complacency. We are not doing this to

[*Claire Perry*]

give ourselves a birthday cake and a pat on the back. We are doing this because we think there is much more opportunity, and we can push the world to go further by showing that it is possible.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): May I gently invite the Minister to come share a meal with me at some point? I say that because I wish to encourage her, after promising to consider using an electric vehicle, to go one further and consider a meat-free day every week. Alternatives to meat are available; there is a very tasty meat-free “chicken” stir-fry in my fridge right now. This is not something we have to do every day. She is very welcome to come and try out what going meat-free would involve. The serious point is that going meat-free or reducing the amount of meat we eat one day a week makes a huge contribution to reducing our emissions.

Mr Speaker: I feel rather excluded from this generous invitation.

Claire Perry: I would enjoy the hon. Lady’s company. As I said this morning, I am not trying to sell cookery books. We are here to set out some sober and serious policies. She makes an important point and I know that many people have made it. I am also very mindful of the farming community. If people are eating meat, they should look for locally sourced meat that is raised to the highest ethical welfare standards. We should all have a healthy diet, because it reduces the burden overall. Perhaps she can bring me in a takeaway version of one her specialties at some point.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): In the borough of Kettering, 150 GWh of renewable electricity is generated every year, which is enough to power all 38,000 homes in the borough. Will the Energy Minister hail Kettering as one of this country’s greenest boroughs and use it as an example to encourage others to do the same?

Claire Perry: It is great to see a Kettering green GB champion on our Benches. My hon. Friend is right: so many of our communities are living this process. It is not some scary existential threat. People are living it. They experience renewable energy—or not—and do not see it as a huge imposition. So many of our towns and communities are committing to these sorts of sustainable initiatives. That is part of Green GB Week, so that people can come together, learn from one another and, frankly, get a pat on the back for some of the things that they have done.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): The Minister rightly mentioned the need to use innovation and new technology in rising to this challenge, yet her statement had not one mention of carbon capture and storage, which is considered vital to reach the Paris treaty targets. Norway is pushing ahead. Germany is planning this along the Rhine. Does she regret the £1 billion betrayal of Peterhead and will she commit to restoring CCS funding levels to 2015 levels?

Claire Perry: The hon. Gentleman and I have had exchanges on this. He knows that we have committed £100 million from our current budget to invest in carbon capture, usage and storage technology. That money is

being spent. We are working with several industrial clusters to work out how we decarbonise the power and get industry to put its emissions in there. Frankly, I was not the Minister at the time of the project’s cancellation, but we were going to spend £1 billion on decarbonising coal, which we no longer want in our mix at all, and we had not thought at all about how we would get industries in this area to put their emissions in. Since the pause of that competition, we have spent more than £300 million investigating our aquifers. They are the best in the world—offshore—and we will continue to explore how to do this in the most cost-effective way.

Mr Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con): I applaud my right hon. Friend’s initiative. First, with her announcement today, the Government are one of the first around the world to respond to the IPCC report, and secondly, she has taken the initiative of Green GB Week to provide more focus on this country’s achievements—it is leading the world—in developing clean growth. I encourage her to get her officials to come up with a rather more snappy means of demonstrating the metrics used to show that we can grow the economy and renewable energy at the same time. If I might give her a pointer in that regard, will she please work more closely with Ofgem to encourage pre-accreditation for anaerobic digestion plants, which will shortly run out of time to get installed to take advantage of the feed-in tariffs?

Claire Perry: My hon. Friend is the definition of “snappy”, so I will always take his advice on how to spice up any of these visuals. He is right that the way to make this acceptable is to make it visual and easy for people to understand. There is some very good stuff on the Green GB Week website, which I encourage him to look at. I will take away his point about pre-certification and perhaps we can discuss it at a separate time.

Anna McMorrin (Cardiff North) (Lab): I am not going to congratulate the Minister on a letter. Action on this is long overdue. Scientific advice to the UK has been very clear. It tests political and policy consensus and hard decisions will have to be made. Is she ready, and crucially, does she have the influence across the Government to deliver? When will she start focusing on the cheap, tried and tested form of renewable technology—onshore wind?

Claire Perry: We benefit from a lot of experience in this House and the hon. Lady has more than many in this area. Even though I could not get her to congratulate us, I am always very willing to listen to her thoughts on this issue. Two things are important. The clean growth strategy was the first cross-Government document we have ever published that set out in detail how we plan to decarbonise all sections of the economy. And, it was very lovely that the Prime Minister asked me to attend Cabinet, albeit at what I call “the kids’ end of the table”—it demonstrated that this is fundamentally part of the Government’s plan going forward. So yes, we are up for the challenge. We do not underestimate it and it will be a cross-Government initiative, as the hon. Lady can see and as we are delivering.

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): I very much welcome this statement on green growth. With green growth, can we make sure that we concentrate on

electric cars, electric buses and electric taxis so that we can get better air quality in our inner cities, especially in the 43 spots across the country where we really do need to improve air quality, so that we have a greener Britain?

Claire Perry: My hon. Friend, in his capacity as Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee, knows very well that what is referred to as the “co-benefit” of cutting emissions also means better air quality, better human health and better child outcomes, in terms of reduced asthma levels. We did not think about that before, but now we are, and luckily we can understand those things and work out the costs and benefits, taking into account some of these new measures.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): The Minister has made decisions now around scrapping the tidal lagoon project and rejecting her own commissioned report. We need to move on from that. What is her plan now for introducing tidal energy across the UK and making sure that south Wales is given the investment it was promised by the Conservative Government?

Claire Perry: The hon. Gentleman will know that we have spent tens of millions of pounds looking at wave energy—we have Wave Hub off the coast of Cornwall and we have invested substantially in many of the trial sites. As we debated at the time, the problem with the Swansea lagoon was not the source of power per se, but the fact that it was the most expensive power station proposal we had ever had in the UK, and it is right that we care about taxpayers’ money. That said, we are always interested in looking at tidal: several other proposals have been brought forward, and the door is always open. I, like him, know the power of the Bristol channel, having grown up on the other side; the problem is delivering it in the most cost-effective way.

Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): My right hon. Friend will be aware that businesses that do the right thing and install solar panels for electricity generation for their own use face a revaluation of business rates, which results in a higher charge, but that they do not face such a revaluation if the energy generation is for provision into the standard domestic grid. Will she commit to working with the Treasury to solve this somewhat unintelligible inequity?

Claire Perry: The short answer is yes. I would point out, however, that there are companies making substantial investments in solar—Rolls-Royce, for example—that absolutely see its value and see it as part of their whole energy-balancing process. So this is happening, but my hon. Friend makes a good point.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I commend the Minister’s aims, but surely one easy way to pursue a clean growth strategy would be for the Government to require all new builds to include some form of solar energy panel in their design, apart from in the handful of situations where technical problems preclude it.

Claire Perry: Whether solar, some other form of renewable energy or just improving energy efficiency, all were set out in the clean growth strategy. One of our aims is to get new homes built off the gas grid—there are 42,000 homes off the grid in my constituency—not

to have fossil fuel heating from 2025. We intend to do that not only because we want to reduce emissions but because it will boost routes to market for some of our world-leading renewable heat technology.

Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con) rose—

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Simon Clarke.

Mr Clarke: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I was looking particularly beseechingly there.

I thank the Minister for her statement. She is a great champion of growing our economy while also protecting our environment. Last week, I was proud to go to Downing Street with the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh) to present a letter from 130 colleagues from across the House setting out our shared commitment to supporting the Government in the event that they decided to pursue net zero. Does the Minister recognise the strength of feeling across the Chamber that we must do everything in our power to limit the rise in global warming to 1.5° C and that net zero is the key to this?

Claire Perry: I thank my hon. Friend and the other MPs for that challenge and their support. Ultimately—forget the political banter—we are the House that will have to agree these policy decisions, justify the spending to our constituents and help to communicate to them the opportunities that are there. I urge him to look at the Green GB website. There are masses of events in his area over the week, for students, businesses, local authorities and the like. There is lots of good stuff we can use to spread this important message.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister has written to the UK Committee on Climate Change, but that committee has written to her twice saying she is failing to meet our Paris commitments, which it is important that we meet. When I was on Leeds City Council, we put 1,000 solar roofs on council housing. We cannot do that now without the subsidies. On cars, again she has cut the subsidies. Why not consider changes to subsidies for new hydrogen technologies for both heating and transport?

Claire Perry: The hon. Gentleman, in his former role as a councillor—and, indeed, Leeds City Council—did amazing work on one of the really big challenges, which is decarbonising heat. As he will know, some of those heat projects are proceeding thanks to Government investment. In fact, a project up in the north-west involving Keele University is going live, blending hydrogen into the heat network. We are innovating, and are doing so in a way that could completely change the methods through which we heat our homes over the next 20 years. However, this is not just about subsidy. The Government cannot do this all on their own, while putting the burden on taxpayers. We must leverage in private industry, and we must work out the most cost-effective way to deliver our aim so that we can keep bills down.

James Heapey (Wells) (Con): The key to a decentralised smart energy system is people installing generation not for the purpose of selling to the grid, but to meet their own needs. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the way to make all that happen is to encourage people to

[James Heappey]

install the storage, the electrified heat, the electric vehicles and all the other facilities that will help them to consume the power that they generate on their premises?

Claire Perry: Indeed, and they should also be encouraged to install the smart meters that can join everything up and show them where the energy generation and export are coming from. We are seeing more and more of that, and we are supporting many of those investments through our innovation funding. Decentralised energy generation and energy balancing are a big part of the future.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): As one who represents the constituency with the greatest number of green deal mis-selling cases, I think that the Minister's answer to the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) was nowhere near good enough. The shameful mis-selling by Home Energy & Lifestyle Management Ltd of UK Government-backed green deal products has cost potentially hundreds of thousands of pounds in my constituency alone, but so far the Government have shamefully washed their hands of any responsibility. When will they do the right thing and fund a compensation scheme for all those affected?

Claire Perry: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my earlier answer. The scheme was employed in the private sector. [Interruption.] Does the hon. Gentleman want to listen, or does he want to keep shouting? There are obviously risks to consumers, and, as I also said to the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney), I should be happy to sit down and have a conversation to see whether we can do more to make the current statutory powers more effective.

Trudy Harrison (Copeland) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that nuclear will play a vital role in securing a low-carbon future for this country? Does she

think that we could keep the lights on if we stopped using it, as the Leader of the Opposition would like us to?

Claire Perry: My hon. Friend is a doughty campaigner. She has seen the benefits of nuclear locally and understands its international importance. We need a diverse energy mix, and that means making good decisions. It was very sad to see this reported in the *Financial Times*:

“In private, Jeremy is against, as is the majority of the shadow cabinet, but no one wants to put Rebecca in an awkward position.”

I feel terribly sorry for my hon. Friend. Dealing with that level of ideology cannot be easy. However, this Government can be trusted to deliver ideology-free energy policy that keeps the lights on and bills down.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): As my right hon. Friend will know, along with the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work, my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton), I have been a champion of the potential of geothermal energy in Cornwall. Although progress has been frustrating, we are very excited to be on the verge of seeing test drilling. Does my right hon. Friend agree that geothermal energy has the potential to play a significant role in the delivery of clean renewable energy in this country, and will she back its development in Cornwall?

Claire Perry: I think that that is an incredibly important challenge. How amazing it is that the economic opportunity created so many years ago by the removal of all the various minerals there can now give us the potential to decarbonise our heat and to generate more jobs in my hon. Friend's beautiful constituency.

Mr Speaker: I am extremely grateful to the Minister for her statement.

Loneliness Strategy

Mr Speaker: Before I call the Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch), to make the next statement, let me say that I know the House will appreciate the significance of its subject, the loneliness strategy. More particularly, Members across the House will remember with great respect that the late Jo Cox prioritised this issue and set about its pursuit, as she did in respect of all her activity, with a crusading zeal that we all immensely admired.

I know that colleagues will want to bear that in mind today, as well as the fact that Jo's sister, Kim, and Jo's parents, Jean and Gordon—the Leadbeater trio, if I may so describe them, whom it has been my privilege to meet and to admire for their extraordinary stoicism, fortitude, dignity and love—are listening. My friends—I think the House regards you as friends—we are proud to see you, and what the Minister is going to address is done not least in the name of, and with everlasting respect for, Jo.

6.5 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch): I should like to make a statement on the publication of the Government's landmark strategy to tackle loneliness.

This is a very emotional statement to make. I am standing here at the Dispatch Box with a clear line of sight to the coat of arms representing our colleague who took this issue of loneliness and catapulted it into the stratosphere. I have dedicated a brief nine months to developing the strategy, but Jo Cox dedicated her whole life to tackling loneliness, and the publication of this strategy, which bears her photo, and a copy of which I have set aside for Jo's children, is dedicated to her. I hope she would be proud.

The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness was set up with a vision to carry forward her important work, and in January the Prime Minister welcomed its report and many of its recommendations, including the appointment of a cross-Government ministerial lead on loneliness, a post which I was overwhelmingly humbled to be offered. I would like to take this opportunity to thank in particular the hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) and my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Seema Kennedy) for their vital work as co-chairs of the commission. Their dedication and passion have been essential in leading and driving forward action, and I am personally grateful to them for the cross-party support they have given me since I have taken on this work.

Since then, our work in the UK has gained global attention. Loneliness is increasingly recognised as one of the most pressing public health issues we face across the world. Feeling lonely is linked to early death, with its impact often cited as being on a par with that of smoking or obesity. It is also linked to an increased risk of heart disease, stroke, depression, cognitive decline and even Alzheimer's.

It is estimated that between 5% and 18% of adults in the UK feel lonely often or always, but they are frequently hard to reach and suffer in silence. The Government are committed to confronting this challenge. The strategy published today outlines the Government's vision for England to tackle loneliness, complementing the work being done in the devolved Administrations, and creating

a place where we all have strong social relationships, where families, friends and communities support each other, where organisations promote people's social connections as a core part of their everyday role, where loneliness can be recognised and acted on without stigma or shame, and where we can all make an effort to look out for each other and ensure that moments of contact are respectful and meaningful.

To get there requires society-wide change, which is why the strategy recognises that Government cannot make the necessary changes alone. It sets out a powerful vision of how we can all play a role in building a more socially connected society. But there is no quick fix to achieving this vision, so it is very much a starting point rather than the end. It largely concentrates on the role Government can play and how we can set the framework to enable local authorities, businesses, health and the voluntary sector, as well as communities and individuals, to support people's social connections. But it also describes the important responsibilities that we all have as individuals to our family, friends and communities and gives some examples of the great work already under way across the country to create strong and connected communities. It is a cross-Government programme, rather than a programme of one Department, and sets out a number of policy commitments ranging across policy areas such as health, employment, transport and housing and planning, and I am pleased that so many of my colleagues involved in the strategy are sitting alongside me on the Treasury Bench this evening.

I wish briefly to draw five areas to the attention of the House. The strategy sets out a commitment to improve and expand social prescribing across England. It is estimated that GPs see between one and five patients a day because of loneliness. This is a policy that has been very much developed in response to some of the brilliant work by the Royal College of General Practitioners, frontline health professionals and others, and it will change the way patients experiencing loneliness are treated.

Social prescribing connects people to community groups and services through the support of link workers, who introduce people to support based on their individual needs. By 2023, the Government will support all local health and care systems to implement social prescribing connector schemes across the whole country. In addition, the Government will explore how a variety of organisations, such as jobcentres, community pharmacies and social workers, refer people into social prescribing schemes and test how to improve this. The Government will also work with local authorities to pilot and test how the better use of data can help to make it easier for people to find local activities, services and support.

The Government will also grow a network of employers to take action on loneliness, working with the Campaign to End Loneliness. The Government strategy includes a pilot with Royal Mail and sets out details of a new pledge that employers can sign up to, demonstrating their commitment to helping their employees to tackle loneliness. I am really pleased that a number of businesses and organisations have signed up, including Sainsbury's, the Co-op, National Grid and the British Red Cross, along with 18 or so others, as well as the UK Government civil service.

Earlier this summer, we announced that £20 million of funding would be made available from the Government and other partners to support initiatives to connect people.

[Tracey Crouch]

In the strategy today, I am pleased to announce that a further £1.8 million will be made available to support even more community spaces and used to transform underutilised areas, including creating new community cafés, art spaces or gardens.

Furthermore, the Government will build a national conversation to raise awareness of loneliness and reduce the stigma. We will explore how best to drive awareness of the importance of social health and how we can encourage people to take action. In addition, Public Health England's forthcoming campaign on mental health will explicitly highlight the importance of social connections to our wider wellbeing.

Finally, the strategy sets out the Government's ongoing commitment to this agenda. The ministerial group that steered development of the strategy will continue to meet to oversee the Government's work on tackling loneliness. The group will publish an annual progress report. My ministerial colleagues in the group, from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Department for Transport and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, will have their portfolios extended to include loneliness, to show the importance of the agenda across a wide range of policy areas. My colleague at the Department of Health and Social Care, who already has loneliness in her portfolio, will also continue to provide invaluable support on this work.

The Government's intention is to embed consideration of loneliness and relationships throughout the policy-making process. From next year, individual Government Departments will highlight the progress they are making on addressing loneliness through their annual single departmental plans. The Government will also explore other mechanisms for ensuring that loneliness is considered in policy making, including through adding loneliness to the guidance for the family test.

The Government strategy is a significant first step in the national mission to end loneliness in our lifetimes. An enormous number of people, organisations, voluntary groups and others have helped to produce the strategy; the list published in the strategy of my thanks extends to four pages, so I cannot mention them all here. As there is no way they would have written it into the speech or the strategy themselves, I would like to place on the record a huge thank you to the team of officials who have been enthusiastic secondees from across Whitehall to work on this strategy. They have brought with them invaluable energy and expertise from their Departments, and it has been an enormous pleasure to work with them.

The strategy builds on years of dedicated work by many organisations and individuals. It sets out a powerful vision on how we can all play a role in building a more socially connected society and is supported by important policy commitments to make that vision a reality. I call on all hon. Members across the House to join me in taking action to defeat loneliness. Together we can address one of the most pressing social issues of our time. I commend this statement to the House.

6.13 pm

Mr Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op): I start by echoing your words prefacing the statement, Mr Speaker, and by welcoming Jo's family to the Chamber.

I welcome the Minister's statement, and am grateful to her for advance sight of it. Loneliness is one of the great social ills of our age, and the Government are right to put forward a strategy to tackle it. It is encouraging to see Ministers representing so many Departments and committing to ensure that the strategy makes a difference.

Loneliness affects people of all ages: disabled people who are unable to get out of the house; older people who lose friends, become housebound, and feel they lack purpose in their lives; young people moving away for work or education; teenagers coping with the challenges of growing up; and people who lose their jobs. It can affect any of us and all of us, and it can have a devastating effect on people's mental and physical health.

The Minister was right to observe that this is an emotional moment, because we are all of course thinking about our former colleague, Jo Cox, who set up the Commission on Loneliness before she was so tragically taken from us. She said:

"I will not live in a country where thousands of people are living lonely lives, forgotten by the rest of us".

She recognised that loneliness does not discriminate between young and old, and that it can affect anyone at any time. Jo's commission set out to find a way forward, and we all echo the Minister's generous and heartfelt tribute to her. I would also like to recognise the outstanding work of my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) and the hon. Member for South Ribble (Seema Kennedy), who have taken Jo's work forward as co-chairs of the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness. Their work, together with that of many charities and community organisations, has inspired and helped to shape today's announcement.

The Minister is right to say that the Government cannot tackle loneliness on their own. It is a social ill, and it requires social action to end it, but the Government certainly have a role in facilitating, engaging and supporting groups who can help. Too often, however, we see the Government ignoring the impact of their decisions on people experiencing loneliness or on the organisations best placed to tackle it—I presume that that is why we are now seeing a group of Ministers assembled to look into the issue—and they will certainly have to change their approach if we are going to see the real difference that we all want to see in tackling loneliness.

The Minister referred to local government, which is certainly a key partner in this agenda, but cuts to local government since 2010 mean that councils are facing a £7.8 billion shortfall by 2025. Councils have lost 60% of their funding since 2010, with a further £1.3 billion in cuts due over the next year. Those cuts have already led to the closure of 428 day centres, 1,000 children's centres, 600 youth centres and 478 public libraries, and we have also seen cuts in funding for countless lunch clubs, befriending services, local voluntary groups and community centres. Those are all places and services that have a role to play in tackling loneliness.

I applaud the Minister for saying on television this morning that she was not there to defend cuts made in the past, and I know that she shares my concern about the impact of difficult decisions on services that we all care about. What assessment has she made, in order to get things right in the future, of the impact of ongoing Government cuts to local government and community services to tackle loneliness? She is also right to talk

positively about the role of civil society in tackling loneliness, yet Government cuts since 2010 have had a significant impact on voluntary and community organisations. Funding cuts already planned for the coming year will lead to further cuts to the voluntary sector. On top of that, we now have the uncertainty associated with Brexit, as we heard from the Prime Minister this afternoon. What assessment has the Minister made of the impact of the loss of EU funding for services in the voluntary sector that support tackling loneliness, and will she tell us whether the Government are in a position to commit to fully replacing that funding when it is lost?

It is welcome that the Minister has announced an extra £1.8 million funding for community projects to help to tackle loneliness, but that is a pretty small drop in the ocean compared with the projected £3.5 billion shortfall in funding for social care. That £1.8 million would reopen just four of the 1,000 children's centres, or nine of the 428 day centres, that have closed under this Government. Unless the Chancellor reverses cuts in public health funding in the Budget, the flourishing of social prescribing and community projects that the Minister wants to see will never happen. Will she explain what steps she and her colleagues are taking, particularly with the Budget approaching, to ensure that adequate funding will be available for these services? Will the Government adopt Age UK's proposal to apply a binding loneliness test to all future decisions to ensure that they do not increase loneliness or decrease our capacity to tackle it?

The Opposition welcome the Government's decision to adopt a loneliness strategy. There is much in it that is good, and it is certainly a step in the right direction, but the fine words that it contains will not reduce loneliness to the extent that we all hope for unless the Government stop cutting the services and organisations that are helping to tackle loneliness in our communities.

Tracey Crouch: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed) for welcoming the strategy. It has involved nine months of extremely hard work from nine different Departments to support the 9 million people who identify themselves as lonely. We know that this issue is enormously important to people. One in five people identify as lonely, and young people between the ages of 16 and 24 now identify themselves as being more lonely than older people. There are many groups in society that, through various life changes, suddenly find themselves suffering from loneliness. Jo herself said that loneliness does not discriminate, and trigger points can happen at any particular time—no one is immune to that sense of overwhelming loneliness.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman has the opportunity to read the whole strategy and to examine its 58 recommendations, including the policy test, which will answer many of his questions. We recognise that difficult decisions were taken during difficult times to try to regain an economic balance, but those decisions may have had an inadvertent impact on loneliness. Going forward, we want to ensure that we recognise loneliness, make policies responsibly—just as we do for other issues in society—and consider all that as part of the policy test.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I commend the Minister for her statement and her work on this issue and welcome a cross-departmental strategy on loneliness. Does she

agree that one of the greatest antidotes to loneliness is stronger families? In the opinion of many of us, it is the greatest antidote and can help many linked problems, such as homelessness, addiction and mental health challenges. As the strategy is implemented, will my hon. Friend commit to ensure that her Department and others actively consider how they can promote the strengthening of family life? As a start, will they also ensure that the family test is properly and comprehensively applied across Government?

Tracey Crouch: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. We recognise the importance of families in tackling loneliness, and it is true that the fragmentation of families and the way in which we all live and work may well have contributed to loneliness. Many young people leave their home communities, often for study or work, and that in turn can have an impact on families. We are an incredibly busy society, and we can quite often forget members of our family, so all that is at the heart of the strategy.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): I join the Minister and shadow Minister in thanking you, Mr Speaker, for a beautiful tribute to our colleague Jo Cox, and I welcome her family. As someone who came to this place as part of the 2015 intake, I assure Jo's family members that she will be remembered quite simply as a bright and brilliant Member of Parliament.

I thank the Minister for her statement, and I am sure that she will agree that social isolation is often little understood and can have an enormous impact on people's physical and mental health. In January this year, the Scottish Government published a consultation on their new national strategy—one of the first in the world to help tackle loneliness and isolation. However, in a similar vein to the questions from the shadow Minister, we know that poverty can be a key factor in social exclusion. The less money someone has, the less likely it is that they can afford to meet people. They might not have the money for a coffee with a friend or even be able to afford to take public transport to visit a friend. Will the Minister commit to look at the impact of poverty on social exclusion as part of the strategy? Will she also consider the impact of the Government's social security policies and investigate any correlations between cuts in income and increases in social isolation?

Tracey Crouch: The Government have been working closely with the Administration in Scotland, and we have looked at Scotland's work on this issue, too. We will continue to work with all our devolved partners to come up with a comprehensive strategy for the whole United Kingdom.

As I said in response to the hon. Member for Croydon North, we know there are trigger points. One of them is debt, about which I spoke very personally in an interview with *The Sunday Times* over the weekend. I completely recognise and understand how it is difficult for people with no money to go out and make connections with others, which is why this is a cross-Government strategy. We are looking at all the different aspects, and nothing is exempt from the strategy to tackle loneliness. Supporting those in debt and on low incomes is definitely part of the strategy.

Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con): First, does the Minister agree that, although the challenge of loneliness is big, the public's appetite to do something about it

[Neil O'Brien]

is great? It is not just the brilliant work of the Jo Cox commission. When I have done things to address loneliness in my constituency, I thought half a dozen people would come, but actually hundreds came. People really want to do something about this.

Secondly, does the Minister agree that involvement in fighting loneliness not only helps those who are being helped but helps those who get involved? People involved with the befriending scheme of Voluntary Action South Leicestershire, a charity in my constituency, have made lots of new friends—it has been great for those who have got involved, as well as for those who are being helped.

Thirdly, does the Minister agree that we need to change the culture if we really want to tackle this problem? Schemes such as the “chatty café” at Zeph’s café in my constituency are a brilliant tribute to Jo Cox’s work, because they encourage people to start a conversation with those who are lonely. That is a great thing.

Tracey Crouch: This is a great opportunity to celebrate the work being done across the country. In fact, I have just met members of VASL at the strategy’s parliamentary launch. The “chatty café” scheme is fantastic, and there are lots of similar initiatives. Having worked on loneliness, it is incredibly heartwarming that a number of organisations out there have just been getting on with it for a significant length of time. When we announced the strategy, I was contacted by thousands of organisations similar to those in my hon. Friend’s constituency.

I commend my hon. Friend’s work with the all-party group, and long may addressing this issue continue to be on the agenda of all politicians.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): If Jo were still here today, she would have been a Member of Parliament for almost three-and-a-half years. She was in this House for just one year, but in that short space of time she achieved more than most of us could hope to achieve in a lifetime.

Tackling loneliness is part of Jo’s legacy, and it is a tribute to her approach to politics and her approach to life, which is that we have more in common than that which divides us.

I am proud to have played a small part in taking forward Jo’s work on this very important issue, but I want to build on what other Members have said this afternoon. The good thing about loneliness is that it is something we can all do something about, one conversation at a time.

Will the Minister join me in encouraging all of us in this House, and all of us in all of our constituencies, to live our lives a little more like Jo Cox lived hers, by putting other people first and by always thinking about what we can do? Whether it is people in our friendship groups, our families or our communities, we should have one conversation at a time to try to reach out and help those who are struggling with loneliness. If we do that, we will all help to secure Jo’s legacy and help to build a world that is a little less lonely.

Tracey Crouch: I cannot pay enough tribute to the hon. Lady’s work in taking forward the work that Jo started. Like me, the hon. Lady was rather daunted

when she started on the journey to tackle this incredibly complex issue. There is no single cause of loneliness, and there is no single solution. The more we can talk about it in this place and beyond, the better. We are on loneliness where we were on mental health 10 years ago, and where we can reduce stigma by going out to support our constituents, our friends and our families, we will be all the better for it.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): It would be interested to hear more from the Minister about what she thinks the role of social media is. Social media can often have a negative influence, particularly on young people, but does she think it could have a positive role to play in tackling loneliness?

Tracey Crouch: I said that there is no single cause of loneliness and therefore there is no single solution, and the same logic applies in respect of social media. We know that 16 to 24-year-olds are more lonely than other groups in society, and that is quite often attributed to the fact that they are much more digitally connected. At the same time, social media can also provide solutions for those who do find themselves lonely. A huge number of apps have been developed to support various groups in society, including Mush, which helps young mums. Technology has also been developed to keep older people connected to their families. As much as social media can be described as a cause, it can also be the solution.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): I have great respect for the Minister, and never more so than today, and I thank her for the words in her statement. Austerity has undeniably led to a reduction in the number of facilities available in the community, but today I want to pay tribute to the incredible volunteer groups, community groups and friendship groups in my constituency and in the neighbouring constituency of Batley and Spen, because the work these volunteers do is absolutely phenomenal—they are simply plugging a gap, particularly at the moment. Will she therefore join me today in thanking all those groups, including More in Common, which was formed after the tragic death of Jo?

Tracey Crouch: Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to do so. We need to remember that difficult decisions have been taken over the past eight years to tackle the deficit, and that has forced many people to rethink how some of the services have been delivered. In some cases they are now being delivered better, because there has been an evolution in service delivery. That is thanks to many voluntary organisations and charities, which have helped to create a more imaginative response to delivering some of those services. I recognise that that is not the case across the board, and it would be churlish not to do so. We also have to recognise that there are lots of different reasons, not all of which are funding-related issues. But we are where we are, and we have now taken this forward to try to ensure that we have a strategy that futureproofs these services in order to help tackle loneliness for all age groups across our society.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): I thank the Minister for an excellent statement, but may I press her on two things? First, I ask her to make a strong and robust case to the Treasury and our colleagues in the

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to set up some ring-fenced funding for local councils to bid into, in order to evolve and deliver bespoke loneliness strategies? We have done this in other areas of local government policy and this one particularly cries out for it. Secondly, may I urge her always to keep in mind the need to sculpt bespoke rural policies and take into account the geography of our rural constituencies? Although I appreciate the challenges that exist across the whole of our country, they are that much more difficult to deal with in that widely spread, low population, rural setting.

Tracey Crouch: The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport is sitting next to me on the Front Bench, and I am sure he heard the calls for him to have another conversation with the Chancellor—I am sure he will do that with great interest and enthusiasm. The issue of rural loneliness is fascinating, because statistics show that there are slightly higher loneliness levels in urban communities than in rural communities. Whereas rural communities might face greater levels of isolation, the loneliness does not necessarily follow; these are two very different issues. That said, there are unique issues faced by rural communities, which is why the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has been one of the Departments involved and why it is working on tackling rural isolation and loneliness.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): It is rather moving to be here in the Chamber this afternoon, and I cannot think of anything better to honour Jo's memory than getting this right. Last Wednesday was World Mental Health Day. Tackling mental health issues can be incredibly difficult and very lonely to deal with. What efforts is the Minister making to ensure that the UK provides more access to opportunities for people to reach out and seek support?

Tracey Crouch: That is a good question. We are working closely with our colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care on the link between loneliness and mental health. The two are not always linked and it is important that we do not badge loneliness as a mental health condition; it is certainly a public health condition. We are working with the DHSC on its development of the strategies on mental health and we will continue to do so.

Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): First, let me thank the Minister for what was a really excellent statement. Obviously, many of us were not Members of the House when Jo was a Member, but it is abundantly clear that she was held in the very highest regard—and rightly so—for what she did. It is incredibly impressive to see the unifying effect that she still has today; it feels very much as though she is, in some ways, still part of today's statement, and the message that this sends out is incredibly powerful.

Will the Minister join me in thanking the work of organisations such as Men's Shed Redcar, which covers the East Cleveland part of my constituency? It is a space for men—sometimes we men are not very good at reaching out to each other and being communal—and a really good way of making sure that they have a space to come together, congregate and, in the words of the organisation, create.

Tracey Crouch: I love Men's Sheds—a little bit too much to be honest. I could quite happily spend my time in a Men's Shed learning how to craft bird boxes and various other things, and having a good old chinwag about the football. There are many organisations out there. It is really important that we do recognise—again, repeating the words of Jo—that loneliness does not discriminate. It impacts enormously on men as well, and there are some fantastic organisations out there supporting them.

Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab): I very much welcome the Minister's announcement, but can she confirm what assessment her Department has undertaken of the loss of 2,400 bus routes across the country, including in my constituency, and the impact of that on social isolation and loneliness?

Tracey Crouch: The Department for Transport is very heavily involved in this strategy. As the hon. Gentleman will have heard in my statement, one of the Transport Ministers will now have loneliness as part of their portfolio. It is important to recognise that rural bus services are incredibly important. They are a matter on which local authorities make decisions. I appreciate that, quite often, those decisions can be difficult, but if a rural bus service, a late evening service or an early morning service is axed, it can clearly have an impact on people's ability to stay connected to their community.

Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): I thank the Minister for the very honest comments that she made in her interview at the weekend about the loneliness experienced by new parents—both mums and dads. That is something with which both my wife and I can empathise, as I am sure can parents right across East Renfrewshire. Given that loneliness does not discriminate, will she ensure that, when rolling out the strategy and creating measures to raise awareness and tackle loneliness, those initiatives are bespoke to people, age groups and locales, and this is not simply a one-size campaign?

Tracey Crouch: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. It is new parents who can feel loneliness, not just new mums. In the strategy, we highlight a case study involving Mush, an app that supports new mums, but we use an infographic of a dad pushing a pushchair because we do recognise that becoming a new parent can be as lonely for a new father as it is for a new mum. Community groups and services are quite often available for mothers and babies, but there is not necessarily the same thing out there for dads and babies. We need to make sure that we look at all people within society, and that is what this strategy and vision do.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): Some of the early work on social prescribing was undertaken in Dursley in the Stroud constituency by Dr Simon Opher and his partners. We also did some work on village agents that was initiated by the Department for Work and Pensions, which involved going out into the villages and making sure that older people were, first, looked after, but, secondly, able to claim the benefits to which they were entitled. Will the Minister have a word with the DWP and give some greater impetus to that particularly good scheme?

Tracey Crouch: We are working very closely with the DWP on some of these initiatives. We do actually see it as one of our front-line providers of solutions on tackling loneliness across the board. I would be very interested to hear more about the scheme that the hon. Gentleman mentions, and, if he would like to write to me, I will look further into it.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): There are many groups within the Glasgow Central constituency that I could highlight for tackling loneliness. Brilliant groups are working very hard, but I would particularly like to mention the Citizens Theatre's community collective, which received Big Lottery funding this year to run drama classes to tackle social isolation. I understand that those classes will happen every Friday for the next four years, which is absolutely brilliant. I mention that because the Minister is meeting Citizens Theatre at an event tomorrow afternoon.

That is very much on the positive side of things and great community work is ongoing, but the loneliest people I see in my surgeries are those with immigration status issues. I met an incredibly sad young man at my surgery who was awaiting his wife coming here from very dangerous circumstances. Will the Minister look into what can be done to speed up these processes? It is incredibly debilitating and a cause of loneliness for many people I see at my surgeries when their spouse or family member is so far away and they are not able to reach them.

Tracey Crouch: A colleague from the Home Office is part of the group. Refugees and others within the immigration system were actually considered as part of the strategy, so I encourage the hon. Lady to look at the report in detail to see how we are tackling that particular issue. Like her, I commend all the organisations out there that are getting together in imaginative and creative ways to reach parts of the community through a variety of initiatives, including drama classes.

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): The Minister will be more than aware that the issue of place is raised in the Government's civil society strategy, as is the infrastructure of the voluntary sector, which varies enormously between places. Will the Government look seriously at the capacity building of organisations that may be required to support people in loneliness? Will the Minister also look at the excellent example of the South Denbighshire Community Partnership and its fantastic work supporting people in a rural community?

Tracey Crouch: We published the civil society strategy before the loneliness strategy very much on purpose in order to create a framework to support important members of civil society that will then help us with many of the initiatives to tackle loneliness. In that strategy, we purposely looked at place, frameworks and everything else to which the hon. Lady alludes. With regard to the project in her constituency, I know that Wales is looking at developing its own strategy, and we are working closely with the Administration to support them in that.

Gill Furniss (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): As chair of the all-party group on libraries, I was proud to launch Libraries Week alongside the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals last

week in the very splendid state rooms in Speaker's House. This year's theme was libraries and wellbeing, highlighting the important ways in which libraries contribute to combating loneliness and social isolation. Does the Minister agree that libraries are a crucial community resource that are already tackling this important issue, and that we must properly invest in them for a better future for all? If there is any additional funding, will she see whether it could be given to libraries to support this really important initiative?

Tracey Crouch: On the hon. Lady's last point, the Secretary of State is sitting on the Treasury Bench, so I am sure that that will be added to his list of things to ask the Chancellor.

I completely agree that libraries play an important role. Over the last few years, they have evolved into bigger and greater community hubs, and have become more diverse in what they offer. My local authorities—I have two in my constituency—have closed none of their libraries. In fact, they have looked at how they can better use the space. For example, one of the libraries that I go to also has our local dementia café. Libraries are important, and they need to look at everything they can do to create connections for people in their communities.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Minister, the shadow Minister and the—

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Oh, I do beg the hon. Gentleman's pardon. I am very sorry; I certainly do not want him to be lonely.

Chris Elmore: I know I am shrinking, Mr Speaker, but not quite at that rate.

I thank the Minister most sincerely for her statement. I had only served in this House for six weeks with Jo when she was taken from us, but we had been friends for the preceding three years, when I was a candidate up until I lost in 2015. When I was selected for my constituency, she sent me a text saying, "Better late than never, mate." In the six weeks as a new Member in which I served with her, there was either a text, a WhatsApp message or a written note asking whether I was okay, so Jo really did practise what she preached.

The Welsh Government are responsible for the loneliness strategy in Wales. The Minister will be aware that the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 requires public bodies to look at issues around loneliness as part of wider public service delivery. Given the extra money that she has announced today, will there be any Barnett consequential in the form of additional funding for the devolved Administrations?

Finally, if I may beg your indulgence, Mr Speaker, will the Minister join me in paying tribute to the connecting the elderly group in Llanharan that supports pensioners around the Pencoed, Llanharan, Bryncae and Llanharry communities by providing afternoon teas free of charge for up to 20 residents every single month to try to improve their community spirit and get them out of the house?

Tracey Crouch: I like a challenge, Mr Speaker, but there is no way I am repeating that!

Obviously, I support the work of the hon. Gentleman's constituency organisation. With reference to the Barnett formula, there is nothing in this strategy relating to that, but I am sure that colleagues from other Departments will have heard his question.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Minister, the shadow Minister, the spokesperson for the Scottish National party and all other contributors to the exchanges on this statement. What colleagues have said and, at least as importantly, the way in which they have said it, has been true, without exception, to the spirit of the late and great Jo. As one colleague observed, one felt that Jo was in a sense here and part of this statement, because it springs from her. Everybody can see the permanent testament both to the outrage, and to the respect and affection, that we feel, and will always feel, for Jo, for her family, and for everyone—goodness knows, it was a very large number of people—who admired and loved her. The challenge now is to give effect to the strategy in a way that does us all credit and would get her nod of approval.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Points of Order

6.46 pm

Jonathan Ashworth: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Last Tuesday, in the urgent question on clinical waste, the Minister of State explicitly denied that the scandal was a result of a lack of incinerator capacity. When I asked him whether there was enough incinerator capacity, he said:

“The answer to that is, yes there is.”—[*Official Report*, 9 October 2018; Vol. 647, c. 35.]

You will have seen subsequently, Mr Speaker, in your copy of the *Health Service Journal*, that according to the minutes of a meeting of NHS Improvement officials held in August, they

“acknowledged there appeared to be a national market capacity issue”.

It turns out that the Environment Agency had said something similar back in August. This suggests that in fact the Government were aware of this and do accept that there is a clinical waste incinerator shortage. Has the Minister given you notice that he will come to make a statement to clear up this apparent contradiction and correct the record?

Mr Speaker: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that point of order. Of course I remember the exchanges to which he has referred. I have not, to date, been advised of any intention by anyone to come to the House to make a statement, but of course, as the hon. Gentleman knows well, every Member in this place, including every Minister, is responsible for what he or she says in the Chamber. In the event that anybody feels that there is a need for a correction, that Member must take the lead in bringing about that correction in the *Official Report*. I think that we had better leave it there for now, but meanwhile the hon. Gentleman has made his point forcefully.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: And I have a feeling that it is about to be buttressed and reinforced by a Member with a notable constituency interest.

Yvette Cooper: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. The evidence that we have seen is that there is a growing gap between what the Minister told the House and the reality that we are seeing on the ground, including rumours that Mitie has neither the workforce, the sites nor the lorries to deal with the majority of this waste. We now have shipping containers in place at Pontefract Hospital, with no clarity about what will be put in them. The workforce at the Healthcare Environment Services site in Normanton are being told nothing at all about whether they will be TUPE-ed, whether they have to carry on with existing work, or what will happen to their jobs. I am sure you will agree that that is deeply unfair on the workforce. Given that the Minister promised to make things better, and it appears that they may be being made worse, what other advice can you give us on how to get the Minister to provide more clarity to the House about what is happening?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady. The Minister will have heard what has been said, or if the

[Mr Speaker]

Minister has not yet heard what has been said, the information about these exchanges will be transmitted, I think, extremely quickly.

The right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) is a very experienced Member of the House. I will not say she is a veteran, for that would be wrong, but she is a very experienced Member—we came into the House together—and she will know that there are ways to ensure that a matter can be addressed as a matter of urgency in the Chamber. That cannot now happen today, but I rather imagine that the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth), and the right hon. Lady will be expecting an update tomorrow. In the expectation but also potentially in lieu of such an update, they know what mechanism is available to them.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I wish to place on record that I omitted to declare an interest when I questioned my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport on the 5G West Midlands bid. I asked what the benefits were for my constituency, but I failed to declare that my husband is the CEO of the company. While he is working as a volunteer, he receives no remuneration, but it has been brought to my attention that I should have mentioned that connection. I wish to correct the record, with your permission.

Mr Speaker: I very much appreciate what the hon. Lady has said. She has corrected the record extremely quickly, and I am confident that that will be accepted by the House in the spirit in which she has offered the correction. I thank her. I will leave it there for now, but I look forward to seeing colleagues ere long.

OFFENSIVE WEAPONS BILL

Bill to be considered tomorrow.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am grateful for you taking this point of order. I want to know why the House was not informed at the earliest opportunity that the Offensive Weapons Bill, a very important Bill, was not going to be moved. We have just found out that it has been rescheduled for tomorrow. I wonder why we and the business managers were not informed in a timely manner.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am interested in why the Leader of the House has not come to make a

business statement about this matter, given that she announced this business on Thursday last week and that many outside organisations have expected to see important debates on airguns, gun control and, crucially, as covered by my amendments, assaults on and threatening behaviour towards retail staff in the exercise of their duties. I would like to know whether “tomorrow” means tomorrow in this case or some unspecified date to be announced in the future. Given that material has been printed and the House still has three and a quarter hours in which this debate could take place, can we have an explanation?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): First, it might be helpful if I explain that while the Government have put the Bill down for tomorrow, that does not mean it will be taken tomorrow. It is a matter for the Government when they bring the Bill back. It is the usual practice for Government Bills to be set down in the remaining Orders for the next sitting day, but then for the Leader of the House to announce in the business statement when they are actually expected to be taken. I am sure that Ministers on the Treasury Bench have heard the concerns raised by Members. The Leader of the House will be responding to business questions on Thursday in the usual way, which will provide an opportunity for Members to ask what the Government’s intention is, if that is not made clear in the Leader of the House’s opening statement.

Valerie Vaz: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. This is such an important Bill: it is about protecting people and, in the case of some of the amendments in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (David Hanson), about protecting shop workers. Could the Leader of the House come to the House at her earliest convenience—when she is not buying pizzas for everyone—and inform us when this matter will be taken in the Chamber?

Madam Deputy Speaker: As I have said, there will be an opportunity on Thursday to question the Leader of the House. I have not received any indication that she will be coming to the House earlier than that, but there will be such an opportunity on Thursday. As I have said, those on the Treasury Bench have heard the concerns of Members.

I wish to inform the House that nominations for the election of a Chair of the Committee on Standards closed at 5 pm today. As a single nomination was received, I can now announce that no ballot is necessary and that Kate Green is elected unopposed. I congratulate her on her assumption of that role.

Ipswich-London Rail Fares

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Wendy Morton.*)

6.56 pm

Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab): Although I am here to talk about rail fares, I should start by making it clear that I believe Ipswich is conveniently connected to London and that rail is by far the most effective and sustainable way to travel between the two cities under all normal circumstances. Like some other Suffolk MPs, I almost always use the train to get here, and on the two occasions in the past 16 months when I have had to drive to Westminster, I have had ample reminder of what a bad idea it is to drive in central London if one can avoid it.

Travelling from Ipswich station is a joy. It is easy to get to by bus, taxi or bicycle or on foot, the staff are friendly and helpful, and the facilities are excellent. It is not just me saying that: Ipswich won the Network Rail award for the best large station for 2018. I am looking forward to having all new trains on the Great Eastern main line, starting from April next year, and I would be able to look forward to shorter journey times as well if only the Government were willing to put the money into the fairly modest track improvements that our region has been calling for.

Ipswich is a town undergoing a renaissance, and that renaissance is partly due to our proximity to London. When IT, software, media and arts-related companies are considering relocating to Ipswich—or, indeed, starting up in Ipswich, which is regarded in at least one business survey as the best start-up location for small businesses in the UK—I want them to know that they can easily visit their families or friends in London and can easily invite clients up from London. In short, they are not cutting themselves off from our capital city in any way.

The cost of fares is not going to be the No. 1 criterion for any business relocating, nor should it be. For those travelling daily between London and Ipswich, the annual season ticket, at £6,548, while eye-wateringly expensive by the standards of most European countries, is not completely out of step with other destinations in England. It is 1p per mile more expensive than Cambridge, but 1.3p per mile less expensive than Oxford. I apologise now for any inaccuracy in my figures, but it appears to be as difficult to pin down actual costs per mile as it is for passengers to find out how much their tickets would cost before they travel.

Although annual season tickets are regulated, anytime walk-on fares have been allowed to rise year after year, and in effect penalise passengers for travelling without advance planning. This really matters because, in the modern work pattern—we are talking about attracting modern, creative and information-based industries—most of the travelling will not be on a nine-to-five work day basis. When businesses invite clients to visit, they may well not know when they are likely to come until the day concerned. When staff are working on projects, they may decide at a moment's notice that they need to visit a colleague. While the season ticket cost for travelling from Ipswich to London is 23.9p per mile, the walk-on peak time fare is 74.4p per mile. I have found a town in the UK where the anytime walk-on fare is even more expensive, and I will be passing my findings to the

Members for Swindon. However, the main point I want to get across is, first, that the exorbitant cost of walk-on fares has the potential to hold back the growth of modern, flexible, creative businesses outside London

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): I congratulate my neighbour on securing the debate, which will be welcomed by my constituents who commute from Ipswich. When we talk about the cost of commuting, it is not just about the cost of the train fare. Most of my constituents drive to stations such as Ipswich, Manningtree and so on. Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern that, on our line, the cost of parking has risen substantially above inflation? The cost is not regulated, and many of my constituents are as concerned about it as they are about the cost of the rail fare.

Sandy Martin: I understand the concerns that the hon. Gentleman's constituents have. I have to say that, if constituents can find a way of getting to the station that does not involve parking, that is clearly preferable. I would certainly not encourage people to drive to Ipswich station and park during the week, and there are bus services to Ipswich station. If his constituents wish to park at a station, Manningtree is probably a more sensible station to drive to than Ipswich.

The anomalies in fares between one town and another confuse travellers, including business travellers and people travelling to visit families in another town, and put many people off using the trains before they have even looked at the prices. It may take only one return trip costing over £100 to dissuade someone from using the trains ever again. It is all very well for rail operators and the Government to point to advance tickets, which can give excellent value for money—I myself have made extensive use of advance tickets, travelling, for instance, to Edinburgh and back for less than it would cost me to travel to London on a peak-time ticket—but if the cost of rail travel bears no relation to the distance, or apparently anything else, the confusion experienced by first-time rail passengers who are stung with maximum fares will not encourage them to travel by train again.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making an excellent case about the problems between Ipswich and London. Would he accept that that is part of a bigger problem? Traditionally the Stroud valleys line, which I represent part of, has always been more expensive than the Cotswold line. Does he think that this issue is worthy of a much bigger investigation, to look at the disparities between different parts of the country and at the way people have to pay bigger fares to travel on some lines?

Sandy Martin: My hon. Friend has absolutely encapsulated the point of my argument, which is that the way fares are allocated to different stations and towns across the country is entirely illogical. There should be some logic behind the fares that are charged; otherwise, passengers become confused and, in many cases, stop travelling by rail.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. To get from Ipswich to London, passengers of course have to pass through Chelmsford, which is the busiest two-platform train station anywhere on the network. By the time the

[Vicky Ford]

train from Ipswich gets to Chelmsford, it is often very crowded, especially at peak times, so while he may be arguing for lower walk-on fares at peak times, I would actually discourage lower walk-on fares at peak times, and encourage people to pay more in advance.

However, what I really want to raise with the hon. Gentleman is the fact that the Government have introduced Delay Repay, and some of my constituents have had up to £400 back under the 30-minute Delay Repay, which is clearly great. Does he welcome the Secretary of State's comments last week that he expects the 15-minute Delay Repay to be introduced on our shared line next year, which would be great for customers?

Sandy Martin: I thank the hon. Lady for her comments. I do share her joy at additional funding for Delay Repay. While I love Chelmsford, I am very happy not to stop there, whenever possible. If there were an additional two lines between Colchester and London, we could sail through Chelmsford without stopping. She would not then have to put up with passengers from Ipswich on the trains she wants to get on, but that is probably something for a fairly dim and distant future.

Vicky Ford: Many of the hon. Gentleman's constituents actually work in my constituency.

Sandy Martin: Indeed they do. However, if they are travelling to Chelmsford and getting off at Chelmsford, clearly they are not in the way of Chelmsford passengers who want to travel to London.

The confusion in the fares charged is particularly stark in Ipswich. The next station on the line to London has fares that are so much lower than ours it is usually cheaper to buy a ticket from Ipswich to Manningtree, followed by another ticket from Manningtree to London, than it is to simply buy a ticket to London. This situation has persisted for well over 20 years. Some canny passengers deliberately buy tickets from Ipswich to Manningtree and from Manningtree to London to save significant sums on their fares. It feels wrong. Many passengers will not do it. Many do not realise that they could save money by doing it. It makes the entire fares structure look ridiculous, which it is.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): On the news this morning, it was stated that the number of those travelling by bus had fallen dramatically. There are a lot of reasons for that, relating to investment, costs and incentives. Does the hon. Gentleman feel that, if the Government were to consider reinvestment and making tickets more cost-effective, in addition to incentives, which some parts of the United Kingdom are introducing, that would be the way forward to secure this line?

Sandy Martin: I agree. The fact is that, if Governments invest in public transport as a public good, the number of people using that public transport tends to increase. This country has taken the view that passengers should be charged as close to the actual cost as possible. I am not sure that that is necessarily sensible.

I understand that the reasons for the anomaly between Ipswich and Manningtree, and for many other anomalous differences in fares between towns at a similar distance

to London, is partly due to the Network Railcard area. The Network Railcard area is a complete mystery to me. Ipswich is outside the area. Peterborough is outside the area. Swindon, the most expensive place in the country to travel from by train, is outside the area. But Kings Lynn is in the area. And so is Weymouth. And so is Worcester. And so is Exeter. I realise that if there is going to be a Network Railcard there needs to be a Network Railcard area, and that the line has to be drawn somewhere. I just wish it were not drawn in a way that so gratuitously disadvantages Ipswich. Ipswich is the final stop for stopping trains on the Great Eastern main line commuter service. If a line has to be drawn, it is nonsensical to draw it just before the destination of the commuter trains it has been created to facilitate.

On 11 October, the Secretary of State launched a root and branch review of the rail industry. In September, 20,000 people responded to a consultation on fares. Many of the improvements passengers want, such as making tickets jargon-free and improving the availability of smart ticketing, are already priorities for the Government and for the train operators. But I want to take this opportunity to make a plea to the Government to adhere to one or two basic principles in the improvements that they make to the fares structure. First, no single journey should ever be more expensive than the sum of its parts. Secondly, for any journey where the anytime walk-on fare is clearly above the national average cost per mile, those fares should be frozen until they are in line with the national average. Thirdly, the Network Railcard area should be reviewed, with some objectivity involved in deciding where the boundary should be and with a fares structure that does not suddenly penalise those stations that are just outside the area.

The root and branch review will take time. Many of its recommendations may be unpalatable to the Government. Some of them may be unpalatable to me. I, like the rest of my party, would like to see train operator franchises taken back into public ownership as and when the franchises expire or are surrendered. I would like to see rail travel being treated as an investment in our country's productive capacity and a Government priority to meet our climate change commitments. I would prefer not to have certain regions, such as East Anglia, paying what is in effect a tax on train travel to the Government, although I am not necessarily expecting those recommendations to be in the panel's report. I would prefer that Ipswich's rail passengers should not have to wait for that report before they see any change in their fares.

In addition to the principles that I believe the Government should seek to enshrine in any sensible fares structure, and pending any root and branch reform of fares, I call on the Minister—with the co-operation of any agency that he believes needs to be seen to be making this decision—to include Ipswich, possibly the closest point to London that is not in the Network Railcard area, forthwith, so that this historical anomaly can be ended immediately.

7.10 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Joseph Johnson): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ipswich (Sandy Martin) on securing this debate. I am delighted that he is a fan of the railways and that he takes such pride in his local station in Ipswich.

I recognise the issues that the hon. Gentleman raised in relation to, in particular, the fares between Ipswich and London. As he recognised, these are, to some extent, the result of historical anomalies. As someone who follows the railways closely, he will know that following privatisation in the early '90s, the operation of the Great Eastern main line was shared between two operating companies until 2004. First Great Eastern operated stopping services from Liverpool Street to Ipswich and Anglia Railways operated the intercity services from Liverpool Street to Norwich. This led to a divergence of fares, increasing the pence-per-mile cost of Ipswich to London relative to, as he pointed out, Manningtree to London.

Manningtree was the furthest extent of the Network Railcard area, and Ipswich was the first station where fares were set by the intercity operator. They were set to reflect the different standard of services and offering on the intercity services, including for example, faster, air-conditioned trains. I appreciate that the differences in the fares today can seem unfair to passengers, but it is always possible for advance fares to be bought for travel between Ipswich and London for as little as £10.

As a Government, we have committed to reviewing rail ticketing to remove pricing complexity and perversity, and we are also awaiting the findings of the Rail Delivery Group's "Easier Fares" consultation. That consultation concluded in September after running for three months. It aimed to look at fare structures and ticketing to ease passenger confusion, with a broad scope. The Rail Delivery Group received approximately 20,000 responses, which it is in the process of analysing, and I look forward to seeing its findings. As the hon. Gentleman mentioned, the recently announced rail review will also consider how to support a railway that is able to offer good value fares for passengers. In his thoughtful speech, he made a number of proposals for fares reform, which I will ensure reach the team that is undertaking the rail review, so that they can consider that as a submission to their work on that part of the review.

James Cartlidge: On the point about reforming how fares are charged, I held an Adjournment debate on part-time season tickets, because there is a concern about that for many of us. We have many constituents who travel perhaps three or four days a week but have to pay a full season-ticket price. People constantly email me about the unfairness of that, and I wonder whether it will feature in the consultation that the Minister referred to.

Joseph Johnson: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. Introducing more flexible ticketing is a priority. We want to see franchises—not just in East Anglia and on the Greater Anglia part of the network, but across the country—looking at how creative they can be to ensure that people who work part-time have a means of securing tickets that are good value for money.

Dr Drew: Will the Minister include ticket machines in his review? One of the biggest rip-offs is when people cannot get the cheapest tickets. I am not talking about pre-buying; I am talking about how the machines always offer the most expensive fare.

Joseph Johnson: Absolutely. Ticket machines should be programmed to offer the best-value fare, and to the extent that they are not, it is worth further consideration by the team undertaking the rail review.

Turning to the cost of fares, the Government and the train operators have made long-term and far-reaching investments in the railways to cope with the considerable increase in use in the years since privatisation. Fares revenue is crucial to funding day-to-day railway operations, and the massive upgrade programme we are delivering now will benefit passengers. We know that a rise in rail fares can affect the family budgets of hard-working people, including commuters in the constituency of the hon. Member for Ipswich and in London, which is why, for the sixth year running, we will be capping regulated fares in line with inflation.

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend's welcome news on capping rail fares, but does he not also agree that it is difficult for customers to disaggregate the cost of the fare—those in Ipswich are very high per mile by national standards—from reliability and speed of service? Despite the cost of tickets from Ipswich, reliability and speed of service have not improved over the years. Reliability, speed of service and track capacity desperately need to improve and be better linked to fare prices.

Joseph Johnson: Of course I agree that performance, whether measured by reliability or punctuality, is exceptionally important to passengers and their perception of value for money. Performance on Greater Anglia has been reasonably good over recent weeks. From memory—I am seeking a prompt—I think its public performance measure is around 89%, so just a couple of percentage points off its target for the relevant period, but there is always room for improvement and we carefully monitor how it is doing against its targets.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): I take an interest in this because Cheltenham, perhaps like Ipswich, is affected by pricing perversity, meaning it is much more expensive per mile to travel from Cheltenham—[*Interruption.*]—and indeed from Stroud, which the hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew) represents, than from other equivalent parts of the country. I am delighted about the review, therefore, but will it address this geographical perversity, which disadvantages my constituents?

Joseph Johnson: No one could defend the current fares system, and I will certainly not attempt to do so; it needs thorough reform, and the rail review's work will be an important contribution to that process.

Vicky Ford: May I encourage the Minister to look again at the punctuality figures, because it does not feel to my constituents that the trains are arriving on time nine days out of 10?

Joseph Johnson: I cannot speak to the experience of my hon. Friend's constituents in particular, but I can confirm that Greater Anglia's overall performance is currently around 89.1%, on the public performance measure, which assesses whether a train arrives within five minutes of its scheduled arrival time. That is against its target, under the franchise for this period, of 91.3%, so it is only marginally off what we have specified for that period of the year.

For the sixth year running, we are capping fees in line with inflation. It is important that we continue to receive this fare income, albeit capped, because it makes

[Joseph Johnson]

such a vital contribution to the investment that we are piling back into the rail system: 98p in every pound goes straight back in as investment. The most significant of those costs are the investments in the network itself and in staff costs, which is why it is so important that we get fares linked ultimately to the more commonly used CPI measure of inflation. For that to be sustainable, we need income and costs in the industry to change in parallel. Linking fares to the CPI without linking other costs in the industry to it would cause higher and higher costs to be borne by the taxpayer rather than by rail users. The Secretary of State wants to work with the rail industry, the Office of Rail and Road and the unions to ensure that wage costs for all employees are based on the CPI and not the RPI in future pay deals.

As the hon. Member for Ipswich noted, we are ensuring that when things do go wrong, passengers are compensated fairly. As was noted a few moments ago by my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford), we are in the process of moving Greater Anglia from Delay Repay 30 to Delay Repay 15, and we hope that the hon. Gentleman will be able to welcome that on behalf of his constituents. In his statement to the House on Thursday, the Secretary of State said that he wanted Delay Repay 15 to be introduced next year.

Stations are also receiving significant investment. Services on the Great Eastern main line between Norwich and London will be improved considerably. As I hope the hon. Gentleman recognises, access for disabled people at Ipswich station has been improved and smart ticketing has been introduced, all within the period of capping fare rises at inflation only. As a result—as the hon. Gentleman said—Ipswich station recently won the “large station of the year” award at the 2018 national rail awards event. That is all part of a £60 million programme of investment by Greater Anglia in stations on its network until 2025.

A number of members mentioned the new trains that will be introduced during the franchise period. That is an exciting and promising development for passengers in East Anglia. There will be 169 new trains—most of them electric, but some bimodal—to replace old British Rail-era rolling stock: much cleaner-running, faster, more spacious and more efficient modern trains for Members’ constituents.

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): My constituents, who also travel on the Great Eastern main line, have waited for, in some cases, 40 years for the brand-new fleet of trains that will be introduced next year. The Minister mentioned changes in fares and infrastructure changes. Can he confirm that none of those changes would threaten the introduction of the new trains?

Joseph Johnson: Indeed they will not. Our priority is to ensure that the new trains are in service by the end of 2020. Once they have been introduced, passengers in Colchester will experience improved journey times, much greater reliability, and much more comfortable journeys.

I thank the hon. Member for Ipswich, and all colleagues in the Chamber who represent East Anglia—and parts of Gloucestershire, and areas further afield—for their contributions. We will continue to look at ways of being able both to improve services and to keep the cost to the passenger to a minimum. Greater Anglia is a train operator that will be in place at least until 2025, and it has shown a willingness to work with the Government and invest in the railways. I hope that, when we reach the end of the term of the East Anglia franchise, we will all be proud of the successes that the Government’s partnership with Greater Anglia has achieved.

Question put and agreed to.

7.23 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Monday 15 October 2018

[PHIL WILSON *in the Chair*]

Racehorse Protection

4.30 pm

Mike Hill (Hartlepool) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 211950 relating to setting up a new independent body for the protection of racehorses.

It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson. I should start by saying that I speak as a member of the Petitions Committee and am therefore impartial. This is not my motion; I speak on behalf of the petitioners.

Animal Aid is one of the largest animal rights organisations in the UK. I met its representatives in September to discuss the issue, as it has campaigned on issues of animal welfare for almost two decades. I also met the British Horseracing Association to get its perspective.

All sports carry an element of risk for participants. A human athlete makes a conscious decision to participate in their chosen sport and should understand the potential risks of injury. In horse-racing, jockeys have the choice whether to participate. The horses that they ride do not have that option; they are bred and conscripted into a billion-pound commercial industry. With that fact comes, or should come, a responsibility towards the animals involved, whether they are among the breeding population, the horses in racing and training or the thousands removed from the industry every year.

According to the petitioner, the BHA bears that responsibility by its own choice. In its diverse and demanding role of governance and regulation, it has to make often conflicting decisions to promote horse-racing and maintain its integrity as part of its remit to foster a healthy horse population that, by any moral, let alone legal, standard, should be kept safe from harm.

Transparency and accountability should be key features of any authority—all the more so where animals are involved, because of the public interest in the sport and the public's ever-growing concern for animal welfare and rights. We are all stakeholders, from punters, racehorse owners, trainers, bookies, farriers and racecourse admin assistants to MPs, campaigners for animals and the thoroughbred racehorses themselves. People should be assured that the best possible welfare practice is at the forefront of racing policy. Without it, the integrity, veracity and legitimacy of racing fall at the first hurdle. Sadly, racing has fallen at that hurdle and is stricken by its own ineptness at getting up to the task in hand and protecting horses from harm.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): The hon. Gentleman mentioned that a number of organisations in the racing industry cover these areas. He also mentioned the BHA and the imperfections that it has had. I am not opposed to an independent body, but could not the BHA be changed and improved to take on the responsibilities of one?

Mike Hill: I take the hon. Gentleman's point and will come to it later. I have heard the voice of the BHA and it has tried to effect change.

According to the petitioners, nearly 200 horses are killed on racecourses each year. Others are taken away injured and die later, but do not appear in any industry figures. Horses are whipped as normal practice. Rule-breaking abuse with the whip runs to more than 500 offences a year, committed by 260 jockeys or more. That alone is a damning indictment of the BHA's failings, and there are other issues, which I will come to. A point of progress noted by the BHA at our meeting was the fact that it now counts horses that have died off the racetrack.

The BHA has lacked urgency and has failed to take pragmatic steps when horses have been killed. If racing has a bad name in the media, that has been brought on by a failure to acknowledge and act. Let me read just a few headlines that expose the deficiencies: "Record number of thoroughbreds being slaughtered for meat", "Jockey banned after...punching horse", "Three horses die within 30 minutes at Hexham races leading to calls for an inquiry", "Worcester Racecourse is among worst venues for horse safety", and "Plumpton described as 'death trap'...six horses died in just nine days of racing". Of course, there was also the recent Cheltenham incident. Such headlines are written because of the public interest in animal welfare, which is ever growing—a point that the petition's signatories have made clear.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): The hon. Gentleman is making extremely good points. Many people, including me, think that the BHA has many qualities and many good people, and serves an important role. However, does he agree that the BHA has so many responsibilities, of which animal welfare is only one, that it is very hard for it to exercise that responsibility as well as it might? Put bluntly, the conflict of interest between promoting the sport and protecting animal welfare ought to lead us to conclude that there should be an independent body.

Mike Hill: Yes. The petitioners' point is that there is a conflict of interest.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): A whole number of realms of life are subject to scrutinised self-regulation by people who actually know the profession, industry or walk of life in question. We may look for improvements, but why would we want to take regulation away from the people who have a long-term interest in sustaining the industry and who have the support of the millions who follow racing, either by going to races or by watching them on television?

Mike Hill: That is, of course, a perfectly appropriate point to make, and the BHA in particular would agree. As I said, I have sat down with the BHA and it has made improvements in areas where it recognises that they are required.

I will cite examples to make the case that racehorses have been failed by the BHA, and set out why the BHA should lose its horse welfare remit and be replaced by an independent body that has horse welfare as its only concern.

The problem is nothing new; it is historical. The rich and politically influential people in racing have always had their hands on the reins. They have controlled all

[Mike Hill]

aspects since they chose to self-regulate the sport back in 1750, just a few streets away from here, in a Pall Mall gentlemen's club called the Jockey Club. Their stranglehold on power, and for a short period that of jump racing's National Hunt Committee, existed until this century, when it married for a few years with a fledgling authority, the Horseracing Regulatory Authority. In 2007, those authorities gave birth to the current incumbent, the BHA.

This is a blue-blooded family who maintain power. Their relatives maintain control too. Weatherby's, racing's private administrator and registrar of thoroughbred births and deaths, has since 1770 and for seven family generations enjoyed direct involvement in the fully integrated sport of breeding, racing and disposing of thoroughbreds. Much of the information that it gathers on racehorses is kept private, but in some circumstances it can be bought.

According to the petitioners, this is an exclusive old boys' club run like a masonic lodge with friends in Government. Through the ages, the Government have left this racing club in full control, rarely intervening in horse welfare matters. Parliament has seen few discussions on the subject. The last time any serious debate took place here was in 1954, when Lord Ammon rose to ask

"whether the attention of Her Majesty's Government has been directed to the disaster on the Aintree racecourse during the Grand National Steeplechase on Saturday, 27th March when 29 horses started, of which 20, including four killed, failed to finish the course; whether the law concerning cruelty to animals applies in such cases, and to move for Papers."

He went on to say:

"Nor is that all the story; hundreds of the horses who fail are not heard of again. It is difficult to get news about them".

He was talked down by Earl Winterton, who—with the support of the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, Lord Lloyd—rejected Government intervention, stating that

"it would be a pity if it went out from your Lordships' House that there was undue criticism here. Surely we should leave the appropriate authorities"

—by which he meant racing's self-regulating National Hunt Committee—

"to consider what has been said...and decide what course they should take".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 6 April 1954; Vol. 186, c. 1041-1049.]

Perhaps not unsurprisingly, the self-regulators did not take any course of action.

I mention that historical debate because, importantly, the same scenario is being played out today. Like Lord Ammon, I ask whether Her Majesty's Government are aware that three horses died just weeks ago in a single afternoon's racing at Perth racecourse. Is the horse welfare regulator—the BHA—going to make any changes to the racecourse or to the conditions of the races at Perth, to prevent this from happening again? Were the Government or anyone else aware that, more alarmingly, this is the second time that three horses have died in a day's racing at Perth? After their deaths in August 2016, the BHA failed to act, making no changes and learning no lessons. As a consequence, horses have had to be killed yet again. Just as its predecessor for jump racing, the National Hunt Committee, walked away from horse deaths back in 1954, the BHA is doing the same—and this, of course, when the deaths do not make the headlines.

One might think that horses are racing's most valuable assets. That is perhaps so for horses such as Frankel, Galileo or Kew Gardens, who are making millions of pounds for their owners, but maybe not for elderly broodmares and former racehorses such as Maidment or Marilouise. These are just two of 23 thoroughbreds, some pregnant and one with a foal at foot, who were taken at the eleventh hour from a bankrupt stud in Newmarket—the beating heart of British racing. Those horses were not saved with the support of the racing industry or the BHA but by Hillside animal sanctuary, a rescue centre that relies on public donations to feed and care for unwanted animals. Had Hillside not taken them into its care just a few weeks ago, on 17 September, those horses, including the foal, would have been destroyed—they were pre-booked for 18 September at 11 am. Fortunately for the BHA's high-profile public image campaign, The Horse Comes First, and its flagship Retraining of Racehorses scheme, ROR, that desperate rescue of 23 vulnerable racehorses and broodmares, who were down on their luck, did not hit the national headlines.

That highlights the major welfare issue of overbreeding, and likewise what to do with the thousands of horses who face ejection by the industry each year, which in effect is the very same problem. In 2008, the Irish Republic, which is the supply centre of half the horses who are trained and raced in Britain, was hit by the global economic recession. British Racing, led by the BHA, stood by and watched an exponential rise in slaughter figures, from just over 2,000 in 2008 to 24,000 in 2012.

John Spellar: My recollection is that the global financial crisis also led to a crisis in horse-owning more generally, quite apart from horseracing. I am not clear whether the perfectly legitimate line that my hon. Friend is taking is, actually, to oppose horseracing.

Mike Hill: I remind my right hon. Friend that I am a member of the Petitions Committee and I am quoting the facts and figures of the petitioners on this occasion.

Abattoirs sprung up almost overnight to cater for the demand for the disposal of unwanted horses. In the crudest terms, Irish and British horseracing had gone from a sport to a food producer. Young foals and those at the end of the careers, the injured or slow, poor-performing stallions and mediocre brood mares similar to Maidment and Marilouise, who Hillside took in just weeks ago, were turned into meat for human consumption or fed to hunting hounds, while others were rendered down to be mixed into everyday products. That massacre of the sport's equine competitors was the result of a lack of foresight and strategic planning for the future, the ignorance of potential outcomes and the sheer apathy of a self-regulated industry. The average punter and Royal Ascot celebrity would never know this secret, because of a lack of transparency and a closed door to freedom of information.

Since that animal welfare disaster, the BHA has failed to put limits on breeding numbers. One hundred years ago, a top stallion would cover—a polite way of saying mate—with 15 mares. Around 35 years ago, stallions such as the ill-fated Shergar would cover 40 at best. This year, we are seeing single stallions cover 100, 200 or even 300 mares. It is irresponsible, and the BHA stands by and lets it happen. It is as bad as any unscrupulous dog breeder who has hit the news in recent years—behaviour that eventually brought about a change to the law.

The burgeoning racing fixtures list, drawn up to accommodate the swell of horses being bred, will be the biggest ever in 2019, with over 1,500 meetings. It will not meet the needs of a huge number of horses who will not win a race and will earn little or no prize money, and who will then be quickly cast out and replaced by another on the conveyor belt of horses that pass through the industry, which brings me on to racing itself.

When a horse steps on to a British racecourse, its welfare and protection from potential suffering should be paramount. Yet each horse has about a one in 50 chance of not surviving a year in racing. The BHA likes to minimise that alarming figure by stating that just 0.2% of runners die in racing, although if a horse runs 10 times and dies, that is classed as one in 10 runners. It is confusing and deliberately misleading. The disrespect shown by classing horses' deaths as a percentage of runners, and the BHA's unwillingness to name individual horses who are killed in an understandable and comprehensive list, as is done in Ireland, led the campaign group Animal Aid to launch its own online website, Race Horse Death Watch, where one can see the names of ill-fated horses and the racecourses where they died. It has become an endless list and makes for disturbing viewing.

Why do horses die racing? Is it by accident, as the BHA cited in the death of a two-year-old colt last month at Doncaster, or are horse deaths to some extent preventable? In the case of the two-year-old, the BHA shamefully absolved itself and the racecourse of any responsibility for the young horse's death. I will go through the account of an eyewitness who saw this tragedy unfold. An inexperienced two-year-old colt known as Commanding Officer entered an enclosed starting stall from which to race. The horse became frightened and reared in an attempt to free himself from the all-enveloping stall. Instead of removing this panic-stricken, novice horse from the race, it was decided to blindfold him in the hope of eventually getting him to run. Without his vision, and with natural equine fear, he reared again in the starting stall. The poor design of stalls enabled Commanding Officer to trap a foreleg between the front gates. As he pulled back, blind, to free himself, his foreleg snapped into two as the gates held firmly shut. By design, there is, surprisingly, no quick-release mechanism on the gates to free individual horses from stalls. As a consequence, the colt's hoof and five inches of bare cannon bone—his shin—were hanging off the end of his leg, held by just a tenuous flap of skin.

The horse was eventually destroyed, but not without immense suffering. The eyewitness described the horse's destruction as "unbelievable", and a load of empty syringes were thrown over the screens—those would have contained a deadly cocktail of drugs in a vain attempt to inject the scared and injured animal. The race was held up but still went ahead. As the other horses set off running, Commander Officer's dead body lay in a white horsebox parked next to the stalls. He was two years old—just a baby.

Shockingly, the BHA stewards' report of events stated that

"the BHA's Equine Health and Welfare department...found that the starting and loading procedures were followed correctly, and that the injury sustained by Commanding Officer was an accident." There was no mention of the inability to quickly open the stall gates to free the horse. That might have been

the end of the story, but it is not. At a previous meeting at the very same racecourse, Doncaster, an identical fatal injury happened that was similarly caused by the poor design of the stalls. An experienced horse known as Mukaynis caught his left foreleg in the starting stall gates when, yet again, the horse's vision was compromised by a hood. Mukaynis, with restricted vision, was startled by a stalls handler. The gelding reared, the gates trapping a leg. Perhaps the BHA thinks that lightning cannot strike twice and crosses its fingers—it did not act after Mukaynis lost his life, and the young Commanding Officer has now lost his life, too. Both horses were failed by poor practice that could have been resolved with basic insight and cost-effective physical changes to starting stall gates.

That is not the only problem. The BHA's crude reporting of events should also be scrutinised. The race-day stewards, who are mostly amateurs, are commissioned by and under guidance from the BHA, and are meant to monitor the races, take action, note any concerning matters and report them in the official BHA documents. The stewards reported that both horse victims were "unruly in the stalls". Their report did not even acknowledge that Mukaynis was dead. The BHA allows anthropomorphic terms to be used to describe fear in an equine that is confined in an unnatural manner and unable to escape when panicked.

I could talk into the night about other heart-wrenching cases in which stewards failed to monitor or report welfare issues. Many racehorse deaths could easily have been avoided if the tired horses that had no chance of winning were simply pulled up. Horses are literally run into the ground: they are forced to race without having time to recover from the previous races.

I have spoken to the BHA, and it has talked about making improvements in the areas that I have condemned. It says that it reviews deaths, but its Cheltenham review came about only because of the public and media outcry over the death of six horses at this year's festival meeting. It published no review of the 2017 festival and did not even mention the five horses that died during it, or the seven that were killed in 2016. The media failed to pick up on those deaths, so the BHA remained silent. It takes the wrath of public opinion to make it look into deaths, let alone take responsibility for them.

The BHA states that it has spent £33 million since 2017 on veterinary research and education. That sum may sound reasonable, but the BHA grossed more than £1.8 billion during that time, and it equates to less than 2% of expenditure. It is about £150 per horse—less money than a jockey's riding fee for one race. Racing is a rich industry and can afford to increase its welfare budget. If it does not, horses will continue to pay the price of the underspend with their lives.

The petitioners call on the Government to act by removing the British Horseracing Authority from its role as welfare regulator for racehorses, while allowing it to retain its other roles in racing, and to replace the BHA with an independent body that is responsible only for horse welfare.

4.52 pm

Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson. I declare my registered interests, in that I receive hospitality

[*Mr Laurence Robertson*]

from racecourses and racing bodies from time to time, and I am co-chairman, with the hon. Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn), of the all-party parliamentary racing and bloodstock industries group. I very much welcome this debate, which gives us the opportunity to discuss how to improve the welfare of racehorses in the United Kingdom, because I am also the proud Member of Parliament for Tewkesbury, which includes the Cheltenham racecourse—one of the greatest in the world. It generates a lot of income, which helps the whole area. Tewkesbury is a rural area, and horses are very much part of the rural scene. The petition attracted 313 signatories from Tewkesbury, demonstrating that there is a love of horses there and a concern that they should be properly looked after.

I have a personal interest in this issue: my wife owns horses and has done so all her life. She trains them and competes, not in racing but in other sports. I am an animal lover—we keep farm animals as pets, and we have had pets all our lives—so I want to see what we can do to build on the good work that has already been done to ensure that racehorses are well cared for, not only during their racing careers but afterwards.

It will be heartwarming to the BHA, as I do not always agree with it on everything, to hear me say that I believe it is doing a good and improving job of looking after the welfare of racehorses. Although it is involved in racing, it is independent of racecourses, jockeys, owners and the other racing bodies. It does work on the fixture list, the integrity of the sport—it makes sure it is clean—and welfare. It has a board of 10 members. One comes from racecourses and one from another body connected to racing, but the majority are independent of those bodies, so they can carry out their work completely without bias. They investigate jockeys and trainers, and sometimes come down very hard on them. They have demonstrated their ability to do that as well as their independence.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): As the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) mentioned, the Irish racehorse sector already has self-regulated through law. Does the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) feel that, to safeguard the lucrative racehorse sector in the United Kingdom, it is vital that we follow the Republic of Ireland's lead?

Mr Robertson: I will come to that issue in a minute, but the hon. Gentleman makes a very good point. Everybody in racing wants horses to be protected, largely because they love them. Owners pay a lot of money for racehorses, and training fees are some £20,000 a year, so purely from a financial point of view the last thing they want is for anything bad to happen to their horses. That is not what motivates them, but they put an awful lot of money into the sport.

The hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) said that racing is a rich industry, but those of us who know it know that it is impoverished. The top 1% are rich, but lots of trainers and jockeys earn very little. Owners get back an average of 23% of the total cost. That is not a return—they lose 77% of everything they put in. They do it for the love of the sport, and it costs them a lot of money, so the last thing they want is for horses to be treated badly on the racecourse or in the stables. They simply would not allow that to happen.

A number of charities care for racehorses, some of which might have been involved in motivating this petition, and the all-party parliamentary group, which I have co-chaired for a number of years, raises money for some of them at a charity dinner in the House of Commons. Retraining of Racehorses, which is not one that we raise money for, does an excellent job of looking after racehorses after they have finished their racing careers. Greatwood—from memory, I think we raised about £50,000 for it in this place a few years ago—does great work in bringing retired racehorses together with disadvantaged young people. It is unfortunate that that work is not recognised as often as it should be.

Even people who are not as into racing as me are captured by the excitement, particularly that of the big race meetings. I mentioned the Cheltenham festival, but there is also the Grand National, Royal Ascot and the Derby. Those races capture the imagination of people not just in this country but across the world, who take a great interest in it. I have travelled the world to watch racing—I was in France just the other week—and, without question, British racing is the best in the world, although Irish racing is also extremely good. In this country, racing contributes some £3.5 billion to the economy and £275 million in tax. Some 17,400 people are directly employed in the industry full time, and another 85,000 are indirectly employed. It really does do a lot for this country, particularly in rural areas.

I am concerned to ensure that we do the absolute best for racehorses, so I am not instinctively against having an extra body to look after them, but I wonder if it is the best way forward. As I have said, the BHA, which is independent of other bodies in racing, is doing a good and improving job. One of the problems in racing is that there are already too many bodies. As well as the BHA, there is the Horsemen's Group, the Racecourse Association, the Racehorse Owners Association, the Professional Jockeys Association, the National Trainers Federation, racecourse groups and probably a few other organisations that I have not remembered. I am not convinced therefore that bringing in another body would help and I am not sure to whom it would report or how independent it would actually be.

That goes back to the point raised by the right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar), who asked whether it is not better for people with longstanding expertise in racing and caring for horses to carry out that overview and supervise the work with racehorses. I am persuaded that that is probably the best way to continue, but that is not to say that improvements cannot be made. They have been made over the past few years: the number of fallers has, on average, been reduced, the fatality rate has thankfully been reduced, and there have been changes to the layout of racecourses, to the fences, and to whip regulations. Although those big improvements have been made, I emphasise that I am not satisfied with where we are. We must continue to move forward and I certainly want to continue working with the BHA in order to help it to do so, but that is the best way forward rather than creating another body.

Cheltenham spends hundreds of thousands of pounds a year on veterinary and welfare fees, and other racecourses spend an awful lot of money ensuring that the horses are properly checked and fit to run and that there are no problems. I accept that there is some way to go, but I think that racing is a very clean sport in this country.

There are very few examples of drugs being given to horses, of any wrongdoing in betting, or of race fixing—they all happen very rarely. It is a good and clean sport but one that can and should improve, and I believe that it is doing so.

I should like to hear the Minister's opinion. My view is that the BHA should take the issue forward and, perhaps, its structure could be altered or it could report more to the Government. I am not saying that changes are not needed in that respect, but I think that is the way forward. I am very grateful to the hon. Member for Hartlepool for introducing the debate in the way that he did, and I look forward to hearing what other hon. Members have to say.

5.3 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is good to see you in the Chair, Mr Wilson. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) for introducing the debate, and I also thank those constituents of mine who have written to me and encouraged me to attend it.

York is home to Britain's second oldest racecourse—it was established in 1731—and on Saturday I had a behind-the-scenes tour and saw all that occurs on race day. The racecourse plays a significant role in York's economy, bringing in about £58 million. It hosts races for 18 days a year and it also hosts many events on the Knavesmire stand. I thank William Derby, the racecourse chief executive, as well as his staff, for the programme he laid on for me and Councillor Jonny Crawshaw, who represents Micklegate ward.

I observed many aspects of the racecourse hosting an event, including security and policing—particularly for antisocial behaviour and terrorism—as well as stewarding, chaplaincy services, hospitality and gambling, but I also paid particular attention to the welfare of the horses, toured their new facilities and met the vets. The racecourse upgraded its facilities in 2015, including building new tepid and cold water showers for horses post-race; installing a mist fan, based on data from the Olympics that showed how best to keep horses cool; and building an equine hospital facility on the site. York also has an equine hospital, to which injured horses can rapidly be transferred should the need occur. I witnessed the horses warming up for a race and cooling down afterwards. Clearly, I did not see the entire impact of a race on a horse, but I discussed some examples with the vets, such as the potential impact of the stress placed on a horse's lungs, and internal and soft tissue injuries.

On Saturday, when speaking with the lead vet from Minster Equine veterinary clinic and others, I was reassured that animal welfare is of prime importance to the racecourse, and that the recent investment demonstrated such a commitment. Of the 1,300 horses that have raced this season, there has been one fatality. In 2016 there were three fatalities; in 2014 there were two; in 2013 there were two; in 2012 there were three; and in 2011 there was one. That is 12 fatalities in seven years, which is clearly devastating. Moreover, given that York hosts flat racing, they are also 12 fatalities too many. I should also like to point out that this feeds a gambling industry.

It is clear that much more research is needed on animal welfare and horse welfare. I observed the rehabilitation of horses from injuries resulting from races. As a physiotherapist, I was particularly interested in how horses are rehabilitated and in why more research is not

done to ensure that those that sustain such injuries are given more intense rehabilitation to increase their chances of survival. However, it is only by having a comprehensive understanding of the causation of injury that risks can be eliminated. I therefore believe that an independent regulator, which could explore why injuries occur, would be invaluable to the industry. The fact that it would be independent would be helpful for the British Horseracing Authority, as well as to those people working throughout the industry. We should welcome the opportunity for more, rather than less, scrutiny in horse-racing: if there is nothing to hide, there is nothing to fear. We have heard about the conflicts of interest that occur within the BHA, so having an animal welfare champion at the core of horse-racing would be a positive step forward.

On Saturday, I observed a delay at the start line. The horses were in the starting stalls when one decided to dip under the stall and escape. That horse experienced only minor injuries, but the other horses were clearly distressed. I would like to examine what more can be done to limit the distress and stress experienced by horses at the start of a race. One horse, for instance, tried to gallop out of the stalls but it was constrained by the gates; its stress increased with each moment but the gates remained closed. Other horses were taken out of the stalls, calmed down, and then placed back in them, but the stress was clearly building. The cases of Mukaynis and Commanding Officer demonstrate that more work needs to be done on that particular pinch point. An independent body could consider those issues and improve safety for horses.

I followed the race with a doctor, to observe their role was and how fast medical support was provided. I was puzzled as to why doctors were ahead of vets in the queue and why they did not move around the racecourse in tandem. Vets should be able to reach the scene of an injured horse with the same expediency as doctors are able to access injured individuals. Perhaps that issue could also be looked at.

During the day, I also made inquiries about the use of the whip, because that has been raised with me on a number of occasions. I understand that whip safety has improved over time. It was pointed out that use of the whip has two functions: first, for steering the horse, which can prevent injury; and, secondly, for "encouragement". I understand that the air cushion on the whip provides protection, but evidence from Animal Aid indicates a lack of confidence about whether a whip injures or hurts a horse. Again, therefore, I believe that an independent body could look into such issues, building confidence whichever way the debate falls. Evidence from an independent regulator could settle an issue such as that of use of the whip in a race. In Norway, to ensure animal welfare, a whip is not used. We need to understand how "encouragement", if it does not hurt a horse and is to continue, can be made subject to good regulation, because the current penalties hardly discourage the use of the whip. That, too, should be reviewed.

The vet also highlighted risks to the horse once it leaves horse-racing, because that environment is less well regulated, and raised one or two issues. In the afterlife of horses, I want to ensure that we take the greatest care of these precious animals, particularly in their breeding. This House has had many a debate about dog breeding. In order to ensure that animal

[*Rachael Maskell*]

welfare is upheld, it is clear that regulation of the number of foals that a mare may produce needs to be tightened, and the same applies to regulation for stallion welfare.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I apologise for arriving slightly late—I was on a Statutory Instrument Committee. My hon. Friend makes an important point about unregulated breeding. The situation has changed significantly in recent years and an independent regulator would make a real difference.

Rachael Maskell: I thank my hon. Friend for his observation. I trust that the Minister will respond to that particular point.

Many organisations are doing phenomenal work to oversee the welfare of retired racehorses. In Yorkshire, the charity New Beginnings has been registered in the past few years. It relaxes and settles horses before retraining them for a further career, domestic purposes or other uses. I have also visited the Hillside animal wellbeing centre, which gives phenomenal support to animals, but we need to understand what percentage of animals have the opportunity for a second life. It is the horses that we do not hear about that are the cause of most concern and that the petitioners have brought to our attention.

We need tight regulation, so what is wrong with having an independent regulator to log not only the injuries and fatalities while horses are in racing, but what happens to them after racing? Enthusiasts and people in general would be able to follow the horses' life course. Transparency is all that is being called for, but it could make such a difference to confidence in horse-racing, instead of everything being left to the BHA, which, as we have heard, already has many responsibilities placed on it. Greater scrutiny would build confidence, and the petitioners are therefore wise to call for it.

Before I close, I want to make a couple of other points about horse welfare associated with the sport. The BHA or an independent regulator might also have a perspective on these issues. First, as we move into a Brexit scenario, given the 26,000 horse movements across European Union borders, delays at a border will clearly have an impact on horse welfare. It would be good to hear from the Minister how he will ensure against animal welfare issues arising. Secondly, given that so many trainers and stable staff come from eastern Europe or Ireland, and that they are not, as we have heard, well paid by the industry, what opportunity will they have to continue to work? Any sudden exit by staff would jeopardise horse welfare, too. What preparations are the Government making to protect horses in such an environment?

I again thank York racecourse for opening its doors to me so that I could look behind the scenes and have better understanding of issues appertaining to horse welfare. I thank the petitioners for raising this important issue and for the measured proposal for independent regulation in horse-racing. We should all reflect on the value of horse-racing to the horse—we need to put the horse at the centre—as well as to other parts of the industry.

5.15 pm

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson. I was not planning to speak in this debate, because I had tabled some

amendments to the Offensive Weapons Bill, but the party Whips decided against holding that debate, presumably so that I might speak in this one. I therefore thought it would be rude not to take up the opportunity.

I do not want to speak for long, but I want to support my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson), who set out clearly the case not only for horse-racing but for how well the BHA regulates horse-racing and in particular horse welfare. Like him, I have had my disagreements with the BHA, so I am not someone who automatically and naturally jumps to support it.

I should make it clear, as my hon. Friend did, that people ought to refer to my entry in the register of Members' interests because, on a number of occasions, I too have received hospitality at the races, including at York racecourse, where I was on Saturday—as was the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell). I should add that I do not own any racehorses at the moment, although I have done so in the past. I would say that I was a modest owner of racehorses and an owner of very modest horses at that. The hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill), who led the debate, talked about the great riches in racing, but I assure everyone that I was not participating at that kind of level. My horses participated at the standard not of the Ebor meeting at York, but more of a Saturday evening at Wolverhampton. I should make that clear.

I will add to some of the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury and respond to a few of the other points made so far. I shall do the latter first, if I may. The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), who unfortunately is no longer in his place, has Cartmel racecourse in his constituency—I might be wrong about that, but I do not think so—and I hope that he is a supporter of it, but he said something quite extraordinary. He said that it was incompatible for a regulator to promote a sport and to be responsible for animal welfare, but I think that the two go essentially hand in hand. How on earth can a body promote a sport such as horse-racing without a clear commitment to animal welfare? For the life of me, I could not understand his argument. For me, the two are perfectly compatible and must go hand in hand.

We also heard earlier, I think from the hon. Member for Hartlepool, that horses have no choice, unlike jockeys and so on. I have to say, that that is not entirely true, for two reasons. For example, a few years ago there was a terrible tragedy when the Cheltenham Gold Cup winner Synchronised, favourite for the Grand National that very same year, died. Synchronised ran in the Grand National and fell, but it did not die when it fell with the jockey on board; it died afterwards, after it fell for a second time, running loose and jumping the fences with the rest of the field. That horse did have a choice. It was loose—it had no jockey on its back. It carried on because horses love jumping. They love running, they love racing and they love jumping. There was a terrible outcome in that case—it is in the figures the hon. Member for Hartlepool referred to—but that horse did have a choice. It wanted to carry on with the rest of the field, because horses love running, racing and jumping.

Mr Robertson: I was at Aintree when that sad incident took place. Has my hon. Friend ever sat on a horse? If he has, he will know that it is simply not possible to get a horse to do anything it does not want to do.

Philip Davies: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That was going to be my very next point. A horse weighs approximately half a tonne. A flat jockey at York on Saturday would have weighed roughly 8 or 8½ stone. I assure Members that there is no way on God's earth that an 8½-stone jockey will force half a tonne of horse to do something it really does not want to do. If it digs its heels in and decides it will not go into the starting stalls, it will not go into the starting stalls, and there is nothing an 8-stone jockey can do to force it to. If a horse does not want to set off at the start of a steeplechase, no jockey will be able to force it to.

That happens from time to time. Horses are wilful and intelligent creatures. They are not stupid. When they get to the racecourse, they know they are at the racecourse and they are there to race. Believe me, when horses decide to set off, they do so of their own volition. Many racehorses decline to race—they do not come out of the stalls and do not set off. That happens from time to time—regrettably, usually when I have backed one.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman is making a thorough speech, but he fails to point out that horses are trained to jump and race—those things do not exactly come to a horse naturally. Horses that are not trained, such as those we see in fields as we drive by on the motorway or a country road, do not jump fences automatically just because they naturally love to jump.

Philip Davies: I do not accept that. Racehorses are not just trained to race—they are bred to race, and they naturally want to race. That is their natural state of being. I do not accept the hon. Lady's premise that racehorses, if they were not in a trainer's yard, would have no interest at all in racing one another. That is what they naturally want to do, and it is what they naturally do.

Someone mentioned the whip. I encourage people to get hold of a whip and hit themselves with it quite hard. They will find it does not actually hurt at all. Whips are not used for that purpose. If someone wants a horse to run faster, they do not hurt it. By definition, a hurt horse will not run faster, just like someone who is injured while running will not run faster as a result of being hurt. Yes, the whip is used to encourage a horse. It is often used for safety reasons, to ensure that a horse runs in a straight line and does not deviate and put other horses and riders in danger. There is a lot of misunderstanding about the use of the whip in horse-racing. Again, a horse will not run faster if it has been injured.

The hon. Member for Hartlepool said racing was run by the “blue-blooded” brigade. I do not know whether more than a few of us have met Nick Rust, the chief executive of the British Horseracing Authority, but I am not sure he would recognise that description. Perhaps he would—perhaps I do him a disservice—but I think most people in the Chamber would accept that he is from a very humble, modest and down-to-earth background. Describing people such as him as “blue-blooded” does them a gross disservice.

Mike Hill: Of course I recognise that horse-racing is not only the sport of kings—allegedly—but the sport of the working man. However, as a member of the Petitions Committee, I reflected the views of the petitioners. To answer the hon. Gentleman, yes I can ride a horse, but I

missed out from my speech the fact that both the BHA and the petitioners recognise that there are issues with the weighting of saddles, which means the weight of the jockey is not natural.

Philip Davies: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for distancing himself from the description of the BHA as “blue-blooded”, which, as I said, I do not recognise.

The BHA puts animal welfare at the heart of everything it does. Anyone who has read its business plan for 2017 to 2019 will know that the first of its six strategic objectives is “equine welfare leadership”. I do not think anyone can doubt the BHA's commitment to animal welfare. It has already started a huge animal welfare programme led by David Sykes, the BHA director of equine welfare.

I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury is, like me, a regular reader of the *Racing Post*. I am sure the hon. Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn) is, too. He is a fantastic joint chairman of the all-party racing and bloodstock industries group. I am merely a vice-chairman, but I am proud of that none the less. I have to say that the two joint chairmen do a fantastic job. Anyone who has read the *Racing Post* recently will know about the BHA's interesting initiative with Exeter University. They have been looking at how horses' vision affects how they see and respond to their environment. They have looked at the visibility of fences and at what colours make horses more careful when they jump them. As a consequence, a trial will soon be run in which a yellow band appears across the hurdles, because the evidence from Exeter University is that horses are more careful when they see the colour yellow. That was news to me, but it goes to show how the racing industry is leaving no stone unturned to try to make the sport as safe as possible for horses. A padded hurdle design is being trialled at 11 jump racecourses, with the objective of reducing fallers.

The hon. Member for Hartlepool talked about the breeding industry. On 1 January, the BHA introduced 30-day notification for thoroughbred foals born in Great Britain so there is greater transparency and information about the whereabouts of foals born into the racing industry.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury made clear the number of people who are employed in the racing industry and the industry's importance. Having owned horses—modest ones on the whole, as I said—I do not believe anyone is more passionate about the welfare of horses than owners, trainers and in particular the stable staff who look after those horses daily. Of course, from time to time, something happens to a horse that goes racing. No one disputes that that is tragic, but the people who are most upset about it are the owners and trainers, and the stable staff who look after those horses every day.

The hon. Member for Hartlepool clearly met various people and did some research before opening the debate. I genuinely commend him for that. I hope everyone present tries to take the opportunity to visit a racing stable and see how well horses are treated in those stables—how well they are pampered and how loved they are by the stable staff who look after them, the trainers who train them and the owners who own them. I often wish I was as well-pampered as a racehorse. No stone is left unturned in looking after them. They have saunas, swimming pools—you name it. They are rightly treated like kings and queens in those stables.

[Philip Davies]

We should be immensely proud of how well racehorses are looked after in this country. I suspect that we compare very well with any other country anywhere in the world and I would be amazed if any other country had as proud a track record in looking after racehorses as we do. The Horserace Betting Levy Board has supported nearly 500 research projects on animal welfare since its foundation. Since 2000, the levy board and third parties have invested about £35 million of veterinary research funding.

Rightly, we are a nation of animal lovers, nobody more than me. As someone who has been closely involved in the racing industry all my life, I can look people in the eye and say that I think that the racing industry in this country is the best in the world and the one most interested in animal welfare. The BHA does a fantastic job in regulating. I am not entirely sure what an independent regulator would do that the BHA does not already do, given some of the things I have mentioned. Anyone can see that it leaves no stone unturned in trying to ensure that we have as few horse casualties as possible in the racing industry. Unfortunately, accidents happen to horses, but they happen when they are out in a field, not when they are racing. Many injuries happen when horses are just loose in the field; they do a lot of damage to themselves. It is terrible, awful and heart-breaking for everybody, but unfortunately those things happen.

We should not castigate an industry that does so much for animal welfare either because of ignorance or because people just do not like a sport or people in that sport. We should all congratulate the British Horseracing Authority on everything it does for animal welfare; without doubt, it is a world leader, and I hope that the Minister will echo that point.

5.31 pm

Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson. I welcome this very important debate and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) on how he put forward the case on behalf of the petitioners. All hon. Members speaking today—whether we support or oppose the petition—have the welfare of racehorses at heart, before, during and after their careers. It is not just those advocating for the petition who support horse welfare. Indeed, in my experience there are no more passionate advocates for the welfare of thoroughbreds than those who work in the sport day in, day out.

I draw members' attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Interests. If the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) has a modest interest in a modest horse, I have a minuscule interest in a couple of very modest horses, although our gelding won a couple of bumpers at Sedgefield racecourse in your constituency, Mr Wilson. As someone who grew up with a great love of horse-racing, it was a thrill for me to see a horse that I have a minuscule interest in run at the champion bumper at Aintree on the Friday evening of the festival.

I am always struck by the attention paid by all of the staff at the yard to every possible need of the racehorses in their care. They are just some of the more than 6,000 racing grooms across training yards throughout Great Britain who put the welfare of the horse at the centre of everything they do: racehorses receive a standard of care virtually unsurpassed by any other domesticated animal.

It will not be surprising that I do not agree with the petition and fully support the responsible, proactive and, most importantly, already independent regulation of the British thoroughbred racing industry by the British Horseracing Authority. The current system has in fact been commended by the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee in its greyhound welfare inquiry as being

“recognised around the world as having implemented a high standard in equine care”.

The Committee highlighted that the racing industry demonstrates

“a very positive example of self-regulation supporting high welfare standards”.

It is a great privilege to be the Member of Parliament for the Haydock Park racecourse. True Lancastrians have loved racing as far back as in 1752; there was a racecourse in Newton-le-Willows where I live. I apologise to colleagues, but I believe Haydock Park is the finest racecourse in the country, not just for the quality of the facilities and the racing it offers 32 days a year over jump and flat racing, but because of the huge economic benefits it provides to the St Helens economy, thanks to its 155,000 visitors a year. It sits right at the heart of the community and works with local organisations and schools.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool mentioned that the petitioners were critical of the Weatherby family and the Jockey Club. I am very proud of our chairman Lord Daresbury, his wife Claire and our association with the Weatherby family. For years, they have given incredible service to horse-racing in this country, in good days and bad days. We are very lucky to have Pete as our chairman. He works with an incredible team at the Jockey Club in the north-west. I had the opportunity recently to join one of the superb educational days offered to a local school by the industry's Racing to School charity programme. It was incredible to see the fascination of the schoolkids and how racing was used as an educational tool. They got to see some of the fantastic thoroughbreds looking fit, healthy and immaculate in the summer sunshine in St Helens over the summer.

Although I may be a touch biased towards Haydock Park, as co-chair of the all-party parliamentary racing and bloodstock industries group, alongside the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson), I am a strong supporter of the wider horse-racing industry, as are many parliamentary colleagues. The industry is worth £3.5 billion to the British economy; it supports tens of thousands of jobs the length and breadth of the country, and it is enjoyed by six million racegoers annually and millions more watching at home on TV screens. British bloodstock is at the forefront of international horse-racing; that was demonstrated just last weekend by the phenomenal back-to-back victories of Enable in the *prix de l'Arc de Triomphe*. Our horsemen have an international reputation for excellence. It is an industry that I, this House and the country should be hugely proud of.

I am afraid that some of the assertions we heard in the debate need to be tackled head-on, although I praise the thoughtful contribution made by my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell), based on her experience of her local racecourse. People often say that horses that are not good enough are simply disposed of or sent to the glue factory, but that is simply not the case. The industry has in place a dedicated charity, Retraining of Racehorses, which rehomes or

retrains thousands of horses each year for other equine disciplines. Further work is being undertaken to enhance the industry's capabilities.

People also say that racehorses are shot when they are injured because owners do not want to pay for their care. The only reason a horse will be euthanised on a racecourse when injured is that it is in the interest of their welfare. That process will be carried out by a fully qualified veterinarian, using medication to prevent any suffering. I know from working closely with the Racehorse Owners Association that an owner's only interest is in their horse's welfare, rather than financial gain, in those sad and rare circumstances, or in any circumstances. From the strong, independent and effective regulation by the British Horseracing Authority across racecourses, trainers, jockeys, owners, breeders and grooms, to fans of the sport, the British racing industry cares deeply about the welfare of these beautiful and wonderful animals. It is important that the industry does all it can to communicate that exceptional care to the wider public. I know that that is a priority of the industry.

I pay tribute to the work being done, from the Racecourse Association, the Jockey Club, the Arena Racing Company and 30 independent courses, to the Horsemen's Group, the Racehorse Owners Association, the Thoroughbred Breeders Association, the Professional Jockeys Association, the National Trainers Federation and the National Association of Racing Staff. People are working day in, day out, in the interests of the horse and to promote British horse-racing, as are the wider racing community, such as Racing Welfare, Racing Together and Great British Racing, because racing is one big family. Like all families, we occasionally fall out, but we are loyal to each of our component parts. Our love for our great sport and the welfare of the horse trumps all other concerns.

I will deal with the petition's substantive point, but the House should be clear that the ultimate aim of its organisers is the abolition of the British thoroughbred racing industry. The call from some who signed the petition for an independent regulator may be well-meaning, but the organisation behind it wants to get rid of British horse-racing. I cannot think of any step that would do more to jeopardise the welfare of more than 14,000 thoroughbreds in training or breeding right now—or indeed the breed's very future—than to abolish the British racing industry.

The RSPCA and World Horse Welfare have spoken of a horse crisis facing the country, with several thousand horses at risk. I emphasise that that does not include the thoroughbred breed; such a step would greatly exacerbate that. All that comes before the hugely damaging economic impact there would be on the British rural economy.

To take the petition at face value, it calls for responsibility for regulation on equine welfare to be removed from the British Horseracing Authority and transferred to an independent body. I reject that on three separate grounds. First, the British Horseracing Authority's track record in the eleven years since it was founded is one of clear improvement in equine welfare outcomes throughout the sport. Equine fatality and injury rates are down significantly, with fatalities down to 0.18% in 2017 from an already low 0.22% in 2013. A detailed review of the Grand National course at Aintree has resulted in six consecutive runnings of that race without an equine fatality. New rules governing the use of the air-cushioned

whip have reduced the threshold for offences by half and breaches are down by 40%. Equine welfare is at the heart of British racing.

As the hon. Member for Shipley said, under the direction of the BHA's first director of equine health and welfare, the association has already introduced measures on notification of foal births within 30 days to improve traceability. The BHA is also introducing innovations in hurdle and fence design, working collaboratively with the RSPCA to reduce faller rates, and it is undertaking a benchmarking project with the University of Bristol to understand better what is in the interests of a horse's welfare.

Secondly, the BHA already demonstrates its independence from commercial interests through its regulatory function. Its board significantly exceeds the Sport England sports governance code criteria for independence, and it has an ambition, which I fully endorse, to increase independence further. A fully independent judicial panel holds participants and racecourses to account for rule breaches relating to equine welfare. If commercial interests were paramount, why would that panel choose to ban the champion flat jockey—unfairly, in my humble opinion—for a significant period for minor whip offences in five races out of 837 mounts, which did not compromise horse welfare at all? Why would that ban run through the sport's richest annual race day—British Champions Day, at Ascot this Saturday—where he is to be presented with his trophy but cannot ride? The regulation of horse welfare is paramount for the BHA—the regulator—and its panels.

Thirdly, the very concept as proposed by the petitioner of somehow extricating regulation of equine welfare from all of the other rules and regulations in place is deeply flawed. Every rule and regulation in British racing, enforced by the BHA's stewarding, course inspectorate, stable inspection and veterinary teams has the welfare of the thoroughbred racehorse at its heart. The proposal is therefore as impractical as it is unnecessary.

I commend the BHA's work in improving equine welfare outcomes in British racing. It has demonstrated a clear track record of upholding and enhancing the welfare of thoroughbred horses. The House should support British racing in its clear ambition to improve those standards further, with the BHA as a strong, already independent regulator of an industry that cares deeply for the welfare of its horses. I have every confidence in Nick Rust and his team to deliver on their ambition for British thoroughbred racehorses.

I encourage hon. Members to go and see for themselves the standards in place and enjoy a fantastic day's racing at any of the 1,500 fixtures run annually in this country. A new independent welfare regulator in horse-racing is unnecessary and unjustified, because it is already clear that in British racing the horse comes first.

5.44 pm

Chris Williamson (Derby North) (Lab): I am pleased to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson. I represent Derby North, where we do not currently have a racecourse, although we do have a park called Racecourse park because we used to have one. I, no doubt like other hon. Members, have been lobbied by many constituents. I have had lots of letters from constituents who are concerned about horse welfare, use of the whip, and the

[Chris Williamson]

number of horses that have died in horse-racing. They are keen for the House to press the Government to introduce an independent regulatory body.

I joined the League Against Cruel Sports back in 1976, so I have paid some attention to cruel sports, and some elements of horse-racing are undoubtedly incredibly cruel. I have paid much attention to the Grand National. The League Against Cruel Sports, along with a number of other organisations, has made representations about the cruelty associated with that event for many years. The course has been modified somewhat, but it is incredibly gruelling nevertheless. Other hon. Members have made glowing references to the British Horseracing Association, but in my opinion it has proved itself to be singularly useless on animal welfare since it was founded in 2007. Why do I say that? Since that time 2,000 horses have died in horse-racing. On the barbaric use of the whip, in the order of 500 abuses are recorded every year, and there is no sign of a reduction in that number.

The hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) suggested rather absurdly that the whip does not hurt. He said, "Get a whip and hit yourself with it—it won't hurt." Let me put a challenge to him: give me the whip, go stand somewhere and let me hit you with it and see if I can hurt you. He will probably find that I could hurt him.

Philip Davies: The hon. Gentleman has a reputation for spouting off without having the first idea what he is talking about, and he has demonstrated that again. He has clearly never come across the new design of the whip in horse-racing—the whip is cushioned. I appreciate that he never feels the need to know anything about a subject before telling us all about it, but I advise him to try to find something out. He should visit racing stables and see for himself the new design of the whip, because it is cushioned and it does not hurt. Old whips may well have had problems, but the new, latest whip does not. He should know that.

Chris Williamson: Many people would beg to differ. The challenge still stands to see whether I could hurt the hon. Gentleman. Perhaps we can get some witnesses together and see whether that is possible—but perhaps he is tougher than me.

The hon. Gentleman also asserted that he is an animal lover. That is an interesting observation from someone whom I understand is in favour of repealing the Hunting Act 2004. Someone in favour of ripping wild animals to pieces claims to be an animal lover—that brings his assertion into question.

Philip Davies: To emphasise the point that the hon. Gentleman comes here without knowing anything of what he is talking about, I have made it abundantly clear that I do not support changing the law on hunting at all. The law should stay in place. Again, he makes the case for me that he comes here spouting off about things of which he knows nothing.

Chris Williamson: I am delighted to hear that, because organisations have sought to find out how Members of Parliament would vote on a repeal of the Hunting Act and the hon. Gentleman was down as being in favour. However, we digress, because we are not here to talk about blood sports.

A self-governing body in any area leaves a lot to be desired. We see it in a host of things, from financial regulation to the governing of the horse-racing industry. The British Horseracing Authority has a range of different responsibilities, including race planning; disciplinary procedures; protecting the integrity of the sport; licensing and registering racing participants; setting and enforcing standards of medical care for jockeys and other participants; setting and enforcing common standards for British racecourses; research and improvements in equine science and welfare; regulating point-to-point racing in the UK; the compilation of the fixture list; and setting and enforcing the rules and orders of racing. There is only one reference to welfare, and that is in the context of research and improvements in equine science and welfare.

To be frank, I do not understand why any hon. Member would have a difficulty with an independent body having oversight of welfare in the industry. If a body is dedicated exclusively at looking at the welfare of horses, surely that would make it more accountable and better at the job. The BHA's responsibilities include a host of things, which I have just listed, and welfare receives just a minor reference. Having an organisation dedicated to enforcing and improving welfare standards would improve the welfare of horses.

My hon. Friend the Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn) tried to widen the debate and question the motives of the organisation behind the petition. He suggested that it wanted to abolish horse-racing, but that is not what we are debating today. All we are debating is whether an independent body should oversee the welfare of horses that participate in horse-racing. Why would anybody have a problem with that?

Mr Robertson: I certainly do not have a problem with a body overseeing this issue. However, the BHA can suspend a jockey for overuse of the whip—which is about not only disciplining jockeys but the welfare of the horse—and it is also responsible for the integrity of the sport. Does not the hon. Gentleman think that those functions fit rather nicely with welfare issues? A new body would take away those functions from the BHA and isolate the issue, when the fact is that other issues also come into play. Does he understand that point?

Chris Williamson: I take the point to an extent, but having an independent body would not mean that the BHA would then have no interest in or responsibility for welfare. An independent body would make sure that the BHA did its job properly and it would also have an overarching responsibility to prevent the same number of horses being killed or dying during horseraces. There have been 2,000 deaths since the BHA was founded and there does not seem to be any sign that the barbaric use of the whip is diminishing, notwithstanding the view of the hon. Member for Shipley that it is all lovely when a horse is hit with a cushioned whip and it does not hurt. The case for an independent body is unanswerable, in my opinion and that of many thousands of British people, whom we represent. Many hundreds of my constituents feel strongly about the issue, to the point that a number of them have lobbied me about it.

In conclusion, an independent body dedicated to stopping the tide of death and abuse in the horse-racing industry, is—

Philip Davies: Will the hon. Member give way?

Chris Williamson: I have only a few more words to say, but go on.

Philip Davies: The hon. Gentleman has been very generous in giving way, but he seems to dodge the issue by saying that we are not talking today about a ban. Does he want to ban horse-racing? Does he want to ban national hunt racing in this country? Would that be the end product if he were running the show?

Chris Williamson: No, I am not calling for that at all. What I want to see is welfare standards upheld in the industry. I would hope that all of us wish to see that. There is a difference of opinion: some seem to think that the BHA is capable of doing that, but it has proven itself incapable of doing so, because if it were, we would not have seen so many horses being killed and we would not see the grotesque use of the whip. In a sense, however, that is irrelevant, irrespective of my views. That is not what we are debating today and I am not calling for it.

I am a vegan and, indeed, the vegans will inherit the earth—there is no doubt about that. We have to reduce the amount of meat we are eating because we are killing the planet, but we are not getting into that now. We are not having a wide debate about the rights, wrongs and wherefores of various different topics. The hon. Gentleman and others have sought to muddy the waters by questioning the motives of the people behind the petition.

Conor McGinn: I do not question for a minute the right and entitlement of anyone to say that horse-racing should be banned. My hon. Friend and other Opposition Members have a long track record of campaigning and speaking out on these issues, and while I admire that, I just do not agree with it. It is important to say that, although ostensibly this debate is about moving to an independent regulator, the ultimate aim of those behind the petition is to ban horse-racing. I do not agree with that, but it is an entirely legitimate view and we should at least be up front about the motivation behind trying to disaggregate the component parts of racing, which is to end racing altogether. I do not doubt my hon. Friend's motives or his sincerity.

Chris Williamson: I appreciate that, but I do not necessarily see the logical, sequential steps that my hon. Friend has outlined. If we agree that there is a need for an independent body, that does not inexorably lead to the abolition of racing. In many ways I think it would preserve it, because the concerns of the many thousands of people who were spurred on to sign the petition would be dissipated if they could see a body that was effective in reducing the number of horses killed and in reducing—or, indeed, eliminating—the use of the whip. Why would people call for the abolition of horse-racing, if they were that way minded, if the cruelty associated with it were eliminated? Contrary to what my hon. Friend has suggested, eliminating the cruelty would help to preserve the longevity of horse-racing.

My last few words are that the time is long overdue for an independent body of the kind called for by the petitioners.

5.59 pm

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson, and to speak in this important debate. I thank the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) for speaking on behalf of the Petitions Committee.

The petition had 105,000 signatures, showing the great concern of members of the public for horse welfare across the United Kingdom. They want the debate to reflect their concerns. We want the very best animal welfare standards and to be leaders in this important field—that goes to the core of what we are speaking about. The petition demonstrates that there is great public interest in this area. Some people who signed it may wish for an abolition of racing, but at the core and the heart of many people's reason for signing is a wish to see welfare standards improved, to make sure that we have the best possible standards for horses.

I am not against horse-racing. I have been down to Hamilton racecourse, next to my constituency, and to the Ayr Gold Cup. I have met jockeys and trainers, and spoken to the industry. I believe that we must put welfare at the heart of what we are doing. It is important that we have a balanced debate that covers what we are doing properly and where things can improve. We need to make sure that regulations can improve and that the issues raised by the public and those concerned about animal welfare are placed at the centre of the debate.

Conor McGinn: I agree with everything that the hon. Lady has said thus far. The British Horseracing Authority has equine welfare as its No. 1 strategic objective. How much higher on the list would she like to see it before she accepts that it is at the heart of what it does?

[MR VIRENDRA SHARMA *in the Chair*]

Dr Cameron: I thank the hon. Gentleman, for whom I have great respect on matters of sport in general—and particularly given his love of darts, which I share; we are both in the all-party darts group. Yes, the authority claims to have horse welfare at its heart in the way that he mentioned, and that must be the case; but there is a need for increased transparency and better reporting. There is also a potential conflict of interest with its other activities. Those are some of the issues that the very discerning public are bringing into question. Is not it time, therefore, to consider an independent regulator, if the issues cannot be ironed out and we cannot make the necessary strides forward in horse welfare? I take the point that there have been improvements at the Grand National, but there is still some way to go in making the improvements needed to ensure that horse welfare is at its heart. I think the public are fully behind such improvements. I agree with the hon. Member for Derby North (Chris Williamson) that improved horse welfare standards would ensure that the industry could continue.

Chris Williamson: On the welfare point, does the hon. Lady agree that although, as my hon. Friend the Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn) said, welfare might be at the heart of things and a top priority for the BHA, it is not very good at maintaining welfare if 2,000 horses have been killed and the whip is used as much as ever?

Dr Cameron: I agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman says. I understand that the whip is no longer used in Norway, including when our jockeys and horses race there, so it is not a necessity to use it, regardless of any disagreement about whether it is sore to be whipped with a horsewhip or whether the whip may be cushioned, as other hon. Members have suggested. Horse-racing could continue without the use of the whip and, if there is any doubt about the level of cruelty in using it, the Norwegian example is surely a step forward.

I thank the charities that have been involved in the petition and in working towards good standards in horse welfare. It is important that we give not only our views but those of our constituents. Hundreds of my constituents have grave concerns, and many of them emailed me to ask me to speak today and raise concerns about horse welfare with the Minister. I thank all hon. Members who spoke, as well. There was some divergence of opinion, but that is good for debate and for moving forward. It brought out many of the issues that the Minister will grapple with. I know he will do a good job of summarising and responding to the debate.

The BHA actively promotes horse-racing in Britain, but it is also responsible for the welfare of racehorses. To my mind that creates a conflict of interest. That is important. Any industry where the regulator was also the promoter would have to recognise some conflict of interest. When that is pointed out, the response should be to try to improve welfare and to counteract the arguments by addressing the concerns.

As we have heard, about 200 horses are killed a result of racing in Britain every year, and an undisclosed number die in training for races. I was concerned to hear during the debate about the horse deaths at Perth racecourse. I shall follow that up with the racecourse industry. I ask the Minister to look at the matter; perhaps he would also speak with industry representatives about the Grand National and whether more can be done to ensure that horse welfare is at the heart of racing and the Grand National in particular. The public would, I am sure, be behind him if he were to do so.

I mentioned that jockeys in Norway do not use the whip; suffice it to say that it is not necessary, and not using it would not mean the end of the industry. Another issue raised in the debate was the fact that the BHA does not apply limits to thoroughbred foal production, and that that can lead to what is called industry wastage, involving huge numbers of horses. The BHA must address that issue if we are to have faith in it to carry out its current role. It was mentioned that race day governing stewards are also frequently found to fail to report accurately on racehorse injuries. I think there have been many occasions when stewards did not report on racehorse deaths. There is a need for more transparency, through independent reporting and disaggregation of figures. I do not see that as something that would put the industry asunder, if there were nothing behind the figures to cause the public alarm. Statistics would mean we could look at the issues and at which types of racecourse and races were causing them, and consider how to improve welfare standards and address the issues fully for horses and jockeys.

The case for an independent racehorse welfare regulator is that an independent body of professionals would be accountable to the Government, and would be responsible for scrutinising all aspects of racehorse welfare. It would

implement measures to help to resolve welfare issues in three key areas, breeding, racing and training—and in post-career provision, as has been described. The new body would be responsible for scrutinising individual racecourses and racing conditions alongside the race calendar programming. It would be able to place requirements on racecourses and the BHA to make tangible changes to reduce the rate of injuries and deaths, which otherwise will surely continue. The rate of injuries and deaths must come down. The BHA has had a long time to achieve that. It has made some progress—but is it sufficient? The fact that 105,000 people have signed the petition to Parliament that we are debating today suggests that it has not been living up to the standards of public expectation. It must do so—or what else can Parliament do but support an independent regulator? The onus is on the BHA to continue to do more.

Conor McGinn: The hon. Lady is generous in giving way, and I do not want to test your patience, Mr Sharma. She is right that 100,000 people signed the petition. They went online, submitted their details and clicked the button. Does she think that the 6 million people who get in their cars or on the train and go to a racecourse and take part in horse-racing every year care about horse-racing welfare too? Should their voice be heard, vis-à-vis the 100,000 people who signed the petition?

Dr Cameron: Absolutely—I totally agree. As I said, I am one of those people who would go in their car to see the races, and have a day of enjoyment there; but at the very core of that, I want to make sure, and to know in my heart, that the best possible standards are being applied at that racecourse. I do not believe for a moment that the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that there are 100,000 people who care about animal welfare and 6 million other people, who go to races and care differently; those are the same people, who care about both. They care about animal welfare, and many also go to the races.

Conor McGinn: The point I was making was that 6 million people go racing every year and 5.9 million of the people who go racing did not sign the petition, so they clearly think that racing and welfare are being adequately looked after and regulated by the BHA.

Dr Cameron: I disagree with the premise that if someone does not sign a petition, they think that something suffices. If the hon. Gentleman were to organise for the BHA to start a petition to say that people were entirely satisfied, we would see how many signatures that collects; that would answer the question.

I will finish by asking a few questions of the Minister. First, will he speak to the industry about the Grand National and what more can be done there? Public opinion is firmly behind change. Secondly, will he consider looking, with the BHA in the first instance and perhaps over time, depending on how it responds, at the transparency of the figures produced and what more we can do in that regard? Thirdly, will he be kind enough to look at the examples in other countries, such as Norway, where the whip is not used any more but where it has no undermining effect on the industry, and see whether improvements can be made there?

I think that everyone who has spoken spoke of the need for horse welfare to be the crux of the debate. I thank everybody for taking part and would be very much obliged if the Minister would address the important issues that the petitioners and I have raised.

6.11 pm

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) on introducing this debate so well, and thank all hon. Members on both sides for their passionate discussion. This issue spans not only my brief, in the shadow Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs team, but that of the shadow Sports Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan), who I thank for her input, as this is not only a welfare issue but an issue for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

Plymouth, which I represent, has many fantastic things, but it does not have a racecourse. It is 27 miles to Newton Abbot, or a little further on to see a race at Exeter. However, that does not mean that the issues are not pertinent to the people I represent, as has been shown by the sheer depth and breadth of numbers of signatories on this petition.

It is important to mention from the outset what an important contribution horse-racing makes to the UK economy and to local economies across the country, providing jobs as well as entertaining punters. Horse-racing estimates that it employs 85,000 people around Great Britain and measures its contribution to the economy at over £3 billion. No one doubts its contribution, but the welfare of horses needs to be an important part of that contribution if it is to continue supporting those economies.

While horse-riding is an extremely dangerous sport for horses and their riders, according to *Horse & Hound*—which I admit might not be at the top of every Labour MP's reading list—around one in 17 jump jockey rides ends in a fall. Many jockeys suffer life-changing injuries and mental health problems as a result, as they compete for prize money in a hotly contested sport. As was mentioned earlier, however, while being a jockey is a voluntary occupation, being a racehorse is not.

As Peter Singer put it in the 1975 book, "Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals", animals do not have a voice to speak up for themselves, so I firmly believe that as parliamentarians we have a duty to give them that voice. Today, this House has spoken: every horse matters. In their welfare, their health, their conditions and their life from birth to death—before racing, during racing and once their racing days are over—every horse should matter. If every horse matters, as we have heard today, then we need robust and constantly improving equine welfare regulation to ensure that that happens.

We will shortly hear from the Minister about the Government's position, but when this petition reached 10,000 signatures back in March, the Government responded by saying that they did not consider it necessary to establish a new welfare body, as

"overall racehorse welfare is improving and fatalities at racecourses are falling".

Both those statements are true; my question is, how ambitious are we in wanting to see those improvements? I appreciate that DEFRA is a busy Department, but we must not be casual or cautious when it comes to animal

welfare. We must be bold, ambitious and demanding. I think the Minister will have heard that from both sides in this debate.

The Government response at that time also pointed out:

"Racehorses, like all domestic and captive animals, are afforded protection under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. Under this legislation, it is an offence to cause any unnecessary suffering to an animal or for an owner, or keeper, to fail to provide for its welfare needs."

That is right, and I am pleased that the Government have accepted the argument that sentences for those who fail to provide for the welfare of their animal should increase. Will the Minister say when he expects that to come online and when we can expect our courts to be able to use those sentencing powers in cases of poor animal welfare in horse-racing and elsewhere?

It is clear that the Government wholeheartedly back the British Horseracing Authority, but the crux of the debate is whether the BHA is conflicted in its mission between its support for the industry and animal welfare. I agree with hon. Members from across the House that we must have an integrated welfare component to all sports. We cannot have the idea that animal welfare is not something that anyone running a race is responsible for. It is the core thing that everyone running a race is responsible for.

This goes to the heart of what the BHA is there for. In its briefing paper it stated:

"Thoroughbreds are the centre of our sport, they are its very heart and soul."

It is right. To its credit, the BHA does not hide from concerns raised about this sector. I met with its team earlier to go line by line through many of the concerns raised, and it is clear that the BHA understands the acute challenges ahead for the industry and what it needs to do to put it right. The BHA has been around since 2007 and was brought in by the Labour Government of the time. The Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs stated in 2016 that the BHA

"is recognised around the world as having implemented a high standard in equine care."

Key to that is the BHA's role in improving animal welfare and equine care in particular. That is where we need to ask ourselves at what pace this improvement is happening and whether it could go faster. Although we have seen improvements in the number of deaths, down from 0.3% to less than 0.2% of runners in 2017, the question at the heart of this debate is: where next? If we are to legitimise the BHA continuing to govern the regulatory approach, when will that figure be halved? When will we get to 0.1%—by what date? What steps will be taken to get there? What happens if we do not get there? When will the target be zero?

We have heard some great speeches today from my hon. Friends the Members for York Central (Rachael Maskell), for St Helens North (Conor McGinn) and for Derby North (Chris Williamson) and the hon. Members for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) and for Shipley (Philip Davies), but the purpose of today's debate and all those contributions is to look at how we can improve equine welfare faster than we are at the moment. In a highly charged, high-pressure competitive sport, where financial gains can be made by winning or going faster, we must ask ourselves whether there is a profit motive in not ensuring the best animal welfare as part of that.

[Luke Pollard]

We must ensure at all times not only that equine care is the foremost of the industry's concerns, but that it is seen to be the foremost, with the industry communicating how to do that. I am sure there is agreement across the House that animals should not suffer for our entertainment. What separates horse-racing from banned sports such as foxhunting, cockfighting and dogfighting is that it does not include unnecessary pain or suffering to the animals used. That is the heart of the social contract on the basis of which horse-racing is permitted.

The World Horse Welfare organisation believes that "the role of horses in sport is legitimate and right, as well as mutually beneficial—so long as their welfare is put first."

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool said, while some racehorses are treated like kings, horse-racing still causes death, pain, distress and suffering for many horses. While progress has been made on making the sport safer for horses, are we comfortable with the pace of change to date?

While the Labour party is still developing its full animal welfare position, hon. Members will know that we have consulted on our 50-point animal welfare plan, "Animal Welfare For The Many, Not The Few". During the consultation period in the summer we received 5,000 responses, which is quite a lot for an Opposition consultation on this subject. At the heart of that plan was a desire to see an independent animal welfare commissioner introduced as a safeguard to ensure that all Government policy is not only compliant with animal welfare but is being enforced and that, where animal welfare is entrusted to self-regulatory bodies, that body is maintaining high animal welfare standards. That should be at the heart of this debate and goes to the heart of some of the petitioners' concerns to ensure that animal welfare in the horse-racing sector is put front and centre and delivered.

If the BHA commits to always putting horse welfare above the interests of commercial sport, as it has done and says it does, if it can properly separate those sides of the organisation and always act to protect horses in line with the latest scientific evidence, it should have nothing to fear from enhanced scrutiny, inspection and transparency. Indeed, it has told me that it wants that, and an animal welfare commissioner would be a step towards achieving it.

The crux of the concerns of those who signed the petition and those who have spoken in the debate can be split into two broad themes. One is independence. Although the BHA has gone to great lengths to make its animal welfare bodies independent and separate, I believe it needs to do more to communicate that governance to the public and to continue to drive for those bodies' greater independence and separation from the sector. The second theme is standards, and the demand that they should be world-class, world-leading and so ambitious that they set the UK out a furlong ahead, not edging it by a nose. I also want to see faster and further progress on the key equine welfare issues raised. The social contract that allows the use of animals in sport is changing. Consumers are more demanding, and welfare standards are rightly being pushed higher in response.

Having spent many years working for the Association of British Travel Agents, the travel trade body, I know about the power of self-regulation. However, I also

know about the responsibility to ensure that, where an organisation regulates members who pay its wages, that organisation should remain one step ahead, in a leadership position, not following the pack. There can be no dash from last place to win the day in good governance or vision. Good governance and independence is not a destination but a constant journey. Standing still is not an option. The BHA should welcome this debate as an opportunity to improve not only its standards but its communication.

I suspect that the Minister will argue that the BHA is the right body to oversee equine welfare. If so, what ambitious and stretching targets does he have for the sector? How can the deaths of 0.2% of runners be halved in the next five years? If it cannot, what will the public response be? I believe in self-regulation, but it has to work and has to carry consumer confidence to remain relevant. As we have heard, there is still a challenge with self-regulation in the sector, and more needs to be done for it to continue. That is why I want the BHA to publish ambitious plans to further reduce racehorse deaths, to set out how new technologies will help to support better behaviour, and to review the use of the whip. Many sound voices in the racing industry want change in that regard.

When our animal welfare plan was put out for consultation, we received countless responses on the use of the whip in racing, as my hon. Friend the Member for York Central mentioned. The BHA has taken steps to reduce the use of the whip, limiting it to seven strikes in a flat race and eight in a national hunt, or jump, race. However, we need to look again at whether that is right. I mentioned the changing social contract between those who participate in the sport, those who watch the sport and, importantly, those who bet on horse-racing. The use of the whip is one element of the social contract that has recently changed and that will continue to change. I know that there are voices within the industry that would like the use of the whip to be further reduced, if not outlawed, except in cases of safety. There is a strong argument in support of that.

The RSPCA believes that the only whips permissible should be those of proven shock-absorbing designs. I must admit that I think replacing whips in horse-racing with MPs whipping each other may soon become more fashionable, given the exchange that we heard earlier. However, it is important that whips are used with minimal force and on minimal occasions, and only for genuine safety purposes. If everyone in horse-racing stopped using whips, the horse that wins a race would be the one that is best trained, has the most energy and is most focused. The best jockeys with the best tactics would win the race, not necessarily those who strike the most with their whip. That has been happening in Norway since 1982, and British and Irish jockeys adhere to those rules when riding there.

The social contract is changing. We need to look at it and in particular at the number of deaths. At the moment, the deaths of 0.2% of runners is too high, equating to roughly one in 500 racehorses. The only reason that it is accepted is because they are horses. Were they humans, that level of fatality in a sport would not be accepted. We have to ask whether, if we applied the same standards to animal welfare as we do to human welfare, as is increasingly the case in animal welfare policy, we would accept the same number of deaths in cricketers or rugby players.

Labour demands that the industry comes up with more stringent and ambitious targets. I want the BHA to bring together its frequently good work, which we have heard about during this debate, into a more ambitious plan.

Mr Robertson: I agree very much with the hon. Gentleman. Is his conclusion that a separate, independent body is not necessarily the way forward, and that bolstering the BHA and perhaps making it more accountable is probably the best way forward?

Luke Pollard: At the moment, there is a strong case for reform and greater ambition. A self-regulatory system needs to carry the confidence of the public. I think that the BHA has heard the concerns voiced by Members on both sides of the House, including those who support its role, in wanting a more demanding and ambitious set of policies. We need to look at what will happen if that is not put in place. Organisations that do not keep pace with changing consumer demands on animal welfare and the changing social contract will see their business model effectively erode from the bottom up, as we have seen with SeaWorld in the tourism sector. If there continue to be more deaths, there is a real danger that the industry's legitimacy could be threatened, as mentioned by Members on both sides of this debate.

Much more needs to be done on improving animal welfare. We should be clear that British horse-racing is a national success story, but we want the industry to work harder, faster and smarter to improve equine welfare and to set transparent targets that can be independently verified. The public have a right to know if activities only pay lip service to that or are genuine—ambitious plans or simply pedestrian. The industry has a lot of good stories to tell about animal welfare and safety, but it can also do a lot more to improve them.

If Labour was in government and I were in the Minister's place, I would be demanding a greater set of targets from the industry, looking at how we can halve the deaths of horses involved in horse-racing. When will we reach the 0.1% target, and can it be a numerical target, not just a percentage target? As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for York Central, Brexit could have an impact on the number of runners for races, so we want to make sure that we are not simply hitting a percentage target but talking about the number horses that die in the trade.

There is an awful lot of good news from the sector. However, there are an awful lot of improvements that Members on both sides should rightly demand if the industry is to continue to adapt and flex to meet the changing social contract and changing consumer demands that our electorate are making.

6.27 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (David Rutley): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma. I congratulate the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) on speaking up for the petitioners, which he did extraordinarily well, while also adding in some of his own views along the way. It has been a useful and stimulating debate.

I am the newly appointed Minister for Animal Welfare, and hon. Members on both sides of the House can be assured that this issue is very important to me. Like other Members, I have also received several emails from

constituents who have signed the petition; there were 176 from Macclesfield. It is clear from the contributions made that racehorses spend many weeks training hard to compete in races so that many people across the country can enjoy the thrill of horse-racing, which, as set out by my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson), the right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar), and others, is the second-best-attended sport after football. That is why we should rightly expect that racehorses are looked after to the highest standard and that their welfare needs, as required by the Animal Welfare Act 2006, are met.

The BHA is responsible for the safety of the tracks, for both horses and jockeys. I am pleased that it works hard to put in place the necessary safety measures for horses and works collaboratively with welfare experts from the RSPCA and World Horse Welfare to continuously improve its work in this vital endeavour, which is important.

As the new Minister, I wanted to understand what these welfare organisations—as well as my colleagues—had to say, so I read with interest the views of the RSPCA, which is supportive of its working arrangement with the BHA. The charity's deputy chief executive, Chris Wainwright, said:

“We work really closely with the BHA and we think that relationship has resulted in lots of really good improvements, whether it's the use of the whip”—

we will come on to that again in a moment—

“hurdles design or the review of Aintree.”

It is clearly open to further reviews, but it has a positive working relationship with the BHA.

World Horse Welfare says that it has worked constructively with the BHA for many years, which has resulted in a number of positive changes to further advance racehorse safety and welfare.

The BHA has a dedicated team who inspect the 60 racetracks in Great Britain. There are four inspectors of courses, who have an allocated number of racecourses. I will not go into all the detail of their work, but it is clear that they do preliminary inspections of the racecourses; they are involved at the start of every season. Throughout the season, racecourses continue to be monitored, and then any improvements that are required get acted on. On race day itself, as the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) has seen for herself, a huge amount of activity goes on to ensure that there are high standards then as well.

How do we think that the BHA is performing? There were differing views across the Chamber today. The BHA maintains statistics on the number of horses involved in fatal accidents, and it is really important to see the level of fatalities and the trend. Mention has been made of this, but let me put it on the record for clarity: clearly, each fatality is absolutely tragic. The continuing decline in fatalities from the years 2012 and 2013, when there were 211 and 196 fatalities respectively, to 167 in 2017 is encouraging, but I am keen to see the number of fatalities decline still further. From contributions in today's debate, including a very useful contribution from the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard), I think that that ambition is shared across the House. The BHA needs to recognise that and respond to it, and I will come in due course to how I think it could be recognised.

[David Rutley]

As has been highlighted, there is always a degree of risk in any sport or activity, whether to the humans or animals involved. With 91,000 runners at tracks in 2017, the fatalities represented 0.18% of all runners. It is positive to see the percentage also declining since 2012. That is very welcome, given the work that the BHA is doing to put in place the necessary safety measures. I have to state again that that is done on a collaborative basis with the RSPCA and World Horse Welfare. That approach is vital. I accept the point made by the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Dr Cameron) that more needs to be done to ensure that the figures are transparent and available to the public more readily. I will raise that when I meet the BHA.

A good example of a result of the collaboration between the BHA and the RSPCA is the redesign of fences and other aspects of the Grand National course, as the hon. Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn) will appreciate, given his constituency interests. It resulted in the inner frames of fences being replaced with more forgiving flexible plastic. That has led to a sharp decline in the number of fatalities in that iconic race; indeed, there has been none since the work was completed in 2013. That is good news, and more needs to be done to learn from these important lessons to reduce fatalities further in other races.

There have been very notable contributions to the debate. Some were incredibly supportive of the status quo, although I think that everyone wants further change and improvement. Worth highlighting are the intervention early on from the right hon. Member for Warley and the contributions from the hon. Member for St Helens North and my hon. Friends the Members for Tewkesbury and for Shipley (Philip Davies). They highlighted how much horse-racing means to many people across the country and that the welfare of racehorses is vital, not just for the industry's sake but for the horses' sake. They are wonderful animals and their welfare should be paramount. Hon. Members spoke strongly in support of the BHA's work, but I did not detect complacency. I recognised that they felt that racehorse welfare needed to continue to be a real priority.

We were able to see during the debate what it is like to go to York racecourse on race day. We had a behind-the-scenes view of what goes on from a contribution by the hon. Member for York Central that was characteristically thoughtful and, as always, as I have noticed in these debates, well researched. She raised a number of issues and, with the permission of hon. Members present, I will go through as many as I can. She raised the important issue of starting gates, which was also raised on the petitioners' behalf by the hon. Member for Hartlepool. It is clear that the BHA needs to look very carefully at the tragic incidents that have been raised, such as the one involving Commanding Officer. More needs to be done to tackle this issue. Again, I will raise it with the BHA when I meet it in the near future.

The use of whips has been much discussed—by the hon. Members for York Central, for East Kilbride and for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport and by my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley. I have to tread pretty carefully on this subject: I am a Government Whip and I have also been the Whip for my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley—I do not think any more needs to

be said there. [Interruption.] I have sometimes found that a carrot can be more effective than a stick, but we will not go too far down that track.

None the less, important issues have been raised about use of the whip. In this country, strict rules are in place. Stewards are empowered to hold inquiries and to ban jockeys. The BHA rightly keeps those rules under review, and of course lessons should be learned from places such as Norway. It was interesting to read the report produced by the RSPCA for this debate. It has obviously been monitoring use of the whip and working closely with the BHA on this issue. According to its records and review, between 2012 and 2015 there was a 40% reduction in use of the whip. The RSPCA welcomes that, as I think we all do, but we would probably all say, "Let's go further down that track."

On the subject of retired racehorses, it sounds as though New Beginnings, in the constituency of the hon. Member for York Central, is doing great work and it is to be commended. We need to learn from the positive work that is going on to retrain racehorses, which was also highlighted by the hon. Member for St Helens North. Indeed, £750,000 is being made available to see what can be done to facilitate the rehoming and retraining of racehorses. I am really encouraged to see that there are successful second careers for racehorses.

The hon. Member for York Central talked about a number of EU-exit-related issues, including that of skilled staff. The Migration Advisory Committee has been asked to review the shortage occupation list, and I am sure that the racing industry will want to make its contributions to that important review. She highlighted equine movement; that is one of several issues that need to be considered as we look at leaving the EU. The continued movement of equines between the UK and the EU, with the minimum of delay, is very important to the industry on both sides. It is therefore in both sides' interest to ensure that that is maintained. Technical notices were put out on 12 October about what arrangements will be put in place in a no deal scenario, but obviously what we are working towards—we have heard more about it today—is securing a deal. The negotiation, as we are all too aware, is ongoing.

The hon. Member for Derby North (Chris Williamson) took a different track with his view of the BHA's track record. None the less, it stimulated a lively debate. Even he did not want a ban on horse-racing. I think that what we are all saying here, although from different positions, is that we want to see the welfare of racehorses put centre stage. I will take on board the points that he made.

The hon. Member for East Kilbride and several other communities—I can never remember them in order, so I will stick with just East Kilbride—made, characteristically, such a reasonable contribution that it is hard to disagree with many of the things that she said. Further improvements are required. She felt that there was a conflict of interest with regard to the BHA's role. I do not particularly share that view, but I will go into that in more detail. She did set out some issues to tackle, notwithstanding the figures that we have talked about for the Grand National, and she talked about what can be done to address issues in relation to the whip.

The hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport, who also made an important contribution, highlighted the Animal Welfare Act 2006, which came into place under a previous Government, under his party's leadership. That is a very important Act. I, too, welcome the fact that

the present Government are looking to increase the sentences. We are looking to bring that into place as soon as possible when parliamentary time permits. We are seeking the Bill necessary to make it possible, and I know that he would welcome that moving forward as quickly as possible. He also highlighted the fact that this subject is very much about an ongoing journey. I share his ambition; in fact, I want to go further. As the Minister for this area now, I need to press hard on these issues.

I will now wind up and give a few concluding remarks. I would like to stress again that we must do all that we can to reduce the fatalities of horses while racing on a track. I am grateful for all the contributions in this debate, which show the keen interest that is genuinely felt in the welfare of racehorses.

The Government welcome all the work the BHA has done, and continues to do, for the safety of horses and riders and as a functioning and transparent body, which has the key responsibility in this area. With the work the BHA has done to further reduce the number of fatalities at racetracks, the Government do not see a need to take a different approach by creating a new body, as was set out in the initial response to the e-petition. That does not mean that the BHA should not continue to be held to account. It should continue to have to explain what it does in an open and transparent way, as has been set out clearly in this debate.

I am looking forward to meeting the BHA in the near future. The welfare of racehorses will be at the top of the agenda and will continue to be at subsequent meetings. I am particularly interested to discuss with the BHA its review, which is due to be published soon, of the tragic deaths of six racehorses at Cheltenham. I think that will be an important vehicle to understand its commitment and ambition, which—as has been set out clearly in the debate—other hon. Members share. It provides an opportunity to look at what more can be done at the Grand National. Let us use that report as a moment for reflection. I hope that the BHA is listening to this debate.

Mike Hill: My understanding from the research I have done is that the count at Cheltenham was six

horses on the racecourse and one off of the racecourse and that the seventh horse has now been included in the overall count.

David Rutley: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that clarification. I will seek clarification myself, based on what he said. Whether six or seven, it is a tragic number of horses to have died in one event. That review is important and timely, particularly for me as a new Minister. I look forward to that meeting, which will be testing and challenging, quite rightly, because of what has been set out in this debate.

I will also continue to monitor the reports of future fatalities and review associated action plans, to ensure that further progress is made in the months and years ahead. As previously stated, I am pleased that the BHA has an open and fruitful relationship with the key welfare bodies in this area—the RSPCA and World Horse Welfare—and that it takes advice on animal welfare from those organisations. I am sure that that will continue; it should be encouraged.

While the Government may not agree with those who signed the e-petition on the need for a new body, I hope that we can all agree that more can and should be done to work collaboratively, to keep the spotlight on reducing fatalities and improving the welfare of racehorses. I look forward to playing my part in this important work.

6.42 pm

Mike Hill: I thank all hon. Members for their contributions. I thank the e-petitioners and Animal Aid, representatives of which are here, for bringing this e-petition. I thank the HRA, which is also represented here, for meeting me. Finally, I thank the Petitions Committee support team for its programme of online engagement on the subject in the run-up to this debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petition 211950 relating to setting up a new independent body for the protection of racehorses.

6.43 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 15 October 2018

TREASURY

Bilateral Loan to Ireland

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen): HM Treasury has today provided a further report to Parliament in relation to the bilateral loan to Ireland as required under the Loans to Ireland Act 2010. The report relates to the period from 1 April 2018 to 30 September 2018.

A written ministerial statement on the previous statutory report regarding the loan to Ireland was issued to Parliament on 24 April 2018, *Official Report*, column 21WS.

[HCWS1008]

Contingent Liability Notification

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen): I can today confirm that I have laid a Treasury Minute informing the House of the contingent liability that HM Treasury has taken on in authorising the sale of a portfolio of Bradford & Bingley (B&B) and NRAM loans acquired during the financial crisis under the last Labour Government.

On this occasion, due to the sensitivities surrounding the commercial negotiation of this sale, it has not been possible to notify Parliament of the particulars of the liability in advance of the sale announcement.

The contingent liability includes certain market standard time and value capped warranties and indemnities confirming regulatory, legislative and contractual compliance. The maximum contingent liability arising from these warranties and indemnities is approximately £49 million. There are further remote fundamental market-standard warranties which are capped at £983 million.

As part of the transaction, UK Asset Resolution (UKAR), the holding company for B&B and NRAM, also terminated interest rate swaps, which hedged the risk of changes in interest rates, held against these mortgage loans. These swaps were taken out by B&B and Northern Rock more than 10 years ago when the loans were issued, in line with good risk management practice. Due to the fall in long term interest rates, there is a substantial cost for terminating the swaps.

The net impacts of the sale and the termination of the swaps on a selection of fiscal metrics are as follows:

Public Sector Net Debt is reduced by £449 million in 2018-19;

Public Sector Net Borrowing is increased by a total of £100 million by 2022-23; and

Public Sector Net Financial Liabilities is reduced by £83 million in 2018-19.

UKAR will incur an accounting loss of £180 million on the transaction in 2018-19. UKAR is expected to make an overall profit in 2018-19.

The net present value of the assets if held to maturity was estimated by UKAR's advisers to be £741 million using Green Book assumptions. UKAR received £943 million in exchange for the assets.

I will update the House of any further changes to B&B and NRAM as necessary.

[HCWS1009]

Finance (No.3) Bill

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride): Finance (No.3) Bill will be published on Wednesday 7 November.

Explanatory notes on the Bill will be available in the Vote Office and the Printed Paper Office and placed in the Libraries of both Houses on that day.

Copies of the explanatory notes will also be available at: www.gov.uk.

[HCWS1002]

JHA Opt-in Decision: Sovereign Bond Backed Securities

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen): The Government have decided not to opt in to a provision in the proposed EU regulation on an enabling framework for sovereign bond backed securities that aims to remove unwarranted regulatory obstacles to the market-led development of sovereign bond backed securities (SBBS), which currently do not yet exist in practice. This is primarily a matter for member states in the euro area whose Government bonds would be included in the scope of the product and therefore whose national debt markets would be affected. The proposal is currently stalled due to significant opposition from member states and industry.

Article 17 of the proposed regulation requires that where member states have chosen to lay down rules for criminal sanctions, they shall ensure that information can be shared between competent authorities in the EU. As the provision requires co-operation involving law enforcement bodies, the Government believe these are JHA obligations and therefore our JHA opt-in is triggered.

The Government have decided not to opt in to these provisions as there are no significant benefits to be gained from doing so. The obligation to share information will only fall on member states who have a relevant criminal sanctions regime. The Government have no intention to introduce a criminal sanctions regime in a way that would lead to this regulation imposing an obligation on the UK or on our competent authorities.

[HCWS1004]

Counter-Terrorist Asset Freezing

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen): Under the Terrorist Asset-Freezing etc. Act 2010 (TAFZA 2010), the Treasury is required to prepare a quarterly report regarding its exercise of the powers conferred on

it by Part 1 of TAFE 2010. This written statement satisfies that requirement for the period 1 April 2018 to 30 June 2018.

This report also covers the UK's implementation of the UN's ISIL (Daesh) and Al-Qaida asset freezing regime (ISIL-AQ), and the operation of the EU's asset freezing regime under EU regulation (EC) 2580/2001 concerning external terrorist threats to the EU (also referred to as the CP 931 regime).

Under the UN's ISIL-AQ asset freezing regime, the UN has responsibility for designations and the Treasury, through the Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation (OFSI), has responsibility for licensing and compliance with the regime in the UK under the ISIL (Daesh) and Al-Qaida (Asset-Freezing) Regulations 2011.

Under EU Regulation 2580/2001, the EU has responsibility for designations and OFSI has responsibility for licensing and compliance with the regime in the UK under Part 1 of TAFE 2010.

A new EU asset freezing regime under EU Regulation 2016/1686 was implemented on 22 September 2016. This permits the EU to make autonomous Al-Qaida and ISIL (Daesh) listings.

The attached tables set out the key asset-freezing activity in the UK during the quarter.

The recently passed Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018 (SAMLA) will help ensure that UK counter-

terrorist sanctions powers remain a useful tool for law enforcement and intelligence agencies to consider utilising, while also meeting the UK's international obligations.

Under SAMLA, a designation could be made where there are reasonable grounds to suspect that the person or group is or has been involved in a defined terrorist activity and that designation is appropriate. This approach is in line with the UK's current approach under UN and EU sanctions and would be balanced by procedural protections such as the ability of designated persons to challenge the Government in court.

Attachments can be viewed online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2018-10-15/HCWS1003/>.

[HCWS1003]

DEFENCE

Defence Industry and Shipbuilding: Response to a Resolution of the House

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Stuart Andrew): I would like to thank all hon. and right hon. Members, my predecessor, the hon. Member for Aberconwy, (Guto Bebb) and the Minister for Defence People and Veterans the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) for their contribution to the Opposition Day debate on Defence Industry and Shipbuilding which took place on 11 July 2018. The passionate and constructive comments of Members clearly demonstrated this House's support for shipbuilding.

Naval shipbuilding has a particularly important place in our defence industry. As a maritime nation, our prosperity as well as our security hinges on the strength of our navy.

All Royal Navy warships, by which we mean destroyers, frigates and aircraft carriers, will have a UK-owned design, and will be built and integrated in the UK.

All other naval vessels, including Royal Fleet Auxiliaries, will be procured through international competition to secure the best designs and value for money for the UK taxpayer. This does not mean that other naval vessels cannot be built in the UK, rather, it means the UK shipbuilding industry has an opportunity to put forward internationally competitive and innovative bids. We have actively engaged UK shipyards to take part in the Fleet Solid Support ships competition. It is in the Government's and the taxpayers' interests to have a robust competition and we anticipate receiving strong bids from UK shipyards.

We will continue to work closely with the defence industry to energise this crucial sector of our economy to achieve our strategic aim—to have a modern, innovative, internationally competitive sector capable of meeting the country's defence and security needs, both now and in the future.

[HCWS999]

Grant in Kind

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster): I have today laid before Parliament a Ministry of Defence departmental minute describing a gifting package which the UK intends to make to the Government of Nigeria.

This gift, a grant in kind, is comprised of a range of equipment intended to equip Nigerian army specialists facing Boko Haram militants in North-East Nigeria. Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) are an insidious and pervasive threat faced daily by Nigerian military personnel deployed in the struggle against Boko Haram. Not only do they pose a significant threat to the lives of Nigerian soldiers, but their impact on humanitarian access is severe, and if left unaddressed they will threaten civilian lives for many years to come.

The equipment granted by the UK, including metal detectors and other specialised C-IED equipment, meets a specific request by the Nigerian armed forces for C-IED assistance. It will complement the delivery of UK military training, help meet an identified operational requirement, and, most importantly, it will help save lives.

The departmental minute, which I have today laid before Parliament, describes a gifting package to the Nigerian armed forces comprised of priority items that provide immediate benefits. These items are metal detectors, binoculars, equipment to access and manipulate suspect devices, and equipment to facilitate their safe disposal.

Subject to completion of the departmental minute process, delivery is expected to be undertaken over the coming weeks. The total cost of this proposed package of equipment is approximately £775,000.

[HCWS1000]

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Loneliness Strategy

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch): I refer to my oral statement made to the House on the evening of 15 October.

[HCWS1007]

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

EU Exit

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Dominic Raab): As announced by the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union on 18 July 2018, the Government are publishing a series of technical notices. We published 25 of these notices on 23 August, 28 on 13 September, and 24 on 24 September. Last Friday, 12 October 2018, we published a further 29 notices. These notices are designed to inform people, businesses and stakeholders about steps they may need to take in the event of a no-deal scenario.

Notices were published on the following areas:

- Accounting and audit if there is no Brexit deal
- Breeding animals if there is no Brexit deal
- Classifying, labelling and packaging chemicals if there is no Brexit deal
- Commercial fishing if there is no Brexit deal
- Consumer rights if there is no Brexit deal
- Control on mercury if there is no Brexit deal
- Control on persistent organic pollutants if there is no Brexit deal
- Existing free trade agreements if there is no Brexit deal
- Export and import of hazardous chemicals if there is no Brexit deal
- Exporting GM food and animal feed products if there is no Brexit deal
- Exporting objects of cultural interest if there is no Brexit deal
- Funding for British Overseas Territories if there is no Brexit deal
- Geo-blocking of online content if there is no Brexit deal
- Health marks on meat, fish and dairy products if there is no Brexit deal
- Importing high-risk food and animal feed if there is no Brexit deal
- Maintaining the continuity of waste shipments if there is no Brexit deal
- Meeting climate change requirements if there is no Brexit deal
- Meeting rail safety and standards if there is no Brexit deal
- Plant variety rights and marketing of seed and propagating material if there is no Brexit deal
- Providing services including those of a qualified professional if there is no Brexit deal
- Rail transport if there is no Brexit deal
- Regulating biocidal products if there is no Brexit deal
- Regulating pesticides if there is no Brexit deal
- Sanctions policy if there is no Brexit deal
- Structuring your business if there is no Brexit deal
- Taking horses abroad if there is no Brexit deal

Trading and moving endangered species protected by CITES if there is no Brexit deal

Trading electricity if there is no Brexit deal

Trading gas with the EU if there is no Brexit deal

Notices are being published on gov.uk. These can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/how-to-prepare-if-the-uk-leaves-the-eu-with-no-deal>.

Copies of notices will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses to ensure all Members have access.

[HCWS1005]

General Affairs Council

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker): Lord Callanan, Minister of State for Exiting the European Union, has made the following statement:

I will attend the General Affairs Council in Luxembourg on 16 October 2018 to represent the UK. Until we leave the European Union, we remain committed to fulfilling our rights and obligations as a full member.

The provisional agenda includes:

Preparation of the European Council on 18 October 2018 and European Council follow up

The Council will discuss the draft conclusions for the October European Council. The conclusions are expected to cover migration, internal security and external relations.

The presidency will also provide an update on progress in implementing previous European Council conclusions.

Rule of Law in Poland/Article 7(1) Treaty of the European Union (TEU) reasoned proposal

The Commission will provide Ministers with an update on the rule of law in Poland and will invite Poland to provide a response.

Rule of Law in Hungary/Article 7(1) Treaty of the European Union (TEU) reasoned proposal

The presidency is expected to provide Ministers with an indication of how it intends to organise future Council proceedings following the triggering of the Article 7(1) TEU procedure for Hungary.

Multiannual financial framework 2021-2027

Ministers will discuss progress on the multiannual financial framework proposals with the presidency.

[HCWS1011]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Child Death Review

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price): Today I am publishing, on behalf of the Government, the statutory and operational guidance “Child Death Review” which outlines the framework which all practitioners involved in a review of a child’s death should follow. Clinical Commissioning Groups and Local Authorities, as the new child death review partners, must make local arrangements for the review of all child deaths, in England.

The policy of child death reviews has, until recently, been the responsibility of the Department for Education. I welcome the Prime Minister’s decision on the transfer of policy for child death review set out in her written statement to the House on 18 July. This change will result in child deaths becoming part of the national Learning from Deaths Programme and its aim is to

learn lessons to save more children's lives and ensure that the way the NHS engages with the bereaved, continuously improves.

Related areas that remain the responsibility of the Department for Education include children's social care including safeguarding children and child protection.

The revisions to the child death review process have been necessary to reflect the legislative changes introduced through the Children and Social Work Act 2017. The reforms underpin a stronger but more flexible statutory framework—one that will support local partners to work together more effectively to review the deaths of children in order to try to prevent deaths recurring by the same cause.

The findings from local reviews will be reported to the National Child Mortality Database (from April 2019), where the information, for the first time will be analysed centrally and will provide additional learning beyond what can be achieved by local systems. The data will be analysed at the Child Mortality Data Unit at the University of Bristol and will be used to inform strategic improvements in health and social care for children, and to help health and social care providers to learn about how they can reduce child deaths.

NHS England plan to publish shortly "When a Child Dies - A Guide for Parents and Carers". The guide has been developed by a group of bereaved parents, and support organisations and professionals.

Child Death review is an important piece of guidance for agencies, organisations and practitioners to know what they must do individually and collectively to robustly and thoroughly review and learn from every child death.

[HCWS998]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Offensive Weapons Bill Memorandum

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): I am today placing in the Library of the House the Department's analysis on the application of Standing Order 83L in respect of the Government amendments tabled for Commons Report stage for the Offensive Weapons Bill Scheduled for the 15 October 2018.

[HCWS1001]

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Leasehold Reform

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (James Brokenshire): I have published a technical consultation on how to implement the Government's reforms to the leasehold system in England.

This consultation marks the next step in my personal commitment to tackle exploitative and unjustifiable practices in the leasehold sector, making homeownership fairer for all.

Unjust leasehold terms also risk making relatively new houses unattractive to buyers. Therefore, last year the Government announced they would introduce

legislation to prohibit the unjustified granting of new residential long leases on new build or existing freehold houses, other than in exceptional circumstances, and restrict ground rents in newly established leases of houses and flats to a peppercorn.

In addition, we want to address loopholes in the law to improve transparency and fairness for leaseholders and freeholders. This includes providing freeholders with equivalent rights to leaseholders to enable them to challenge the reasonableness of estate rent charges or freehold service charges for the maintenance of communal arrears and facilities on a private or mixed estate.

Finally, we want to introduce measures to improve how leasehold properties are bought and sold.

The consultation details a number of proposals setting out how our plans may work in practice. It asks important questions to understand people's views on how this could affect them. It sets out and seeks views on:

how the changes to prevent unjustified new leasehold houses will work in practice, in what circumstances any exemptions will be provided, and how the policy will be enforced;

the future nominal ground rent for new leasehold properties being capped at £10 per annum, and what exceptional circumstances may warrant exemption;

how we intend to provide freeholders with equivalent rights to leaseholders to enable them to challenge the reasonableness of an estate rent charge or a freehold service charge for the maintenance of communal arrears and facilities on a private or mixed estate; and

measures to improve how leasehold properties are bought and sold.

We will use the evidence we gather to inform the legislation and the accompanying impact assessment.

The consultation will run for six weeks and will close on 26 November 2018. It is available online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/implementing-reforms-to-the-leasehold-system>, and I have placed a copy in the House Library.

Since becoming Secretary of State, I have already taken steps to ensure excessive and unfair leasehold practices are brought to an end. No new Government funding schemes will now support the unjustified use of leasehold for new houses.

This consultation, and the legislation which will follow, will make the leasehold system fairer, more transparent, and cheaper for home owners in the future.

[HCWS1010]

Ratings (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Bill

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (James Brokenshire): I am today placing in the Library of the House the Department's analysis on the application of Standing Order 83O in respect of any motion relating to a Lords amendment for Commons consideration of Lords amendments stage for the Ratings (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Bill.

[HCWS1006]

Ministerial Corrections

Monday 15 October 2018

TRANSPORT

Road Transport Emissions

The following is an extract from Questions to the Secretary State for Transport on 11 October 2018.

Andy McDonald: The reality is that the policies of this Government have directly increased harmful emissions from road transport. Bus funding has been slashed, plug-in car grants cut, and there is chaos in the transition to electric motor vehicles and trains. Will the Secretary of State wake up and accept that he cannot continue to crawl along in the slow lane when it comes to tackling climate change?

Jesse Norman: I apologise for being the same person that I was when I answered the previous question and not the Secretary of State, but let me pick up on the hon. Gentleman's points. In August, 12% of new vehicles were electric, and that is because electric vehicles are beginning a fast S-curve of take-up. They have been heavily supported by this Government, and they will continue to be so supported.

[Official Report, 11 October 2018, Vol. 647, c. 275.]

Letter of correction from Jesse Norman.

An error has been identified in the response I gave to the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald) during Questions to the Secretary of State for Transport.

The correct response should have been:

Jesse Norman: I apologise for being the same person that I was when I answered the previous question and not the Secretary of State, but let me pick up on the hon. Gentleman's points. In August, **one in 12** new

vehicles was electric, and that is because electric vehicles are beginning a fast S-curve of take-up. They have been heavily supported by this Government, and they will continue to be so supported.

TRANSPORT

Careers at Sea

The following is an extract from Questions to the Secretary State for Transport on 11 October 2018.

Karl Turner: It is scandalous that British officers and ratings hold fewer than 20% of jobs on UK vessels, while the shipping companies reap the benefits from the tonnage tax. Does the Minister agree that we need to create a mandatory link to training and employment of British seafarers, including ratings, as other EU countries have?

Ms Ghani: The tonnage tax enables us to have six types of apprenticeship, and it encourages companies to employ UK ratings as well. We are doing everything we can, whether it is on ports or working with our ship owners, to ensure that every opportunity is available for young people to enter the maritime sector as a career. *[Official Report, 11 October 2018, Vol. 647, c. 270.]*

Letter of correction from Ms Nusrat Ghani:

An error has been identified in the response I gave to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull East (Karl Turner) during Questions to the Secretary of State for Transport.

The correct response should have been:

Ms Ghani: The tonnage tax **enables and encourages companies to train UK ratings as well.** We are doing everything we can, whether it is on ports or working with our ship owners, to ensure that every opportunity is available for young people to enter the maritime sector as a career.

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**not later than
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